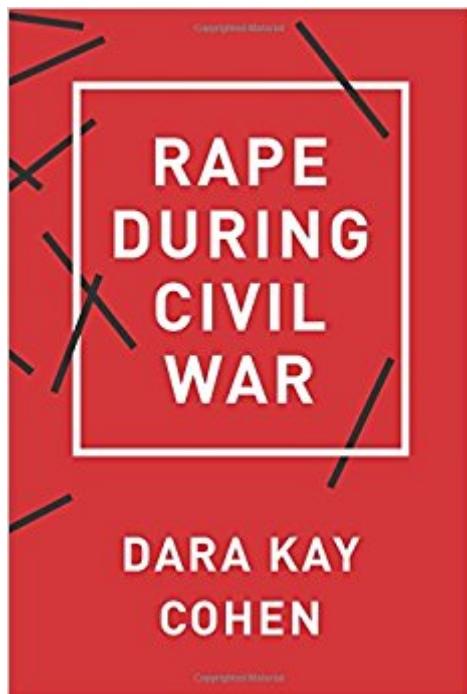


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# Rape During Civil War



## Synopsis

Rape is common during wartime, but even within the context of the same war, some armed groups perpetrate rape on a massive scale while others never do. In *Rape during Civil War* Dara Kay Cohen examines variation in the severity and perpetrators of rape using an original dataset of reported rape during all major civil wars from 1980 to 2012. Cohen also conducted extensive fieldwork, including interviews with perpetrators of wartime rape, in three postconflict countries, finding that rape was widespread in the civil wars of the Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste but was far less common during El Salvador's civil war. Cohen argues that armed groups that recruit their fighters through the random abduction of strangers use rape—especially gang rape—to create bonds of loyalty and trust between soldiers. The statistical evidence confirms that armed groups that recruit using abduction are more likely to perpetrate rape than are groups that use voluntary methods, even controlling for other confounding factors. Important findings from the fieldwork—across cases—include that rape, even when it occurs on a massive scale, rarely seems to be directly ordered. Instead, former fighters describe participating in rape as a violent socialization practice that served to cut ties with fighters' past lives and to signal their commitment to their new groups. Results from the book lay the groundwork for the systematic analysis of an understudied form of civilian abuse. The book will also be useful to policymakers and organizations seeking to understand and to mitigate the horrors of wartime rape.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Rape is one of the most devastating forms of violence associated with war, and preventing it

requires a deeper understanding of its causes. Rape during Civil War represents the most significant scholarly effort to understand this phenomenon. The breadth and quality of the research is remarkable. Dara Kay Cohen combines cross-national statistical work with in-depth case studies, including extensive original research and interviews with both victims and perpetrators. The result of the effort is deeply impressive and the book will likely serve as the focus of the debate for scholars writing about these subjects for years to come."•Benjamin Valentino, Dartmouth College, author of *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century*"Dara Kay Cohen's extraordinary work breaks new ground in the study of sexual violence in war. Students of violence have struggled to explain why rape occurs in some conflicts and not others and have had difficulties characterizing the functions of sexual violence that distinguish it from other types of abuse. Cohen addresses both challenges by examining the role that sexual violence plays in solidifying bonds in otherwise fragmented fighting groups. Rape is used as a response to organizational weaknesses and is not just a product of them. Cohen develops and tests the argument using a unique dataset that characterizes the behavior of armed groups around the world and probes the logics through in-depth analysis of Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, and El Salvador. This is scholarship on violence at its best: innovative, engaged, informed."•Macartan Humphreys, Columbia University, coauthor of *Coethnicity: Diversity and the Dilemmas of Collective Action*"In this remarkable work, Dara Kay Cohen first shows that not all rebel groups and state armies rape civilians during war. It is those armed organizations that kidnap their recruits off the streets of their villages and towns that are much more likely to do, she argues. Along the way she debunks many of the myths that dominate policy and public perception."•Elisabeth Jean Wood, Yale University and the Santa Fe Institute, coeditor of *Understanding and Proving International Sex Crimes*

Dara Kay Cohen is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Her earlier work on wartime sexual violence has received awards from the American Political Science Association, including the Heinz Eulau prize for the best article published in the *American Political Science Review*.

Cohen's book is an original and significant contribution to the issue. Until quite recently, sexual violence in war was not a topic addressed in systematic ways by international relations security scholars. For many years feminist scholars in international relations argued for more attention to gender issues, but no one conducted quantitative analyses of rape in war because data sets on the topic did not exist. Cohen has been creative in finding ways to systematically test alternative

hypotheses about the causes of gender violence using original databases she created and comparative case research. In this work, Cohen has provided a bridge between more traditional security scholars and feminist and gender scholarship in various disciplines. In doing so, she has been equally willing to call each of their received wisdoms into question. Theoretically, Cohen's work represents a major challenge to two existing schools of thought in the study of civil war: First, she resists the intentionalism that dominates much of the field, in which particular kinds of violence are seen as strategies of war purposefully chosen by military leaders to advance specific objectives. Instead, she demonstrates how some forms of violence emerge organically from below, and persist due to psychological benefits they confer on small groups of fighters, often despite the preferences of military leaders. Cohen's work challenges dominant accounts of gender-based violence that locate it in the innate tendency of men to commit rape. She shows that uncontrolled male sexual desire—long thought to be the fundamental driver of wartime rape—figures very little in the deployment of sexual violence in wartime. Her ethnographic research uncovers facts about wartime rape such as the participation of women in it—that do much to undermine existing narratives rooted in male propensities to sexual aggression. She tests her theory in interviews with 260 former combatants and victims in Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, and El Salvador. The scope of Cohen's fieldwork and the difficulty involved in undertaking it cannot be exaggerated. This book is a major achievement and a model of social science research.

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