Mass Media and Civil War Onset

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Overview

- The Puzzle

- A Theory of Non-Linear Media Effects

- Hypotheses

- Data and Method

- Findings

- Implications and Conclusion

The Puzzle

- It is widely argued that mass media play a role in the outbreak of civil wars (Brass 1997; Des Forges 1999; Gagnon Jr 1994; Kellow and Steeves 1998; Metzl 1997; Tambiah 1996).

- But there is also evidence that mass media strengthen the state and pacify potential challengers (Anderson 1983; Deutsch 1953; Warren 2014).

- How can we square these contradictory findings?

A Theory of Non-Linear Media Effects

- A system of mass communications will strengthen a state because it generates a unique economy of scale (Warren 2014).

- The key of my argument is that this should only take effect beyond some critical threshold of media density.

- Before that threshold, each increase in media density *encourages* insurgency by increasing the payoffs of taking state power *before* mass communications are achieved.

Hypotheses

At the cross-national historical level (unit is the country-year):

1. There should exist some threshold of mass media density below which there is a positive correlation between mass media and civil war onset and above which there is a negative correlation.
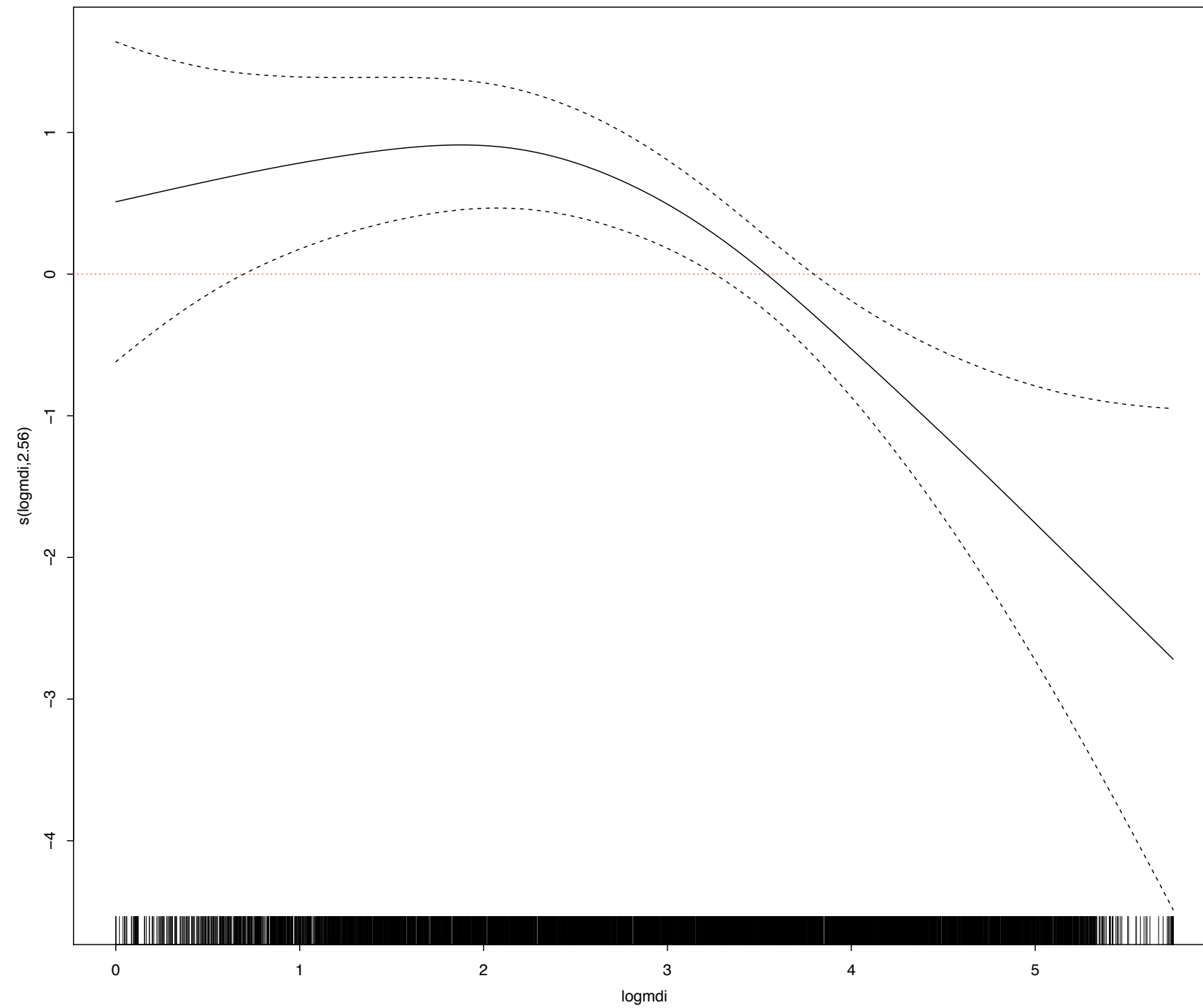
At the international level (unit is global system in each year):

