Acting out and Speaking Up: The Parliamentary Behavior of Ex-Rebel Women

Abstract

How do women's pre-election experiences influence their behavior in government? We examine women's participation in rebel groups as a form of masculine socialization and theorize that former rebel women elected in the national legislature will continue to defy gender norms by being more active than their other women colleagues and more frequently discussing male-dominated topics and topics relating to their wartime experience. Using novel datasets of parliamentary speeches and rebel ties of elected MPs in Uganda and Zimbabwe, we find that women ex-rebels make more legislative speeches, including speeches on topics related to wartime experience. We find mixed evidence for speeches on "hard" topics. These findings contribute to theoretical debates on women's political representation, gender and conflict, and legislative politics.

Keywords: Female rebels, women's political representation, parliamentary speeches

Word Count: 9,955

1 Introduction

For many women, participating in rebellion is not just a path to political change or liberation but also the chance to challenge gendered expectations. During war, sameness and equality become a mainstay of gender relations in many non-state armed groups, allowing organizations to maximize their efficiency and effectiveness (Israelsen 2020; Wood 2019). Women rebels find themselves "acting out a new gender" as they are encouraged and rewarded for abandoning their feminine socialization in favor of more masculine and militarized behavior (Barth 2002, 17). These experiences, along with their wartime political education, skill building, and training, can empower and motivate rebel women to continue seeking post-war political roles (Barth 2002; Cock 1992; Lyons 2004; Turshen 2002). After war, political opportunities are more readily available for women (Hughes and Tripp 2015; Tripp 2015), offering former rebel women the possibility of transitioning their wartime empowerment into post-war gains.

Women elected to parliament tend to have distinctly different and more passive behaviors than male legislators. Women members of parliament (MPs) are less active in parliamentary debates or give speeches (Bäck and Debus 2019; Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2014*a*; Clayton and Zetterberg 2021) and more likely to speak on "soft" issues, including those that pertain to women and gender (Bäck and Debus 2019; Baumann, Bäck and Davidsson 2018; Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2017; de Vet and Devroe 2022; Piscopo 2011). They tend to act in gender-conforming ways, subscribing to passive stereotypes and displaying higher levels of party loyalty (Baumann, Bäck and Davidsson 2018; Clayton and Zetterberg 2021; Cowley and Childs 2003). These patterns differ from descriptions of the more masculine and aggressive form of socialization rebel women experience during war. Given this, is their behavior different from other women in post-conflict parliaments?

In this article, we explore whether women's participation in rebellion impacts their behavior in political office, considering if their exposure to masculine socialization during

war is associated with conformance to gendered patterns of parliamentary participation. During war, rebel women acclimate to non-traditional roles that may make them feel equal to men. Moreover, they unlearn many gendered behaviors, finding themselves rewarded for "acting like men." We expect that rebel backgrounds among women MPs could be associated with less stereotypical gendered behavior in government. In particular, we expect that rebel women may speak more frequently than other women and that they will be less likely to avoid non-gender-conforming behavior, such as speaking on "hard" or masculine policy topics, like finance or foreign policy. Also, we expect that their socialization within rebel groups may lead to more participation in debates on topics relevant to their wartime experiences.

We test these arguments by combining micro-level data on wartime participation for all representatives in the Ugandan and Zimbabwean parliaments with data on parliamentarian speeches delivered by MPs between 2005 and 2018. Statistical analyses of about 247,000 speeches made by 1,093 MPs across the two countries offer evidence that rebel women, on average, speak more frequently than their other female colleagues. Former rebel women also differ from other women in what they speak about. They prioritize speeches on topics related to wartime experience both in terms of volume and as a percentage of their overall speeches. We find mixed support for our claim regarding the "hard" policy topics, with rebel women making more speeches in volume but not percentage.

We build on a growing body of work in the comparative study of women's political representation to understand how diverse backgrounds among women impact their political careers (Barnes and Saxton 2019; Barnes and Holman 2020; Hughes 2011). Though women's roles in rebellion are just one possible masculinized experience that may prime women's behavior in political office, it is a common and important one in post-conflict contexts. Women's participation as rebels is common (Loken and Matfess 2023), and moreover, Turshen (2002) argues that in every conflict where women have fought alongside men in rebellion, they have sought greater political representation after the war. Additionally, post-

conflict countries are generally global leaders in women's descriptive representation, electing more women than non-conflict afflicted countries (Hughes 2009; Hughes and Tripp 2015). As such, rebellion's influence on women's political behavior is not simply a useful application of our question but a critical implication of women's wartime roles and an essential arena of women's political reach.

Finally, by studying legislative speeches, this study can offer insight into women MPs' real power and influence. Legislative speeches represent one of many behaviors of interest in parliament but are crucial to making policy. These speeches typically occur before votes on bills and can affect legislation content and the successful passing of such bills (Slapin and Proksch 2014). Further, speech patterns are a useful way to understand the gender dynamics of any given organization (Brescoll 2011; Karakowsky, McBey and Miller 2004). In government, it demonstrates how women are included in and influence political decision-making in the country (Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014). Thus, the levels of women's participation in these debates—and greater participation by a certain type of women—offers insight into women's power and influence in the policy-making process.

2 Women's Parliamentary Behavior

As women's political representation has risen across the globe, scholars of gender and politics have devoted increasing attention to understanding dynamics of women's election and representation. A significant body of research has studied women's behavior in elected political office, often focusing on the conditions under which they will represent women's interests, linking their descriptive representation to substantive representation (Childs 2006; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Phillips 1995). This work has largely supported the proposition that women MPs will tend to support policies relevant to women (Childs 2004; Dodson 2006; Piscopo 2011). This may be because of genuine interest, where women MPs have shared experiences with women as a group and thus form similar policy interests (Phillips

1995), as well as a feeling of duty or obligation among women MPs to represent women's issues (Childs 2004; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Schwindt-Bayer 2010).

Researchers have also offered consistent evidence that gender norms and socialization shape women's behavior and policy interests within legislatures. Using Eagly and Karau (2002)'s role congruity theory as a framework, this body of work argues that social norms dictate certain characteristics that men and women should display within legislatures, influencing how they behave and what policies they support. Eagly and Karau (2002) argue that women are expected to have more "communal" characteristics, including being more nurturing, honest, and helpful, while men are expected to have "agentic" qualities, such as being more assertive and dominant. These expectations can provide prescriptions for behavior in parliament, as well as backlash for defying such norms (Bäck, Debus and Müller 2014; Brescoll 2011).

Experimental research has offered ample evidence in support of the role congruity theory. In various workplaces and social settings, researchers have found that women speak less, are interrupted more, and use less assertive language than men do (Brescoll 2011; Karakowsky, McBey and Miller 2004). Many studies have similarly found that gender affects speech behavior in parliaments. Bäck and Debus (2019) and Clayton and Zetterberg (2021) examine European and African parliaments, respectively, and both find that women speak less than men in parliamentary debates. These patterns are also impacted by constructs of power. For example, in Uganda, women in reserved quota seats speak less often than men and women in open seats (Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2014*a*).

Scholars have also used the role congruity theory to explain how social norms can influence what policies women MPs prioritize. Women MPs are expected to focus more on communal policy issues due to their stereotyped "communal" traits (Eagly and Karau 2002; Huddy et al. 1993; Koch 2000). This includes topics categorized as "soft" or "feminine," like

women, gender, family, education, health, social affairs, culture, and youth.[1] Across different levels of democracy and regime type, research shows that women MPs tend to speak on topics that relate to women and gender (Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2017; Piscopo 2011), as well as other "soft" issues that are linked to communal stereotypes, such as education and healthcare (Bäck and Debus 2019; Baumann, Bäck and Davidsson 2018; de Vet and Devroe 2022). Women politicians are also more likely to receive appointments that are relevant to "soft" issues than "masculine" or "hard" issues, such as defense or the economy (Barnes and Brien 2018; Krook and Brien 2012).

