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# Resources and the Information Problem in Rebel Recruitment

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How does the resource base of a rebel group impact its membership, structure, and behavior? While scholars, analysts, and policy makers increasingly link natural resources to the onset and duration of civil war, this article explores how resource endowments shape the character and conduct of rebel groups. This article identifies a rebel “resource curse” much like the one that undermines state institutions in resource-rich environments. While the presence of economic endowments makes it possible for leaders to recruit on the basis of short-term rewards, these groups are flooded with opportunistic joiners who exhibit little commitment to the long-term goals of the organization. In resource-poor environments, leaders attract new recruits by drawing on social ties to make credible promises about the private rewards that will come with victory. Opportunistic joiners stay away from these movements, leaving a pool of activist recruits willing to invest their time and energy in the hope of reaping large gains in the future.

**Keywords:** *civil war; rebellion; recruitment; natural resources*

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**H**ow does the resource base of a rebel group impact its membership, structure, and behavior? While scholars, analysts, and policy makers increasingly link natural resources to the onset and duration of civil war, this article explores how resource endowments shape the *character* and *conduct* of rebel groups.

Recent studies of the causes of contemporary civil conflict suggest a relationship between the presence of natural resources and the likelihood of conflict. Collier and Hoeffler (2000) find that states dependent on the export of primary commodities are more likely to experience civil war. Fearon (2004) shows that the availability of particular types of resources (gemstones and narcotics) tends to make wars last longer. Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) extend the argument to a broader range of economic endowments, suggesting that support from external patrons reduces the cost to rebel groups of organizing violence, which makes long civil conflicts more likely.

While the strength of the relationship between natural resources and conflict remains contested, research efforts in this area share an underlying economic theory of rebel group formation in which a group’s access to resources matters. Insurgents are

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seen as weak relative to the governments they challenge (Fearon and Laitin 2003). To survive, rebel leaders need arms and ammunition; a supply of recruits to mount and maintain the insurgency; resources to feed, equip, and finance the organization; and training to improve the effectiveness of rebel fighters. Whether a group can draw upon economic endowments—including natural resources, diaspora remittances, or the support of an external patron—is seen as critical to successful organization because resources strengthen the hand of the insurgency relative to the government (Collier et al. 2003).

Yet economic endowments are not so central in other cases. Although diamonds and other “lootable” resources play an important role in many conflicts that motivate this literature (e.g., Angola, Congo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone), rebel groups have also emerged in environments lacking an economic base around which to organize (e.g., Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, and Rwanda). In these contexts, rebel leaders have met the logistical demands of insurgency through means other than the mobilization of material wealth. Rebel leaders have employed appeals to ethnic or class solidarity, nationalist sentiments, and local community ties to identify the recruits and resources necessary to effectively challenge the government (Fearon and Laitin 2000; Sambanis 2001).

That some rebel groups succeed in launching their campaigns with access to a wealth of material resources, and others succeed without, raises important questions about the relationship between natural resources, other economic endowments, and civil war. If economic endowments can be mobilized in some cases and not in others, how does their presence—or absence—shape the trajectory of the conflict? What impact does the resource profile of a rebel group have on its membership? How do economic endowments influence the behavior of the rebel groups that employ them? These questions linking a group’s resource endowments to the dynamics of warfare are largely unaddressed by the growing literature on civil conflict.

This article advances a theory that explains the contrasting recruitment profiles and strategies of rebel groups as a function of variation in the initial conditions facing the rebel leadership. Defining economic endowments broadly as a supply of material resources that can be mobilized to meet the logistical requirements of organizing insurgency, the theory recognizes that rebel leaders employ different mixes of endowments as they attempt to recruit the best participants for their movements.

The analysis points to a rebel “resource curse” much like the one that undermines state institutions in resource-rich environments (Karl 1997; Ross 2001). When it comes to governments, resource wealth leads to a myopia among policy makers and weakens state accountability to the citizenry. With rebel groups, the story unfolds similarly. While the presence of economic endowments makes it possible for leaders to recruit on the basis of short-term rewards, these groups tend to be flooded with opportunistic joiners who exhibit little commitment to the long-term goals of the organization. The absence of economic endowments makes recruitment more difficult. Yet in these resource-poor environments, leaders attract new recruits by drawing on social ties to make credible promises about the private rewards that will come with victory. Opportunistic joiners tend to stay away from these movements, leaving the groups populated with activist recruits willing to invest their time and energy in the hope of

reaping large gains in the future. So while natural resources and other economic endowments initially appear as a blessing to would-be rebels, they attract recruits that are possibly ill suited to the long-term goal of capturing state power.