2. The mean level of media density should have a negative correlation with civil war prevalence but year-to-year changes in media density should be associated with an increase in civil war prevalence.
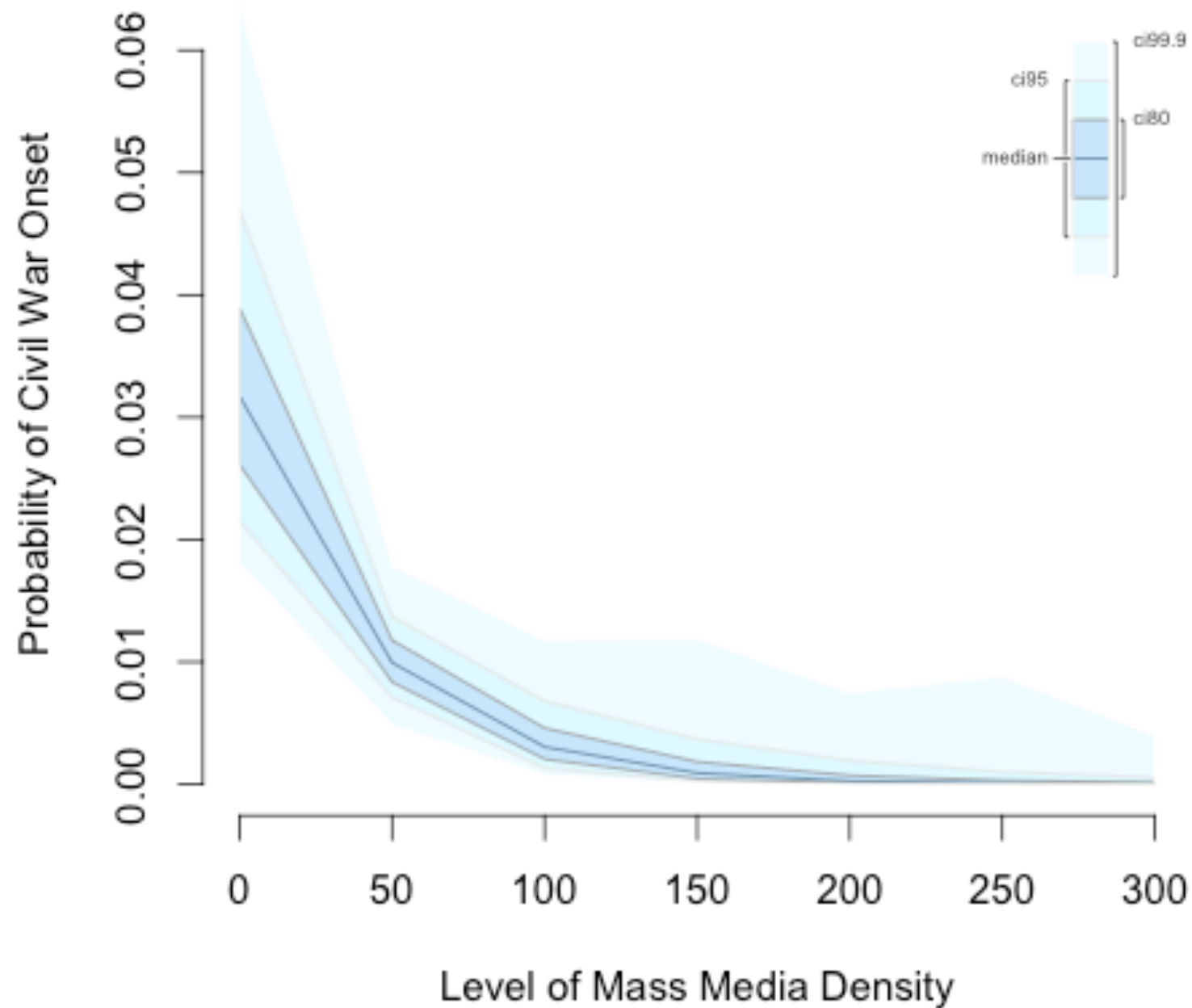
Data and Method

- Cross-national time-series data on civil war onset (Sambanis 2004) and mass media density from Arthur Banks and World Bank (Warren 2014).