These dynamics create double standards for women. They face limitations in voicing their opinions and interests within these institutions, as well as possible barriers to certain policy portfolios. When they defy such gendered expectations, however, they can face backlash from both their party and voters. For instance, women holding masculine policy portfolios and are more active on the parliament floor are less likely to be reappointed or promoted (Baumann, Bäck and Davidsson 2018; Yildirim, Kocapınar and Ecevit 2021). This creates a policing mechanism in which women may be unlikely to defy these norms even if they have policy interests beyond "soft" issues because they must strategically consider how it may impact their personal career (Bäck, Debus and Müller 2014).

Scholars have found, however, that these patterns are tempered when women MPs are introduced to some kind of intervention in gendered norms and socialization. Wahman, Frantzeskakis and Yildirim (2021) demonstrate that, in Malawi, women MPs were more active in parliament after Joyce Banda ascended to the presidency following the unexpected death of Bingu Mutharika. They argue that Banda was able to "normalize female political power, redefine gendered norms about appropriate female political behavior and compe-

[1]In contrast, "masculine" or "hard" topics include issues of government operations, defense, macroeconomics, domestic commerce, foreign trade, and international affairs. See Bäck, Debus and Müller (2014) for more on the classification of "hard" versus "soft" topics.

tences, and create momentum for more assertiveness among female MPs" (1). Similarly, in the United Kingdom's House of Commons, Blumenau (2021) shows that female MPs are more engaged in debates led by women ministers, suggesting that women in leadership positions act as role models for other women in politics.

These studies offer evidence of gendered patterns of behavior that can be further improved by conditions that empower MPs to be more engaged. While this demonstrates the possibility of changes in group-level socialization, it does not explore variation in individual-level socialization. The following section discusses the potential micro-level effects of women's wartime experiences as one type of socialization that can alter gendered behavior.

3 Women's Socialization in Militarized Organizations

The role congruity theory suggests women and men have different social expectations, leading to unique socialization and behavior. We build on this to examine variation within groups of legislators, particularly women legislators, based on their background and their respective socialization regarding feminine and masculine behaviors. In this section, we discuss the socialization of women within non-state armed groups and then build our theory on the legislative behavior of such rebel women in the following section.

Women are motivated to join rebel groups, like men, for various reasons, such as ideology, political and economic grievances, security and protection, upward mobility, and social networks (Henshaw 2016; Thomas and Bond 2015; Viterna 2013). Many women are motivated by the political ideals of the organization (Henshaw 2016; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). For others, the decision to join may be a matter of pure survival and protection (Coulter 2008; Mazurana et al. 2002). However, interpretations of women's participation in rebel groups are often colored by gendered stereotypes. Because participation in a violent rebellion defies ideas about women as passive and peaceful, when they participate Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) argue their "womanhood, their cognitive ability, and their sanity" are

all questioned, which in turn "negates any cause for which violent women may be acting," (50). Yet, their choice to join represents their agency and is a "vast departure" from gender expectations (Azmi 2015). This could suggest these women may have a less common characteristic based on their choice to escape the mold. By joining, they demonstrate a willingness to buck the traditional gender socialization and norms they have known in their lives.

As women are integrated into these organizations, they are further socialized in a manner that contradicts traditionally feminine norms. Like formal state militaries, non-state armed groups are hyper-masculine organizations in which typical masculine characteristics are amplified to glorify aggression and strength (Enloe 1989, 2000). For men, these spaces reinforce and augment existing masculine socialization. However, for most women, who likely were socialized in a feminine manner, these spaces problematize feminine characteristics as weaknesses and push women to act in a more masculine manner (Cohn 2000; MacKenzie 2015). Beliefs that effective militaries must amplify masculine characteristics lead to a glorification of masculine behavior and a rejection of the feminine as anything other than the innocent "beautiful souls" to be rescued (Elshtain 1982; Enloe 1989). Conceptualizations of a "good soldier" and a "masculine soldier" are indistinguishable—to be a good soldier, one must be masculine (MacKenzie and Foster 2017).

Socialization of these beliefs is likely pervasive across most levels of the organization. Rebels are socialized according to the organization's political and tactical goals through group institutions, such as recruitment, military training, political training, and disciplinary regimes (Green 2017). Even for those who may have held non-gender conforming characteristics before joining, this socialization likely pushes a deeper and more extreme form of masculinity that contradicts any pre-war upbringing. This socialization is reinforced as

women in both non-combat and combat roles are trained and educated similarly to men.[2] Alison (2004) quotes a female combatant of the Irish National Army, recalling, "First and foremost, you were a soldier, and that was it."

Throughout their training and socialization, "sameness" is emphasized between women and men in a way that glorifies masculine behavior in all members. In these hyper-masculine spaces, women's "sameness" comes from adopting "masculine and militarized attitudes and values" (Jordan and Denov 2007, 47). In Colombia, Schmidt (2020) recalls FARC women frequently claimed that there were "no women in FARC, because they were all treated like men" (6). Similarly, in Eritrea, Barth (2002) found that "Rather than describing women as acting out a new gender role, female fighters in Eritrea say that they were acting as men" (17). For rebel women, masculine behavior is the currency for respect (Jordan and Denov 2007; Marks 2017; Schmidt 2020). By acting the "same" as men, rebel women may believe they will be valued and rewarded. In South Africa, a former female combatant of the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) argued that through the "equality practiced" in the organization, women were "recognized as equals," (Cock 1992, 163). [3]

This sense of "sameness," along with the skill-based training that rebel women receive, can affect how they view themselves and their place in society (Barth 2002; Lyons 2004; Moral 2014; Yadav 2016). Steenbergen (2022) finds among former female combatants in Liberia and Nepal that joining the rebellion increased their overall self-reliance, self-esteem, self-confidence, and awareness that they can and should speak out regarding injustices (134).

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[2]This socialization can be role dependent. Those who hold gender-conforming roles such as cooks or child rearers would be unlikely to experience deep masculine socialization. However, many of the other combat and non-combat roles that women hold will likely experience some degree of this militarized masculine socialization.

[3]This recognition, however, is not always ubiquitous, as not all of their male colleagues will view them in this "sameness" and instead will offer social punishments to them for their masculine roles and behavior (Tripp 2000). This creates a double standard where women are expected to perform more masculine behaviors while also being punished for it.

One female combatant told Steenbergen (2022), "Before joining the party, there was not much courage within me as I was female and I cannot do everything, but after joining and surviving on my own, I became self-reliant and [feeling] I am not less than men" (135). When women return from the war, this socialization and confidence remain with them, impacting how they feel and act in post-conflict environments (Barth 2002; Bernal 2001).

In the next section, we explore how wartime gender socialization may be associated with how these select women behave once they enter political roles.

4 Theoretical Expectations: Rebel Women's Post-Conflict Political Behavior

Following civil conflicts, a high number of women opt into political roles. Their choice of career confers information about their personality and behavior, as Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014) argue that women who select into politics do not represent the average woman—instead, a more "unusual" and "masculine" type of woman (335). Yet, gender expectations still present powerful effects on how women participate in politics, resulting in them speaking less than men and focusing more on softer, feminine topics (Bäck and Debus 2019; Baumann, Bäck and Davidsson 2018; Bäck, Debus and Müller 2014; Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2014*a*; Clayton and Zetterberg 2021). Rebel women also represent an "unusual" type of woman. Their choice to join the rebellion and engage politically signals a willingness and comfort with defying gender norms (Azmi 2015). Yet, through their participation and subsequent socialization, their defiance of gender norms, as well as their confidence and political interest, likely deepens over the war. We argue that behavior among women MPs after war may vary based on rebel background.