The first section of this article situates the emerging literature on natural resources and conflict in the context of what we know about how rebel groups recruit. The following section formalizes the problem of rebel recruitment as a game in which rebel leaders must simultaneously overcome collective action problems and address informational asymmetries. The empirical implications of this new model of rebel recruitment are then explored in the two cases that motivate the model and in two out-of-sample illustrations. The concluding section evaluates an important alternative explanation.

### ENDOWMENTS, INFORMATION, AND RECRUITMENT

My theoretical approach centers on the recruitment challenge—the fundamental requirement that rebel leaders mobilize additional participants to join their efforts to challenge the state. Yet attracting recruits to participate in civil war is not an easy task. Theories of collective action paint a grim picture of the likelihood of organized opposition to the state (Olson 1965). Since many of the collective benefits of a victory will be realized independent of participation, and the potential costs provide every reason not to participate, rebel leaders face an uphill battle in convincing individuals to rebel.

To overcome this problem, rebel leaders often distribute selective incentives (Popkin 1979; Lichbach 1994). Of course, sometimes groups rely on nonmaterial rewards as well, including status, the affirmation of identities, and empowerment or agency.<sup>1</sup> Because the literature linking natural resources to conflict is replete with references to selective incentives, however, this article focuses exclusively on material motivations. The “looting” mechanism hypothesizes that rents from the extraction and export of natural resources are used to finance the start-up costs of rebellion (Keen 1998; Collier and Hoeffler 2000; Ross 2004). Rebel leaders use looted resource wealth to buy arms and hire soldiers, making it possible to rapidly overcome the dramatic asymmetry of power with government forces. The “financing” mechanism asserts that resource wealth enables rebel groups to keep fighting, independent of whether such rents provided an impetus for the conflict in the first place. Assuming that rebel groups are the weaker side, money raised through the resource sector, looting, or external patrons prevents the rebels from being crushed and can provide strong incentives for individual soldiers to prolong the conflict (Ross 2004).

To explain the relationship between resource endowments and the character of rebel groups, I focus on how two factors shape the recruitment process: first, the mix of endowments that different rebel leaders have at their disposal to attract new recruits;

1. Selective incentives are only one of many explanations of participation in rebellion. Explanations rooted in the “grievances” of participants have been the dominant school of thought among political scientists and historians (Moore 1966; Paige 1975; Scott 1976). Other explanations rely on the mobilization of common collective identities or the activation of tight social networks (Taylor 1988). Still others point to the importance of honor, reputation, and agency in providing the impetus for high-risk collective action (Wood 2003).

and, second, the informational asymmetries that exist between leaders and prospective recruits.

While previous research has identified various ways in which rebel groups mobilize participants (Gurr 1970; Popkin 1979; Keen 1998; Gates 2002), far less attention has been given to the mix of endowments that rebel leaders have at their disposal as they make strategic choices, the resource constraints that exist for some groups and not for others, and how timing introduces uncertainty into the delivery of selective incentives. An emphasis on the implications of a rebel group's *resource mix* for recruitment is a key part of the model.

Moreover, by adding a new focus on the role of information in the recruitment process, the model gets beyond an important limitation of existing research: the assumption that all potential recruits are of the same value to a rebel group. Rebel groups are unable to easily distinguish high-commitment from low-commitment recruits. The theory proposes that how rebel leaders use selective incentives matters for the type of recruit that is attracted to participate. This *information problem* is a fundamental part of the recruitment process as well.