  - Unbalanced panel of 175 countries over a maximum of 55 years in the period from 1945 to1999.

- Semi-parametric logistic regression (a general additive model) fits mass media density to civil war onset with a nonparametric smooth.

- Traditional parametric logistic regressions for more convenient effect estimates.

- For the international level hypothesis, negative binomial models for the count of total onsets in each year, using TV as the key independent variable.

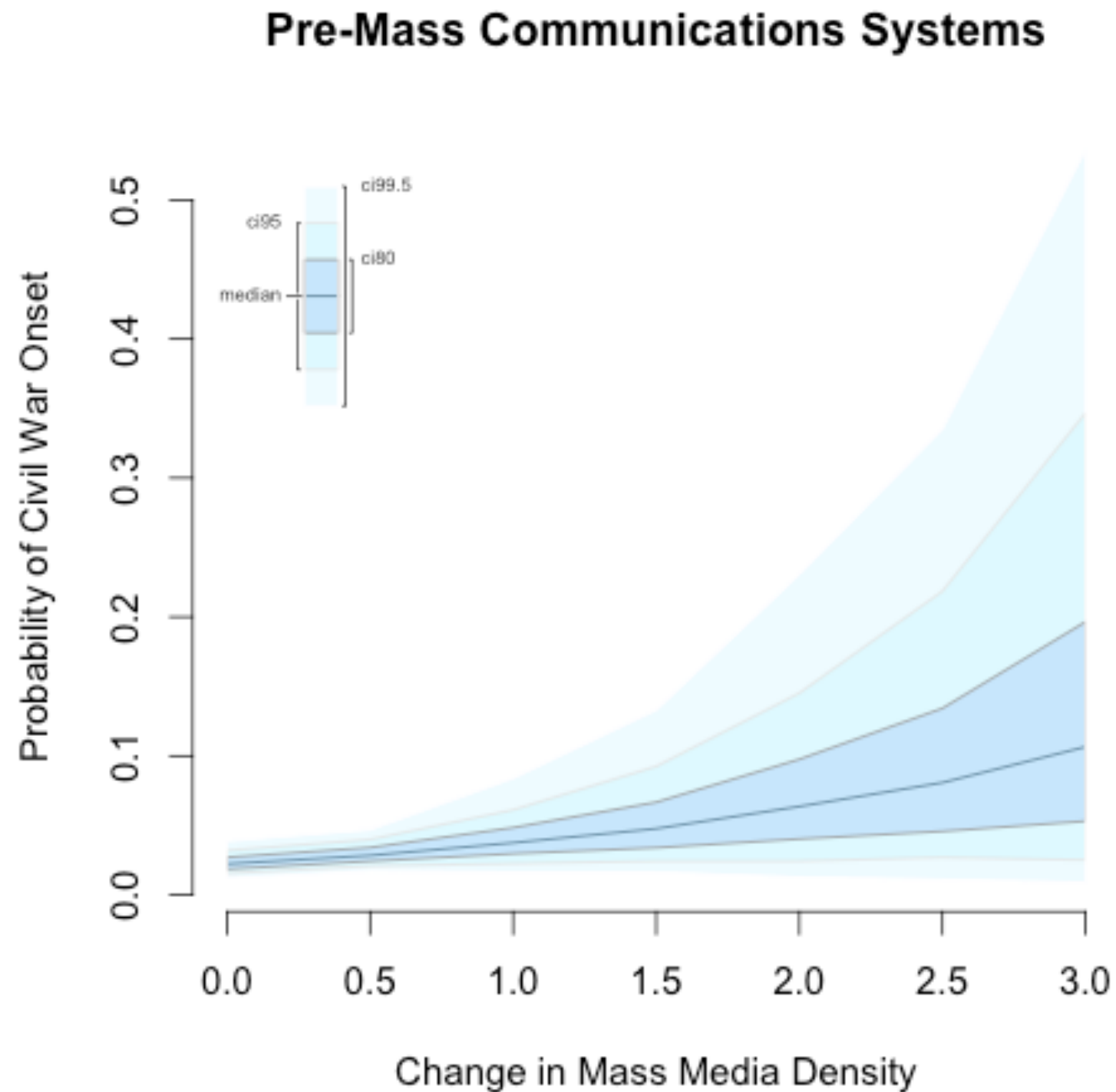# The Non-Linear Effect of Media Density on Civil War Onset