We assume that women MPs have more feminine gender socialization based on proscribed societal gender norms, which often emerge even more forcefully after conflict (Handrahan 2004; Pankhurst 2002). Following the role congruity theory, women MPs may adhere

to traditional gender norms that dictate that they should be less assertive and agentic than their male colleagues, meaning they will speak less frequently in parliament, especially on "hard" or "masculine" topics. Additionally, they may have genuine preferences that also influence their behavior.

In contrast, rebel women are likely to display more masculine behaviors. Based on their selection into rebel groups, it is likely that these women already possess non-gender conforming characteristics. In cases where they do not, such characteristics emerge as they are socialized into these hyper-masculine organizations. Those with non-gender conforming traits will likely see these characteristics deepened and reinforced over the course of the war. Moreover, they will become more confident through practice as they demonstrate this "sameness" in behavior and agency with men.

Rebel women MPs also may not face the same pressures for role congruence, particularly when working within their former organizations. In fact, they have little incentive to change their behavior, as they have already learned that it is accepted and encouraged within their group. Moreover, more masculine behavior is congruent with their identities as former rebels, which may trump other identity groups. As a result, when they step into political roles within the same organization, they can continue their wartime masculine behavior.[4]

This may have implications for several facets of women MPs' behavior in government, including how often they speak and what they speak about. While women MPs tend to be less assertive in parliament, speaking less than men (Bäck and Debus 2019; Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2014*a*; Clayton and Zetterberg 2021), rebel women may be more assertive than the average women MP due to factors associated with their wartime participation. This may include their pre-war levels of gender incongruity, their wartime socialization, as well

[4]How rebel women are received by their communities, however, may differ from the party. When they return home, they often find that their communities remain unchanged in their gendered views, leading to a double standard where they are celebrated for their wartime roles but punished within their communities for their defying behavior and pressured to revert to traditional gendered standards.

as confidence gained through their participation. For example, in Ethiopia, a woman shared with Veale (2003) that non-rebel and rebel women acted differently in their local council, saying:

> In politics, those (women) who were fighters are better than those who were not. If there is a meeting at the Kebele, these fighter women ask and answer questions. They participate actively, but this activity is not common to those who were not fighters or other women because they feel frightened or afraid of anybody. (47)

Rebel women's wartime experiences may also impact their fear of backlash for non-gender conforming behavior. Scholars have emphasized that women's gender-conforming behavior in parliament may also result from a fear of punishment—rather than a true individual adherence to these norms—as women who are perceived as more assertive and dominating in parliament tend to be punished by party leaders and voters (Baumann, Bäck and Davidsson 2018; Yildirim, Kocapınar and Ecevit 2021). If rebel women are primarily elected to their former rebel parties, these same incentive structures may not be in place, as rebel women may have experienced both the expectation and reward of acting more like a man than a woman. In turn, they may be less likely to experience some of the double standards and backlash that other women MPs may experience from demonstrating more masculine behavior in parliament. Thus, they may be more likely to demonstrate more assertive behavior, including speaking more frequently on the parliament floor.

> **HYPOTHESIS 1**: Former rebel women will speak more in parliament than non-rebel women.

This may similarly impact the content of rebel women's speeches. Although average women MPs are also less likely to speak on masculine or "hard" topics (Baumann, Bäck and Davidsson 2018; de Vet and Devroe 2022), rebel women may not avoid these topics because they do not view them as incongruous to their roles as rebel MPs. Due to their wartime experiences, they may be accustomed to speaking on more masculine topics, especially in

military, defense, and security matters. Moreover, their feelings of "sameness" developed during the war may have instilled confidence to speak on issues often assumed to be beyond women's purview. Again, they also may be less likely to fear backlash from speaking on these topics, as their colleagues have proven accepting of more masculinized behavior. As such, we argue, they will be more likely than other women to speak on the same topics as men rather than avoiding "hard" topics.

> **HYPOTHESIS 2**: Former rebel women will speak more in parliament on 'hard' topics than non-rebel women.

Alternatively, rebel women may be more inclined to speak on topics related to wartime interests and experiences. Just as women may be more likely to speak on communal issues because they are more relevant to their experiences and interests (Phillips 1995), rebel women's policy interests in government may reflect the factors that drove them to join the rebellion or issues that became especially salient to them over the course of the conflict as they were further socialized into the group's political goals. This includes certain hard topics like defense or security but also may extend to topics that are considered soft, such as civil rights, social welfare, and inequality, that are related to the sort of grievances that drive individuals to rebel. They may be more likely to speak on such issues due to an interest related to or borne from their wartime participation. Likewise, they may have become more confident speaking on these issues during the war, increasing their likelihood to continue in parliament after the war. In contrast, non-rebel women are not expected to prioritize this collection of issues, as they do not share direct experiences of conflict or socialization into the political goals of a rebel group that typically characterizes rebel women.

> **HYPOTHESIS 3**: Former rebel women will speak more in parliament on topics that relate to wartime participation than non-rebel women.

5 Case Selection

Uganda and Zimbabwe offer a useful test of our theory due to the dynamics of their civil conflicts and the subsequent high levels of women's post-war political representation. The Ugandan Bush War (1981-1986) concluded with the rebel forces, the National Resistance Army (NRA), overthrowing the government. Scholars have argued that the war transformed Uganda from a country with limited opportunities for women to one in which women were accepted and promoted in politics (Boyd 1989; Byanyima 1992; Goetz 1998; Tripp 2000). Women were active within NRA forces and held a variety of combat and non-combat roles (Boyd 1989; Byanyima 1992; Kasfir 2005; Mugabme 2000). The women who participated have emphasized its transformational roles, arguing that they "acquired a sense of competence, self-confidence, and opportunity for self-determination" (Byanyima 1992, 129). Women's participation and their tactical success also led to changing attitudes among their male comrades and outside observers (Tripp 2015). Uganda became one of the first countries to adopt gender quotas in 1989, leading to high levels of women's representation over the subsequent decades. Further, the continued role of the NRA (now the National Resistance Movement/NRM) has ensured that former combatants are influential within formal politics (Reuss and Titeca 2017). This makes it an ideal case to compare former rebel and non-rebel women's behavior. In our sample, although their number is quite small ($<$5% of the non-rebel women), rebel women are still about 30% of the ex-rebels in the chamber (also see Appendix, Table 2). Moreover, scholars have argued that though ex-rebels' representation in Uganda has dwindled in the last few decades, their influence is perceived to still be strong (Brannon 2023; Reuss 2020; Reuss and Titeca 2017).

The Zimbabwean case offers similar and contrasting dynamics. The Zimbabwean war (1964 to 1979) ended with the removal of colonial forces. After the war, the rebels, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, transitioned into political parties and eventually merged into one party, the Zimbabwe

African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF), in 1987. Similar to the NRA, women in the guerilla forces served in support, combat, and leadership roles and have expressed that these experiences offered them "new vision for their role in society" (Seidman 1984, 427). Yet, many scholars have questioned the veracity of claims that women's roles in the field were emancipatory, emphasizing that they only had a "limited voice" (Seidman 1984, 420) and that gendered hierarchies were reinforced, limiting women's access to decision-making and training and frequently subjecting women to sexual abuse and harassment (Lyons 2004). This is reinforced by the lack of feminist progress after the war (Law 2021; Ranchod-Nilsson 2006; Sadomba and Dzinesa 2004). It was not until 2013 that the country adopted gender quotas, and large gains in women's representation were achieved. Nonetheless, due to the dominant position of the former rebels in government, ex-rebels have long cemented their place in politics, though the representation of non-rebel women did not rise significantly until several decades after the war. This is evident in our sample, where almost 25% of the women MPs are ex-rebels. This figure goes up to 47% for women MPs of the government party after the 2013 election (also see Appendix, Table 2). As such, Zimbabwe offers a useful comparison point to Uganda.