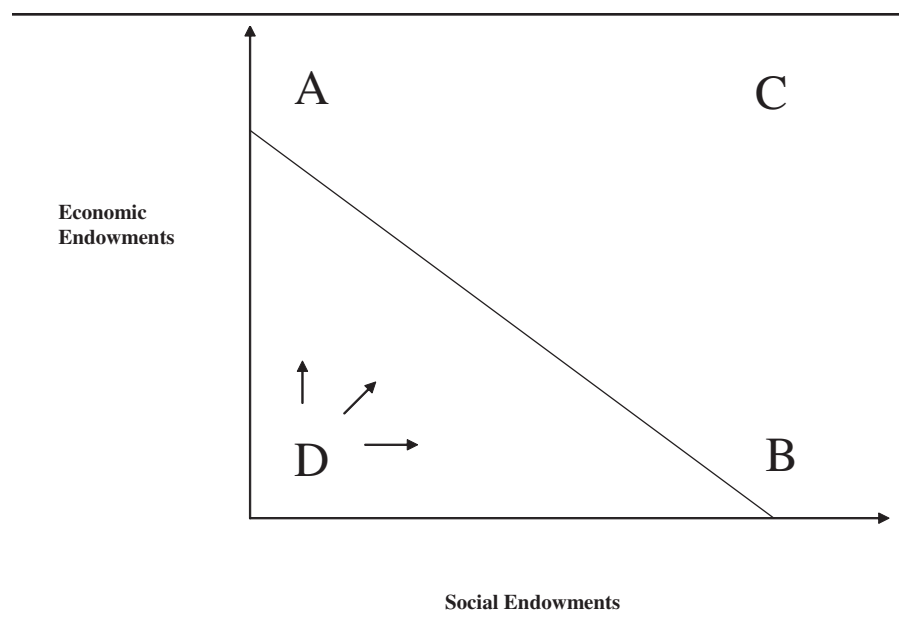
#### THE RESOURCE MIX

Rebel leaders face different sets of initial conditions as they organize a strategy for recruiting new members. In some contexts, rebel leaders initiate a conflict with access to economic resources.<sup>2</sup> Such financing can come from a diversity of sources—the extraction of natural resources, taxation of local production, conduct of criminal business, or an external patron. Of course, economic endowments vary in the ease with which they can be mobilized and translated into selective incentives (Le Billon 2001). The extent to which a group has access to economic endowments will be a function, in part, of the resource endowments of the country, the alignment of external actors, and the productivity of the land—factors largely beyond the control of the rebel organization in the short term.

But economic resources are not a rebel group's only endowment. Rebel leaders may also draw on a set of social endowments including shared beliefs, common expectations, norms of behavior, and trust with certain members of the population (North 1990; Putnam 1993).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Sambanis (2001) has argued that ethnic wars differ from nonethnic wars because potential rebels make choices based on ethnic affinities rather than material payoffs. These forms of social capital may come from shared ethnic, religious, or cultural identities or emerge as a consequence of repeated interactions in political or social settings. These preexisting social endowments provide for "generalized reciprocity" among a group's members but are difficult to create or change in the short term as leaders embark on the recruitment process (Taylor 1988).

2. Much theoretical work in social movement theory has highlighted the relative importance of an organization's resource base for the likelihood of collective action (Jenkins 1983). The literature on resource mobilization (RM) argues that collective action is a result of movement entrepreneurs mobilizing resources and cadres, rather than a change in the underlying level of grievances.

3. As a corrective to the narrow focus on resources in the RM literature, subsequent scholars have explored other sources of organizational strength commonly referred to as "mobilizing structures" including social networks, personal ties, and preexisting organizations (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).



**Figure 1: Theoretical Possibilities**

Social capital, often seen as a force for good governance or democracy, can also be employed by leaders in mobilizing opposition to the state.

Initially, I treat the level of both economic and social endowments as structural constraints—relatively fixed in the short run.<sup>4</sup> As a result, one can imagine rebel leaders facing four different starting points (see Figure 1).

Rebel leaders at points A and C are in a position to mobilize economic resources in the production of material rewards for participation. Leaders at point B, however, lack the economic endowments required to provide short-term material rewards. Organizers at point D face the most difficult task and are unlikely to be able to recruit large numbers of individuals for their movements.<sup>5</sup> The diagonal line reflects a key property of the production function for rebellion, namely, that without a minimum level of economic or social endowments, groups are unable to overcome the *threshold* of rebel organization.