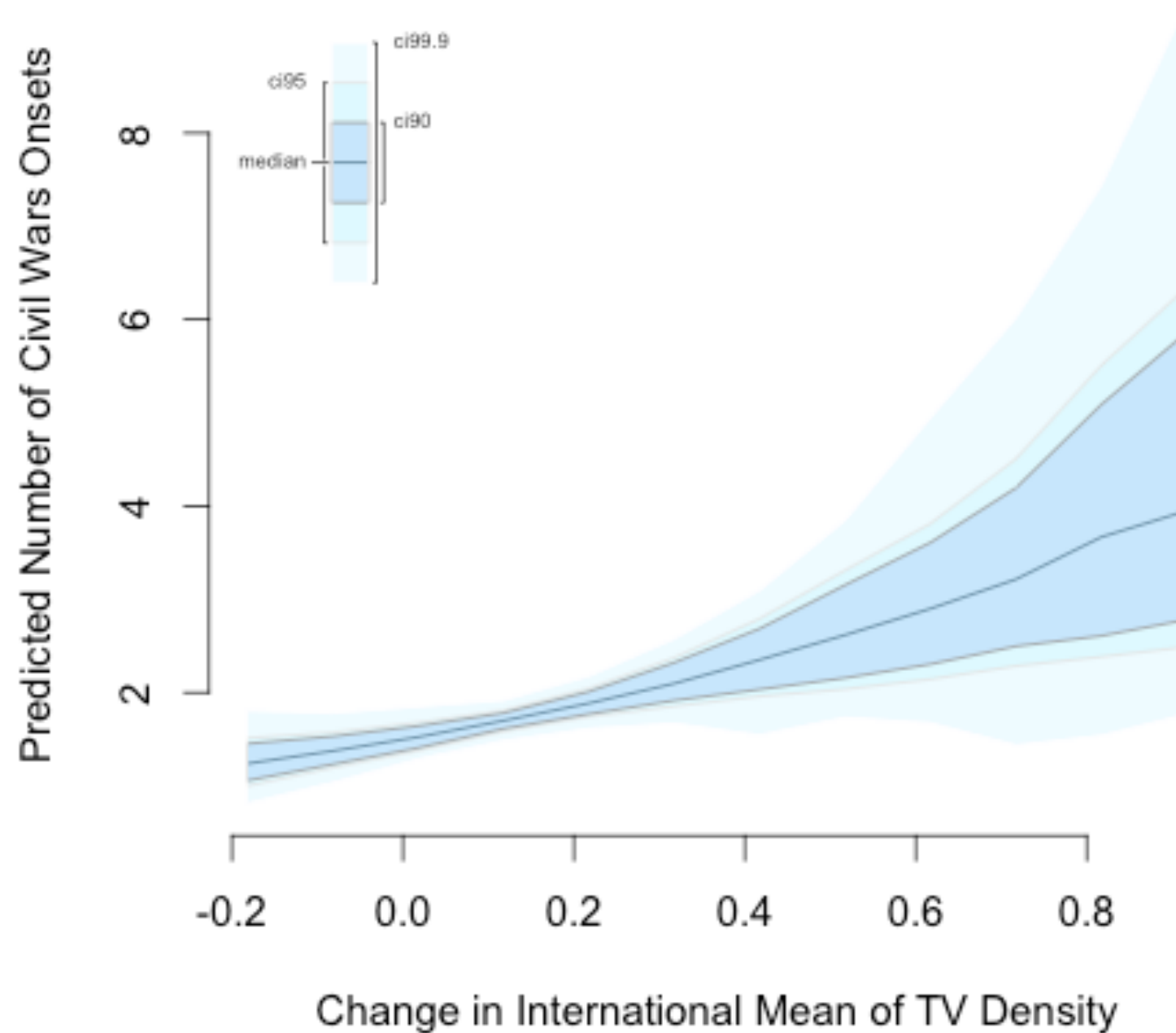# Effect of Mass Media Density on Civil War Onset for All Countries

Effect of Mass Media Density on Civil War
Onset for Countries < 20th Percentile of Media Density

Pre-Mass Communications Systems

Effect of Change in the Global Mean of TV Density
on Number of Civil War Onsets

Conclusion

- These findings suggest a crucial revision to our current understanding of the role played by media in civil war onset.

- The introduction and *early growth* of mass media appears to significantly increase the probability of observing a civil war within a particular country.

- The global growth of mass media technologies since the 1960s helps explain the dramatic rise of civil wars in this period.

- Thank you and feel free to get in touch.

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