Beyond these dynamics, three other critical factors could impact conclusions drawn from these cases. First, each is a semi-authoritarian country with a dominant political party—both of which are former rebel parties (the NRM in Uganda and the ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe). While the closed nature of the authoritarian regime may hinder the degree to which all representatives, including women, are outspoken within parliament, the prominent nature of the dominant rebel parties may also offer some perceptions of protection to representatives—mitigating some of the effects of the regime type. There is evidence that ruling party MPs tend to be fairly strong-minded in the chamber in both Uganda (Collord 2016, 2021; Doro and Kufakurinani 2018) and Zimbabwe (Doro and Kufakurinani 2018). In addition, since our research design compares the behavior of sub-groups of MPs that are all

active within the same political context, these regime qualities should not present a validity threat. Furthermore, while the regime type and party system do limit the scope conditions of any findings, it does not necessarily limit generalizability given that rebel parties—especially victorious rebel parties—are more likely to be authoritarian and dominant political parties (Lyons 2016).

Second, the rebel parties included in the sample each held a leftist ideology during the war. While leftist ideology is associated with an increased likelihood of recruiting women to rebel groups (Wood and Thomas 2017), previous work has emphasized that leftist groups frequently abandon a commitment to ideological commitments (Burihabwa and Curtis 2019), but also specifically to gender equality after the war is over (Henderson and Jeydel 2013). In fact, Brannon (2025) finds that leftist rebel parties tend to elect far fewer women on average than rebel parties with other ideological stances. Thus, due to the dominant status and ideology of these rebel parties, it is possible that any findings understate the true relationship more generally.

Third, these cases are suitable regarding institutional setup. Both countries are comprised of first-past-the-post single-member constituencies. However, in both cases, constituencies are part of electoral districts, each of which elects a woman representative. In terms of speechmaking, MPs have considerable flexibility. There are rules in place to ensure that members of both the government and the opposition have the opportunity to take the floor, but to do so, an MP only needs to be recognized by the Speaker. In both cases, ministers, committee chairpersons, leaders of the opposition, and government representatives are given priority, but other than that, the Speaker is responsible for distributing time on the floor (Collord 2016, 2021; Doro and Kufakurinani 2018; Kriger 2006; Parliament 2021, 2005). The similarity of the systems and the limited institutional constraints make these cases suitable for testing our theory.

We expect that the findings presented should be applicable, particularly to contexts

with other rebel parties. Many rebel parties, especially in Africa, are dominant parties and hold a majority of seats within their legislatures (Lyons 2016; Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz 2016). Further, the level of representation of female rebels in both cases is similar to global patterns, where rebel women hold an average of five percent of rebel party seats (Brannon 2025). While this may seem like a low percentage of seats, women's numerical representative varies according to party legislature size. Further, though rebel women only hold a small percentage of seats in the cases analyzed in this paper (and in other cases), existing research on female rebel veterans in politics in Uganda and Zimbabwe suggests that they have an outsized impact on politics (Boyd 1989; Goredema and Chigora 2011; Mugabme 2000; Seidman 1984; Tamale 1999), making them an important group to study.[5]

6 Data on Parliamentary Speaking and Research Design

To test our hypotheses, we leverage a novel dataset of parliamentary speeches made by MPs in Uganda (2011-2021) and Zimbabwe (2008-2018). In total, this amounts to 247,000 speeches made by 1,093 MPs. To compile this dataset, we collected the transcripts of parliamentary discussions (Hansards), which were available on the website of each country's parliament. The speeches were categorized based on the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) coding scheme (Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen and Jones 2006). Specifically, each speech was classified into one of the major 23 CAP topics, which ranged from macroeconomics to cultural policy. An additional category was included for procedural speeches.

To identify speeches on "hard" topics, we follow the categorization of Bäck, Debus and Müller (2014). Based on their classification, we categorize the following as hard topics: law and crime, defence, macroeconomics, domestic commerce, foreign trade, and international

[5]Moreover, other studies have similarly analyzed differences in behavior among relatively small groups of women (Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2014*b*; Wang 2014; Wang and Yoon 2018).

affairs. We base our classifications of topics related to wartime experiences on common factors associated with rebel group recruitment and the political and military priorities of rebels in Uganda and Zimbabwe. This includes defence, international affairs, law and crime, civil rights, and social welfare.[6]

To facilitate coding this expansive corpus of speeches, we employed a neural network. The effectiveness of this approach for text classification has been widely documented (e.g., Mirończuk and Protasiewicz (2018); Popov (2018)), and it is increasingly utilized within the context of political science (e.g., Ballard et al. (2022); Wahman, Frantzeskakis and Yildirim (2021)). For our application, we employed BERT (Devlin et al. 2018), a neural network developed by Google. This data generation process is part of a larger data-building project, so the network was fine-tuned on data from Ghana, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The data from Ghana were used to train the model, and the data from the other countries were used to validate that the trained net could code speeches across countries with sufficient accuracy. The network coded the policy topic of test data with an average f1 score of 82.6% (precision: 83.2%, recall: 82.9%).

We combined the speech data with data collected on the individual backgrounds of MPs elected during this time period. This includes data on their education, professional background, gender, and, most pertinently, connections to the former rebel organizations: the National Resistance Army in Uganda, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army. These data were coded using various sources, including parliamentary profiles, media interviews, policy reports, academic research, and biographical profiles. Their participation had to be clearly specified to code an MP as a for-

[6]Factors like ideology, political and economic grievances, security and protection, gender inequality, and upward mobility frequently drive women's recruitment. The conflicts in Zimbabwe and Uganda were both liberation struggles that had the goal of overthrowing what was viewed as unjust and repressive governments. Topics like civil rights, social welfare, and law and crime relate to the issues reflected in both recruitment and political goals in these cases. We include defence and international affairs/foreign aid issues as well, given that over the course of the conflict, rebels gain significant experience with these issues.

mer rebel. While in some cases, it is conceivable that individuals may want to conceal their wartime ties, given the prominence of these organizations within Ugandan and Zimbabwean politics, this is unlikely in these cases.

For the purpose of the analysis, the dataset was collapsed into a country-MP-year format, and it includes every MP elected in office for the years covered in each country. The key dependent variable, which is used to test H1, is operationalized as the number of speeches per year. To test H2, we rely on two variables. The first is the number of speeches on "hard" topics, and the second is the ratio of "hard" speeches over the total number of speeches made by the MP over the course of a year. This two-step approach allows us to better understand both the engagement with specific topics in parliament and the existence of a relative focus in particular topic areas. Similarly, to test H3, we use the number of speeches made on wartime experience-related topics and the ratio of wartime experience-related speeches over the total number of speeches made in a year. As we are primarily interested in differences in the level of activity between rebel and non-rebel women MPs, we introduce an interaction term with the constituent terms being gender and rebel group membership. Both independent variables are coded as binary.