A group's endowments shape the potential strategies—the “action repertoire”—that its leaders can employ (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Groups with access to economic resources are able to translate those endowments into selective incentives to overcome collective action problems. Resource-constrained groups can also utilize

4. While Goodwin and Jasper (1999) suggest that social endowments, or mobilizing structures, are too often viewed as static or unchanging, they concede that certain forms of preexisting ties and networks are hard for movement actors to shape and develop in the near-term.

5. Plundering is the only strategy that appears possible regardless of the political and economic context in which a rebel group organizes. But looting is also a strategy with high costs. Unleashing bandits into the countryside to enrich themselves in exchange for their labor in the movement is a recipe for a quick defeat, as it is unlikely to build any base of support.

selective incentives, but they must take a different form. Where groups lack economic endowments, rebel leaders can promise to provide private rewards expecting that the group will gain access to material resources at some point during the conflict or at its conclusion if they capture the state. Offering such rewards requires credibility on the part of the rebel leadership, however. It is the presence of social endowments that makes these promises about future rewards credible—because members tend to come from ethnic, religious, or political groups in which interaction is repeated and reputation matters.

The take-away point is that different initial conditions contribute to variation in the opportunity that participation presents to potential rebels. Resource-rich rebel groups offer short-term rewards, or *payoffs*, to motivate participants. Resource-constrained rebel groups rely on *promises* about the selective benefits that individuals will receive in the future. Material motivations remain important considerations for potential rebels in both circumstances. It is the capacity of the rebel group to provide selective incentives and the timing of their delivery that vary in important ways across conflicts.

#### THE INFORMATION PROBLEM

Rebel leaders are equally concerned with attracting the right type of potential recruit. Leaders are forward-looking and conscious that any resources garnered today should be invested in the organization so that it can overcome its power imbalance with the government forces. At the early stages of rebellion, the presence of uncommitted soldiers can irreparably harm a movement and lead to its quick defeat. Hence, rebel leaders wish to recruit high-commitment as opposed to low-commitment individuals.

High-commitment individuals are *investors*, dedicated to the cause of the organization and willing to make costly investments today with the promise of receiving rewards in the future. Low-commitment individuals are *consumers*, seeking short-term gains from participation. Low-commitment individuals are thus less productive for the organization as they require a continual expenditure of resources in the short term. In practical terms, one can think of the level of commitment as a discount rate.<sup>6</sup>

The problem is that, while recruits are aware of their level of commitment to the organization, the rebel leadership is not. A recruit's type is private information, and individuals have a strong incentive to misrepresent their level of commitment. Selective incentives magnify this challenge for rebel leaders. By offering short-term rewards that are higher than the opportunity cost of participation, rebel leaders are flooded with potential recruits. In this context, distinguishing between high- and low-quality recruits is of paramount importance.

Rebel leaders, however, are unable to choose recruits on the basis of an individual's type. Without strategic actions on the part of the recruits or the rebel organization, the market suffers from adverse selection (Spence 1973). Unable to distribute rewards linked to the actual productivity of the two types, rebel groups may find themselves overwhelmed by low-commitment individuals. The recruitment process is thus a set of

6. An individual's discount rate is a measure of how much she or he values present versus future consumption. A high discount rate means that future consumption is worth significantly less than consumption today.

strategic actions by recruits and rebel leaders to overcome the constraint of collective action and avoid the pitfall of adverse selection. The variation in what rebel groups can offer potential recruits plays a critical role in addressing this informational asymmetry in the recruitment market.

### REVISITING REBEL RECRUITMENT

This section integrates two components of the framework—the resource mix available to rebel leaders and the informational problems they confront—into a model of rebel recruitment. The model generates testable predictions linking the resource base of a rebel group to the profile of its membership and the strategies that rebel leaders employ.

