

## **Cultural Violence and Civilian Fatalities in the Syrian War: Sequencing the Microdynamics of Conflict with Spatial-Temporal Analysis**

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Wartime cultural violence – the destruction of sites, monuments, and objects having ethnic, religious, and artistic significance – is generally thought to be related to civilian casualties, but the theory and evidence on the issue are unclear. Sociologists have tended to study the issue as a matter of humanitarian violations, principally through the framework of genocide, while criminologists have not yet examined this issue. Yet, both the international destruction of cultural heritage and targeted civilian violence are important microdynamics of a conflict that may violate international law. Understanding the relationship between these two – if indeed there is one – is essential for any legal accountability in the aftermath of the conflict.

To that end, we take an empirical approach to examining the sequencing of cultural violence and civilian fatalities. Specifically, we present the first formal test of the so-called “prelude hypothesis,” which states that deliberate cultural destruction tends to precede targeted killings of civilians. We use a novel spatiotemporal dataset combining cultural heritage damage and destruction with incidents of conflict with civilian fatalities. The cultural heritage data are compiled using open-source investigative techniques based on the American Schools for Oriental Research Cultural Heritage Initiative (ASOR-CHI) reports as well as supplemental validation. Data on civilian fatalities comes from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Both sources were synthesized and reconciled to provide geolocated incident-level data.

Our analysis tests the Prelude hypothesis across multiple specifications, moving from a broad understanding to specific spatio-temporal relationships. Through this holistic approach we are able to explore with more nuance the boundaries of the hypothesis. Our results speak to the implications of such causal hypotheses for legal accountability and more generally on the relationship between cultural destruction and mass violence. The presentation will focus on both the methodological approach and the implications of the findings for practitioners and scholars.