We also include several control variables. We control for government membership, ministerial appointments, committee chairmanships, independent status, and the number of years that the MP has been in office.[7] In addition, we control for two categories of special elections. First, both Zimbabwe and Uganda have reserved women's seats at the district level. Second, in Uganda, there are reserved seats for representatives of the military who are appointed by the Army Council. Further, we control for whether an MP was a rebel leader during their country's respective liberation struggle. This helps us differentiate between effects driven by socialization within rebel groups versus individuals with specific traits self-

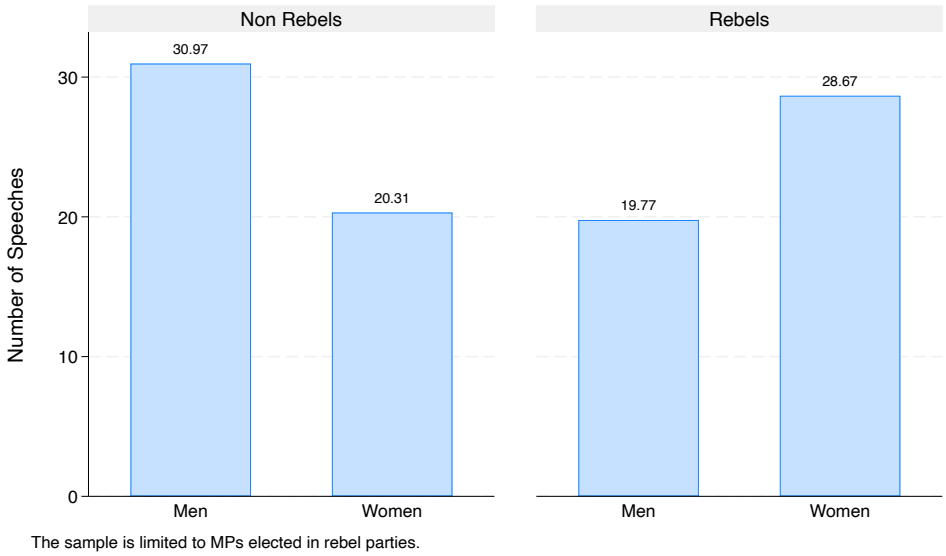
[7]This variable is coded starting during the 2006 parliament for Uganda and the 2002 parliament for Zimbabwe.

selecting into both rebel groups and the parliament. We provide a summary of the dataset in Table 1 of the Appendix.

To test H1, we use zero-inflated negative binomial models. This accounts for the nature of the dependent variable – the number of speeches – which is an overdispersed and zero-inflated count variable. To test H2 and H3, we use zero-inflated negative binomial models for the count-type dependent variables and OLS regressions when the dependent variable is a ratio. To account for the structure of our data, we add country-level fixed effects. To account for time dependencies, we include linear splines with knots at the beginning and end of each parliament.[8] Also, we cluster standard errors at the MP level.

7 Analysis

Figure 1: Speeches per Year by Rebels and Non-Rebels

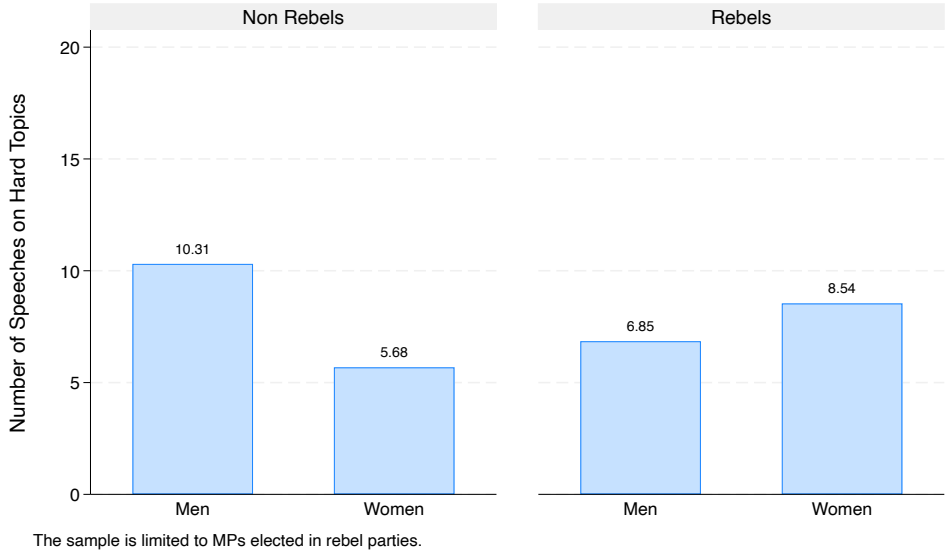


First, we explore the relationship between gender, rebel legacies, and parliamentary

[8]The results remain identical when cubic splines are used, so linear splines are preferred due to the greater modeling control they allow.

speech-making descriptively. Figure 1 depicts the number of speeches per year made by MPs elected to political parties with rebel legacies. The barplot on the left compares speeches per year by men and women who were not rebels themselves. In the right-hand panel, we plot the number of speeches per year for MPs who participated in the rebellion. Based on these plots, non-rebel men speak more than rebel men on a yearly basis. Conversely, non-rebel women MPs make 19.77 speeches per year, while rebel women MPs make 28.67 speeches. This is a substantial difference of 31%. These descriptive relationships suggest that women's wartime roles may be related to their active engagement in debates, as these women may feel more comfortable and confident speaking up than average women.

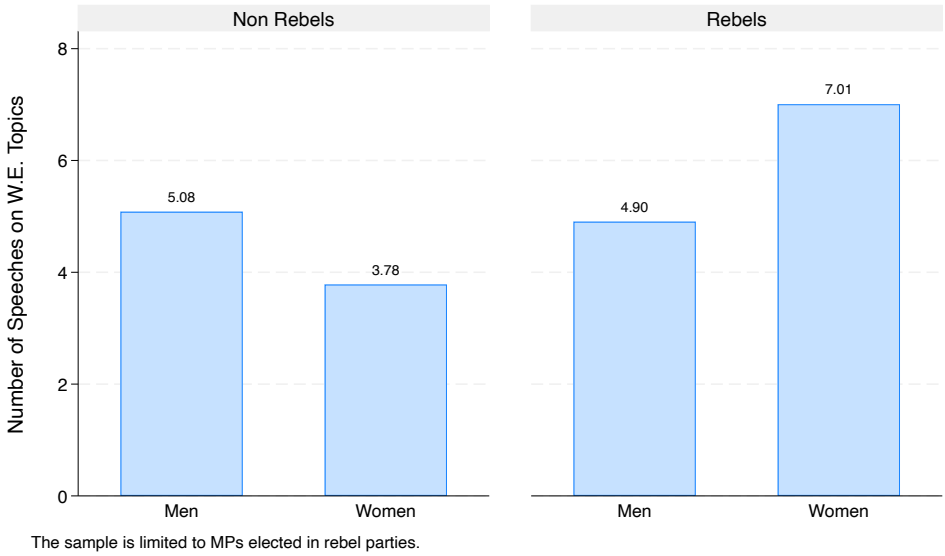
Figure 2: Speeches on Hard Topics per Year by Rebels and Non-Rebels



In Figure 2, we examine the same relationship but focus on speeches made regarding "hard" topics. The patterns are similar. While rebel men make substantially fewer speeches than non-rebel men, rebel women make 2.9 speeches per year more than non-rebel women. This corresponds to a difference of about 33%. Similarly, in Figure 3, which graphs the number of speeches on wartime experience-related topics, we observe that rebel women are considerably more active than all other groups of MPs. Compared to non-rebel women,

they make 46% more speeches per year. Overall, Figures 1, 2, and 3 show some level of support for all our hypotheses, indicating that rebel women are overall more active on the floor of parliament than non-rebel women generally and specifically on "hard" topics and topics that relate to wartime experiences. This offers further evidence that some aspects of rebel women's identity set them apart from other women, likely their propensity to display more masculine behaviors.