#### THE BASIC MODEL

Rebel leaders are seen as political entrepreneurs seeking to construct an organization with sufficient capacity to compete against the government's military forces. Moreover, rebel leaders have an overriding goal—the capture of state power over the entire country or part of the national territory.<sup>7</sup>

There are two players in the recruitment game: a rebel organization and potential recruits.<sup>8</sup> Potential recruits choose to participate or abstain to maximize the economic returns to their labor. Groups may use short-term payoffs to attract individuals or may make promises about the private benefits to be provided down the line.<sup>9</sup>

#### SIGNALING COMMITMENT

In the first stage, groups offer a contract to potential soldiers. To bring recruits on board, this offer must exceed the value of what each recruit could earn if they did not participate in the movement. Payoffs provided in the short term are not uncertain. However, three factors lessen the real value of benefits promised down the road. The first is the probability of a rebel victory. Clearly, where government forces are strong relative to the rebel movement, the value of promises (in expectation) is very low. Second, there is the probability that rebel soldiers will actually receive the promised rewards from the rebel commanders if they win. This probability of distribution is a reflection of the credibility of future promises made by a rebel group. Finally, an indi-

7. In this sense, the model applies to the classical case of insurgency. The model does not apply to movements organized with genocidal aims, state-led militias, or terrorist groups that demonstrate no interest in territorial control.

8. Although they do not figure directly in the model, government forces undeniably shape the choices of potential rebel soldiers. In particular, strong military forces substantially reduce the probability of a rebel victory. As a consequence, recruits further discount a group's promise of future benefits in making their participation decision.

9. Of course, in some contexts, groups rely on coercive means to recruit individuals. However, coercion tends to emerge as a strategy in contexts where the resources necessary to continue providing payoffs are cut off or where a sufficiently strong movement aims to limit the number of members to whom it needs to distribute rewards.



vidual's discount rate plays into the equation. Future benefits are worth less to those recruits who heavily discount the future.

A group's commitment to provide private rewards resolves the problem of collective action but does little to help rebel organizations avoid adverse selection. Since the offers rebel organizations make are relatively fixed by their endowments, potential recruits must take strategic actions to signal their level of commitment to rebel leaders.<sup>10</sup> In particular, high-commitment individuals signal their quality by accepting promises rather than payoffs.

A willingness to defer rewards into the future functions as a credible signal because it is relatively more costly for low-commitment individuals to accept deferred benefits. Their high discount rates make the same offer of future benefits worth less in real terms than it would be to high-commitment individuals. As a result, rebel organizations can infer that an individual's willingness to accept larger amounts (and often all) of her or his payoff in the form of promises is a signal of her or his commitment to the organization. High-commitment individuals would be better off if they did not have to bear the costs of the signal to distinguish themselves from others. But for committed individuals, it is a cost worth bearing to protect their organizations from a flood of opportunistic joiners.

Conditional on the resource endowment, recruitment thus separates high-commitment and low-commitment individuals. Potential recruits signal their commitment to the rebel organization by accepting offers from groups that are only able to provide benefits in the future. Spurning these groups, because the real value of their offers is too low, low-commitment individuals join rebel organizations offering immediate payoffs or no group at all. The result is that resource-rich rebel groups are overwhelmed by opportunistic joiners, while those waging war with limited economic endowments attract committed soldiers to their movements.<sup>11</sup>

#### REDUCING THE INFORMATIONAL ASYMMETRY

Importantly, the signaling mechanism is not sufficient on its own to weed out opportunists. In practice, there is a continuum of commitment, rather than the two extremes assumed in the simplified model. The opportunities that rebel groups provide, even when they emphasize promises over payoffs, are still likely to attract some low-commitment individuals.

10. The concept of signaling was initially developed in economics (Spence 1973). Political scientists have also explored the role of signaling in addressing informational asymmetries in political interaction as well (Lohmann 1993; Fearon 1997). Fearon (1997), for example, explores the role of two types of signals, "tying hands" and "sinking costs," in helping political leaders make *credible* threats of force in the international arena. More recently, Krueger and Maleckova (2003) suggest that high levels of education may signal to terrorist groups the sincere commitment to the cause of a potential recruit.

11. Why are resource-rich groups unable to preserve their wealth and invest it in the organization? Resource-rich groups tend to be unable to recruit on the basis of promises because they lack the shared ethnic, religious, or political identities that make promises credible and allow for effective screening. In resource-rich contexts, groups that organize around social linkages are crowded out as opportunistic insurgencies emerge quickly and gain the dominant position.

Accordingly, in the recruitment process, groups also take strategic actions to reduce their informational disadvantage. The key to any such strategy is its *selectivity*. Rebel organizations develop recruitment methods that attempt to identify and exclude potential recruits that might be joining with little interest in the group's overall objectives.<sup>12</sup>

Three key strategies enable rebel groups to overcome their informational handicap. The first requires that rebel organizations actively *gather information* about the past behavior of interested individuals. Previous practice is a strong indication of the likely performance of potential recruits. To gather such information, rebel groups must establish links within the communities in which they operate that enable them to collect information about potential members. Community leaders are likely to have information about the reliability and trustworthiness of community members that precedes the start of the rebel movement.

For information gathering to provide useful signals about a recruit's level of commitment, potential members must care about their reputations as well. In trying to join, recruits make assertions about their level of commitment. Groups with access to information gathering networks have the capacity to authenticate these pledges. Where reputation matters and groups are able to gather information, those recruits with a demonstrated incapacity for honest and committed behavior will avoid the movement or, when they try to join, will be stopped at the door.

A second strategy also requires that reputation matters. However, instead of looking to actors outside of the movement to authenticate the pledges of new recruits, it relies on the credibility and commitment of current members. This screening mechanism is called *vouching*. Potential members must be invited to join by current rebel soldiers. And in the process of becoming a rebel, the current soldier must vouch for the honesty and commitment of the new member. If a new recruit fails to live up to his or her pledge, both the recruit and the current soldier bear the costs of his failure. As long as rebel soldiers seek to protect their reputations within the organization, vouching is an effective strategy for screening out opportunists.

The final method used to screen recruits is called *costly induction*. Rebel organizations set in place processes for evaluating the level of commitment of potential recruits. To be effective, these processes must be more costly for some individuals than others, creating a disincentive for low-commitment recruits to join. Two key examples of costly induction demonstrate how it works. The first is a required period of political indoctrination for new recruits to the rebel movement. This process might include the sustained study of the ideology and political messages of the rebel group followed by oral or written examinations testing the individual's capacity. As a screening mechanism, the process introduces a number of additional costs: the time delay in access to a weapon and the authority of being a rebel, the time wasted in study for disinterested recruits, and the reputational costs likely to accrue when the recruit fails his examinations. A second example is a required period of rebel apprenticeship in which recruits participate actively in attacks without the use of a weapon. This method clearly ele-

12. One analyst of civil war has argued that screening mechanisms such as those described here can be used to select for psychopaths and criminals, rather than committed individuals, if leaders are motivated to plunder and kill rather than capture control of the state (Mueller 2000).

vates the level of risk involved to an almost unmanageable level for low-commitment individuals.

### OBSERVABLE IMPLICATIONS

To test the model, one would want to reveal the true “types” of the recruits attracted to the various rebel groups. Groups that offer payoffs should have significantly higher proportions of low-commitment individuals. However, the same problem that bedevils the rebel organization makes it difficult to run a clean empirical test. The level of individual commitment is private information and cannot be discerned directly from outward markers.

However, the model suggests a number of other patterns to look for across rebel organizations. First, only groups able to make credible promises to deliver future benefits are able to recruit high-commitment individuals. Credibility comes from a set of social endowments: shared ethnic or religious identity, shared political beliefs and ideology, or tight social networks. Groups making promises thus should exhibit one of these sources of credibility inside their organization. The converse also follows from the model. Groups that emerge in resource-rich contexts and recruit by offering short-term payoffs should exhibit heterogeneity of identities or beliefs within their membership.

Second, the key signal of commitment that potential recruits use is their willingness to defer private rewards into the future. This is a function of their discount rate. Although educational opportunities tend to be limited in many of the developing countries that experience civil war, a small percentage of citizens manage to receive places in the national university system. While education is too restricted in its supply to serve as an accurate signal of commitment across all individuals, the level of education is likely to be negatively correlated with an individual’s discount rate.<sup>13</sup> People who value future payoffs almost as much as those today are far more likely to absorb the costs of investing in education today to earn greater rewards in the future. As a result, one can expect that the level of advanced education in groups recruiting by promises alone should be significantly higher than in groups that recruit with immediate payoffs.