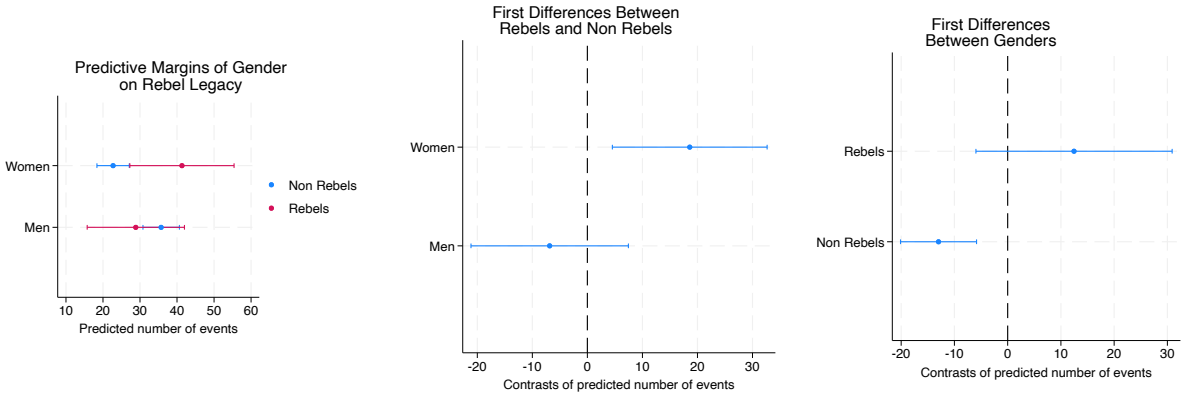
Figure 3: Speeches on Wartime Experience-Related Topics per Year by Rebels and Non-Rebels



To further explore the relationship between rebel ties and behavior in the chamber, we present a number of regression models. Since we are interested in the marginal effect of rebel background on women's behavior, we base our discussion of the results on substantively meaningful simulations (see Ai and Norton (2003); Brambor, Clark and Golder (2006)) following the observed values approach (Hanmer and Kalkan 2013). The results of the simulations are presented in Figures 4, 5, and 6. In each figure, each row has three graphs. The left-hand panel shows the predicted values for each group of MPs. The middle panel evaluates whether the difference between these predicted values are statistically sig-

nificant between the groups of MPs (rebels and non-rebels) sharing the same gender (men and women). The right-hand panel evaluates the statistical significance of the difference in the predicted values between genders (men and women) with the same group (rebels and non-rebels). The full models are presented Table 3 of the Appendix (Models 1-5).

Figure 4: Marginal Effects between Gender and Rebel Group Membership for All Speeches

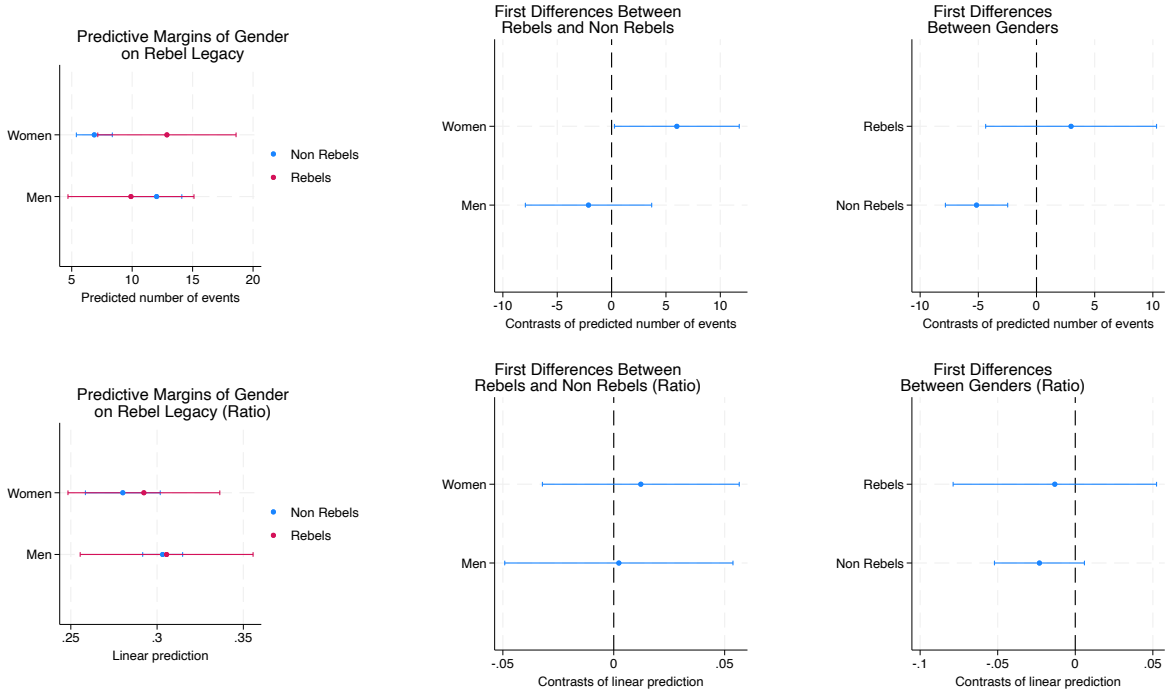


Note: Model results can be found in Models 1 of Table 3 in the Appendix.

Support for H1 is evaluated in Figure 4. The left-hand panel shows the expected number of speeches per year by rebel and non-rebel men and women MPs. Non-rebel women MPs are projected to make 22.7 speeches each year (95% CIs: 18.4–27.1). On the other hand, Rebel women MPs are projected to make 41.3 speeches per year (95% CIs: 27.3 – 55.4). This is a drastic increase of about 55%. On the contrary, non-rebel men are projected to make 35.7 speeches per year (95% CIs: 30.8 – 40.6), while rebel men are projected to make 28.9 speeches per year (95% CIs: 15.7 – 42). The middle graph depicts the estimated change in the expected number of speeches for men and women when they have a rebel legacy. We

find that the increase of 18.6 speeches per year for rebel women is statistically significant (95% CIs: 4.5 – 32.7). Finally, in the right-hand panel, we compare the number of speeches made by men and women who either have or lack a rebel legacy. We find that non-rebel women make 13 fewer speeches than non-rebel men each year, which is statistically significant (95% CIs: 5.8 – 20.1). On the other hand, rebel women make 12.5 speeches per year more than rebel men, but this relationship is not statistically significant (95% CIs: -6 – 30.9). Therefore, after comparing all possible groups based on gender and rebel group affiliation, we find that rebel women make more speeches than non-rebel women, but their behavior is not significantly different compared to rebel men. On the other hand, non-rebel women take the floor less frequently than both rebel women and their male colleagues without rebel experience. Overall, this provides sound support for H1.

Figure 5: Marginal Effects between Gender and Rebel Group Membership for Speeches on Hard Topics



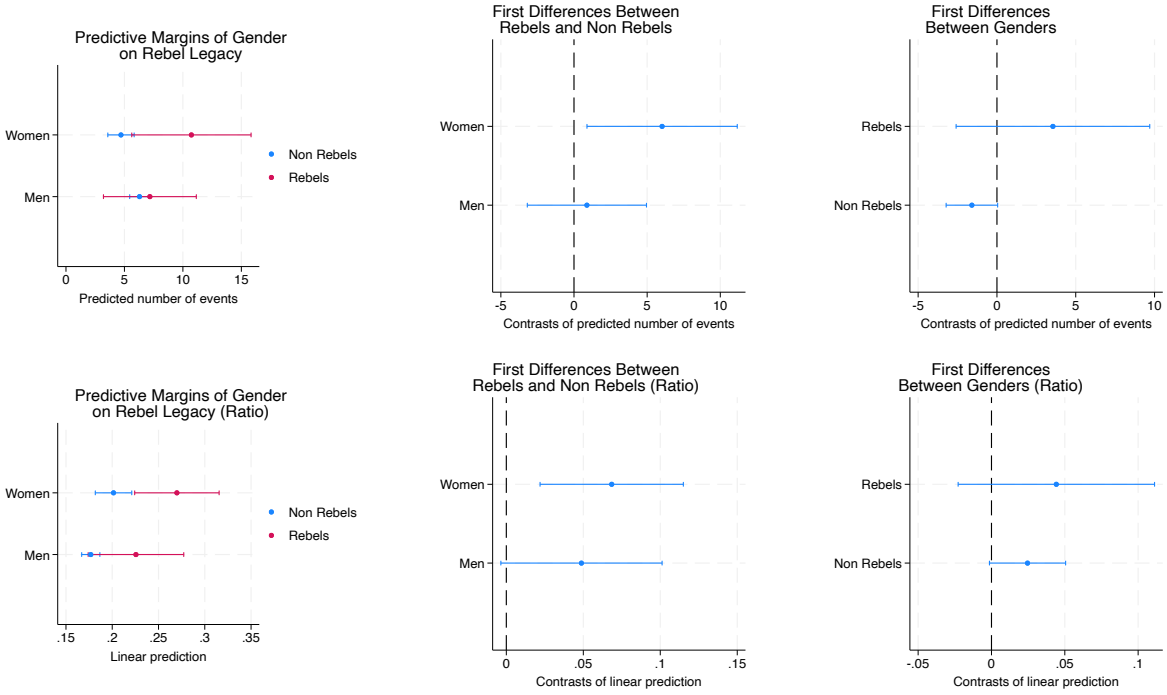
Note: Model results can be found in Models 2 and 3 of Table 3 in the Appendix.

To evaluate support for H2, we look at graphs in Figure 5. The top row of graphs shows simulations based on the count DV (hard speeches per year), while the bottom row of graphs shows simulations based on the ratio DV (hard to total speeches). Starting with the top-left panel, we see that rebel women are expected to make 12.9 speeches on hard topics per year (95% CIs: 7.2 – 18.6), while non-rebel women are expected to make 6.9 speeches (95% CIs: 5.4 – 8.4). This is an increase of 53%. In regards to men, non-rebels are expected to make 12 speeches on hard topics (95% CIs: 9.9 – 14.1), while rebels are expected to make 9.9 speeches (4.7 – 15.1). The middle graph shows that the change of 6 speeches between rebel and non-rebel women is statistically significant (95% CIs: 0.27 – 11.7), but this is not the case for the difference between male MPs. Finally, the top right panel shows that non-rebel men make 5.1 speeches on hard topics more than non-rebel women (95% CIs 2.5 – 7.8), but there is no statistically significant difference between rebel men and women MPs when it comes to this category of speeches.

We then proceed to the bottom row of graphs in Figure 5, where we investigate the differences in the ratio of speeches on hard topics. The bottom left panel shows the expected ratio of hard speeches by rebel and non-rebel men and women MPs. For non-rebel women MPs, the projection is for 28% of their speeches to be on hard topics (95% CIs: 25.8 – 30.2). On the other hand, when rebel women MPs take the floor, they are expected to speak about a hard topic 29.2% of the time (95% CIs: 24.8 – 33.6). In comparison, this ratio is projected to be 30.3% for non-rebel men (95% CIs: 29.2 – 31.5) and 30.5% for rebel men (95% CIs: 25.5 – 35.6). In the middle bottom-row panel, we show the expected ratio change for men and women when they have a rebel legacy. We find that the change for rebel women is not statistically significant (95% CIs: -3.2 – 5.7). Finally, in the bottom-right panel, we compare the ratios of hard speeches made by men and women who either have or lack a rebel legacy. The ratio of hard speeches to total speeches is lower by 1.3% for rebel women compared to their male colleagues, but the relationship is not statistically significant (95% CIs: -7.8

– 5.2). Similarly, the gap of 2.3% between non-rebel women and men is not statistically significant (95% CIs: -5.2 – 0.1). Taken together, these simulations provide mixed support for H2. We find that rebel women make more hard speeches than non-rebel women, which is consistent with the fact that they make more speeches overall (H1), but we do not find evidence of an increased focus on hard topics compared to other topics.

Figure 6: Marginal Effects between Gender and Rebel Group Membership for Speeches on Wartime Experience-Related Topics



Note: Model results can be found in Models 4 and 5 of Table 3 in the Appendix.

We evaluate support for H3 through the simulations presented in Figure 6. The top-level graphs contain simulations from the count model and the bottom-level graphs from the ratio model. Starting from the top-right panel, rebel-women MPs appear considerably more active on topics related to wartime experiences. Specifically, they make 10.7 speeches per year (95% CIs: 5.6 – 15.8) while their non-rebel counterparts make 4.7 speeches (95% CIs: 3.6 – 5.8). This is an increase of 64%. In regards to men, non-rebels are expected to

make 6.3 speeches on these topics (95% CIs: 5.5 – 7.1), while rebels are expected to make 7.2 speeches (3.2 – 11.1). The middle panel of the top row indicates that the difference of 6 speeches between rebel and non-rebel women is statistically significant (95% CIs: 0.9 – 11.2). Finally, the top right panel shows that there is no statistically significant difference between rebel men and women.

The graphs in the bottom row of Figure 6 show that rebel women also devote a greater share of their speeches to topics related to wartime experiences. These topics make up 27% of the speeches given by rebel women (95% CIs: 22.4 – 31.5). This number drops to 20.1% for non-rebel women (95% CIs: 18.2 – 22.1). Rebel men also appear to focus more on these topics as they make up 22.6% of their speeches (95% CIs: 17.4 – 27.7) compared to 17.7 for non-rebel men (95% CIs: 16.7 – 18.7). The middle panel of the row indicates that the difference of 6.8% between rebel and non-rebel women is statistically significant (95% CIs: 2.2 – 11.5), but the difference between their men colleagues is not. Finally, the bottom-right panel shows that there is no statistically significant difference between rebel men and rebel women. Overall, these simulations offer strong support for H3, with women MPs making more speeches on topics related to wartime experiences and also focusing on these topics more than non-rebel women.

To test the robustness of these findings, we run a series of additional tests. First, we restrict the sample to women MPs so that the relationship can be tested linearly (Appendix: Table 4, Models 6-10). We also ran the main models with an alternative operationalization of the dependent variable. Parliamentary speeches vary tremendously in length. It is possible for some MPs to make fewer but longer speeches compared to others but still occupy the floor for long stretches of time. To account for this possibility, we ran our models with the number of spoken words as the DV (Appendix: Table 5, Models 11-15, Figures 1-3). In both cases, we find support for hypotheses H1 and H3 but not for H2.

7.1 *Speaking on Soft Topics*

While we theorize that rebel women will be more active on "hard" topics and topics related to wartime experience, there is strong evidence in the existing literature of women MPs focusing on "soft" topics (Baumann, Bäck and Davidsson 2018; Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2017; de Vet and Devroe 2022; Eagly and Karau 2002). Therefore, it would be possible for rebel women to be more active overall, as we find (H1), but to focus especially on "soft" topics out of genuine interest. To test this possibility, we run our main models with a count DV for soft topics and a ratio DV for the share of soft to total speeches. As "soft" topics, we code civil rights, health, education, community development, and social welfare.

We find that rebel women make more speeches on soft topics, but the degree to which they focus on them is identical to non-rebel women. In addition, we find that rebel women speak significantly more on those issues than rebel men, but they do not make up a significantly higher percentage of their total speeches. However, the finding that stands out the most in part of the analysis is the relationship between non-rebel men and women. While in other simulations non-rebel women speak significantly less than men, they make virtually the same number of speeches with them on soft topics. In addition, speeches on soft topics comprise a significantly higher proportion of their speeches compared to their men colleagues (Appendix: Table 10, Figure 14). These findings corroborate the conventional wisdom regarding women MPs focusing on particular policy domains while avoiding others.

7.2 *Exploring Government Party Effects*

An important limitation of our research design is that the overwhelming majority of rebel women are elected on the ticket of the government party, which is also a rebel party. As a result, an alternative explanation could be that women MPs are empowered due to being part of the government (ruling) party or that, due to their past, rebel parties provide a more egalitarian environment in which women MPs may get more opportunities to take

the floor. To test this alternative explanation, we ran models where government membership replaces rebel group membership in the interaction term (Table 6, Figures 4-6). The results show that there is no evidence that membership in a ruling party is driving the results.

7.3 *Background Differences Between Women MPs*

Another limitation concerns the possibility that systematic differences in the backgrounds of rebel and non-rebel women MPs affect their behavior in parliament. While women with non-gender conforming backgrounds and preferences may be more likely to join rebel groups (Azmi 2015; Thomas and Wood 2018; Yadav 2016) and be active in parliament, a plethora of research at the individual level suggests that women who join these groups commonly have low levels of education and are of a lower socio-economic status (Barth 2002; Byanyima 1992; Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen 2002; Mugabme 2000). In either case, it is possible that these women possess personalities or experiences that deem them more likely to challenge gender norms, though the narratives of women's experiences in rebel groups still stress the changes in socialization they undergo nonetheless. While it is not possible to directly test for pre-war socialization, to address this concern, we utilize the level of education and type of career as proxies.[9,10]

Preliminary analysis shows that both variables are associated with our key independent variables. A t-test indicates that non-rebel women tend to have significantly higher levels of education compared to rebel women MPs ($p<0.001$). Also, simulations based on a logit regression indicate a statistically significant association between certain career paths

[9]Due to increased missingness, we do not include these potentially important indicators in the main models.

[10]The education variable is an interval level variable that indicates the highest level of education received, including primary schooling, secondary schooling, or university. Career is a nominal variable that indicates the primary profession that the MP has held throughout their life. This includes Education, Social Work, Business, Law, Medicine, Government Bureaucracy, and Career Politician.

and rebel group legacies for women MPs (Appendix: Table 7, Figure 7). Adding these controls leaves our results largely unaffected (Appendix: Table 8, Figures 8-10).[11]

7.4 *Time in Office and Speechmaking*

The results presented to this point indicate that rebel backgrounds among women are associated with greater speechmaking activity. However, it is not clear when this relationship develops temporally. If, as we suggest, rebel women are more active due to their prior socialization in environments dominated by men, we should expect them to be more active from the beginning of their careers in parliament. Furthermore, if this is indeed a matter of socialization, the literature would suggest that non-rebel women also start participating more as they become more experienced (e.g., Pfafman and McEwan (2014)).

To test this, we ran additional models where the number of years that the MP has been in office is added as a third interaction term (Appendix: Table 9, Figures 11-13). We observe that in terms of absolute numbers, the difference between rebel and non-rebel women is statistically significant across the board during their first years in office, but not after year 6. However, the lack of statistical significance in later years is due to a widening of the estimated confidence intervals as opposed to the gap between the means becoming narrower. The exception to this rule is the rate of speeches related to wartime experiences (H3), for which the difference remains statistically significant for all simulated years.

[11] While we find that rebel women are more likely to speak on these topics, we do not find evidence that speeches on wartime experience-related topics make up a higher percentage of rebel women's total speeches. While this challenges our main findings regarding H3, it is important to point out that almost 2/3 of the sample is excluded due to missingness in the additional controls.

8 Conclusions

This paper explores the relationship between women's participation in conflict and their political behavior once they enter elected positions. We argued that rebel women may display different behavior than other women because they were socialized into hyper-masculine organizations that reward them for acting like men. Our analysis shows that women with rebel legacies are much more vocal in parliament than women without such experiences, particularly when it comes to topics that relate to wartime experience. We find mixed evidence that they engage more in discussions on traditionally male-dominated topics.

Overall, we believe this study has several implications for women in politics. First, it suggests the importance of further considering the variation among which women select into politics and how these selection factors will impact behavior. We join a growing body of research that calls attention to the variation in gender socialization, breaking down assumptions that all women will display feminine behaviors. Though our study is limited to post-conflict countries, the theory posed here could be applied broadly in the future to consider how variation in socialization impacts behavior in any government. Rebel groups are not the only form of masculine socialization that women may experience. For example, women's experience within state militaries could be one of the most direct applications. Military service has long been a path to political office, and though fewer women veterans tend to serve in politics (Best, Hunter and Thomas 2021), their masculine wartime association could have important effects on their ability to get elected and how they behave in government. However, we can only directly generalize these findings to other rebel women in rebel parties, as there may be something unique about their wartime experiences that influences this behavior. More research ought to be done to understand broader masculine socialization and behavior.

Additionally, our findings have implications for the wider literature on legislative politics and representation. They promote the idea of thinking more broadly when considering

the determinants of legislative behavior. The study contributes to a growing body of feminist work that questions the idea that all women will have uniform behavior in politics. In particular, this builds on work that emphasizes the diverse backgrounds of women in politics (Barnes and Saxton 2019; Barnes and Holman 2020; Hughes 2011). Furthermore, while boosting women's descriptive representation has been a stated goal in many countries around the world for a long time, understanding how to empower women in the chamber and enable them to provide substantive representation has proven difficult, especially in "hard" policy areas like the economy.

Our findings also speak to the literature on women and conflict. While existing literature captures ways in which women rebels may add to their status during conflict, it also documents in dark colors the difficulties they face in fitting in their communities once the conflict has concluded. Our findings indicate that women's empowerment in an arena outside the realms of formal politics leads to positive outcomes for women's substantive representation in the chamber of parliament. However, despite any positive externalities that emerge from conflict settings, it must be clearly noted that war is still writ large catastrophic for states and for women. These developments in women's parliamentary behavior come alongside the devastating effects of war that are often disproportionally felt by women.

Nonetheless, our study leaves several questions unanswered. First, due to the relatively small numbers of rebel women present in the Ugandan and Zimbabwean parliament, it is possible that these findings could represent a few exceptional women, though existing research on the empowerment and masculine socialization of women during wartime leads us to believe this is unlikely. However, more work should be done in other contexts to understand how these patterns travel. Second, our data do not allow us to speak to the relationships between rebel women and non-rebel women. Future work ought to explore these dynamics, including how differences in prestige between groups underlie behavior. Third, future research could study the mechanism of cohesion employed by rebel parties and its

impact on behavior. Observational data, such as what we rely on in this study, allows us to discern associations and patterns, but stops short of offering causal evidence of the effect of women's wartime socialization. Though the literature on women's roles in rebel groups offers persuasive evidence that this is possible, there are other factors that could impact this relationship, such as women's pre-war socialization. While it is impossible to measure pre-war socialization or behaviors, future research could draw out the life cycle of women's behavior and possible empowerment before, during, and after their participation in rebellion.

Data Availability

Upon publication, the data and replication files will be available on the corresponding author's website.

Supplementary Materials

Supplementary materials are attached with the manuscript submission. Materials will be hosted online if the article is accepted for publication.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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