A final empirical implication is that strategies of information gathering, vouching, and costly induction are more likely to be used by rebel organizations that rely on social endowments. Information gathering requires that groups be embedded in particular communities from which the rebel leadership can obtain reliable information about the quality of potential recruits. Vouching is only as effective as the members

13. Economists have long explored individual variation in time preference. Because discount rates are not directly observable, scholars have identified a variety of instruments for time preference including, most notably, whether someone smokes cigarettes (Fuchs 1982). Smoking is negatively correlated with a whole series of future-oriented activities including investments in health, educational attainment, and the choice of careers with a steeper wage profile. On education and wages, see Sander (1995) and Munasinghe and Sicherman (2000).

that have already joined the group. High-commitment individuals protect their reputations by inviting only other committed recruits to join. Low-commitment rebels face no such incentive to recruit the highly committed. Finally, costly induction generally necessitates the presence of clear political beliefs or ideological leanings.<sup>14</sup>

### EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: RESOURCES, MEMBERSHIP, AND STRATEGY

This section uses case studies of four rebel groups to explore the logic of the model and some of its observable implications. Two of the cases—the National Resistance Army (NRA; Uganda) and Renamo (Mozambique)—helped to motivate the model. An additional set of cases—the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF; Eritrea) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF; Sierra Leone)—are useful in illustrating the theory outside of the initial set of cases.

The four rebel groups exhibit a diversity of resource mixes. Two groups depended heavily on economic endowments to recruit participants and build their organizations. Renamo generated its material wealth through partnerships with external patrons, while the RUF mobilized its recruits to extract resources from the alluvial diamond sector in Sierra Leone. The others, in the absence of a valuable economic base, met the start-up costs of organization through the mobilization of social ties. The NRA turned at first to ethnic networks as it laid the foundation for a political movement, while the EPLF challenged sectarian differences through the articulation of a nationalist political agenda.

In many other respects, however, the four rebel groups are similar. All four sought, as their primary objective, to capture control of all or part of the state. Differences in their recruitment profile and strategies are not likely the result of differing objectives. In addition, rebel leaders organized in opposition to an existing, functional state. Each rebel group faced an asymmetry of power that made collective action a relatively high-risk strategy. Finally, the four countries experienced a widening of political opportunity, creating conditions favorable to the organization of rebel movements (Tarrow 1998). In both Uganda and Mozambique, the start of insurgency immediately followed a period of regime transition in which the new leadership faced serious questions regarding its legitimacy. The rebellions in Sierra Leone and Ethiopia/Eritrea challenged authoritarian regimes under stress, one that was gradually losing its fiscal capacity as the economy moved underground (Sierra Leone), and the other, an empire, challenged by military forces on multiple fronts (Ethiopia).

14. A period of rebel apprenticeship does not, on the surface, seem out of reach to resource-rich groups. But low-commitment individuals would need to be compensated with greater private rewards to make it worth their while to absorb initiation costs. Because even resource-rich rebel groups face a budget constraint, they are poorly equipped to make joining more difficult unless they can defer some payments to participants into the future.

## UGANDA AND MOZAMBIQUE

The recruitment model was developed on the basis of a careful examination of the micro-organizational strategies of the NRA and Renamo. My research strategy relied principally on the collection of grassroots accounts of rebellion from the perspectives of rebel commanders, combatants, and civilians who lived in the war zones. Participant accounts offer unique and valuable insights into the dynamics of organization, but they also raise important methodological concerns about accuracy and sample bias. My research strategy sought to overcome these hurdles through a variety of methods: research in postconflict settings where individuals' incentives to misrepresent their stories are minimized; one-on-one interviews with commanders, combatants, and civilians from the same geographic areas to allow for cross-checking of events; ethnographic work in two distinct regions in each country, one at the center of rebel control and one on the fringe; and a large sample of respondents, nearly 140 in the two countries. While individuals were not randomly selected for interviews, lists of potential respondents (combatant and civilian, from both sides) were built using multiple sources within each community to ensure a balanced set of perspectives.

### Variation in Opportunity

Potential recruits to the NRA faced daunting challenges if they decided to join (Ngoga 1997; Amaza 1998). Operating in the Luwero Triangle, less than ninety kilometers from the capital, Kampala, the NRA was in a highly unstable situation. The NRA lacked a significant number of weapons to arm its growing membership. There was no money for basic supplies or salaries. Everything had to be donated by the local population or come from contacts in Kampala. The main agricultural product in its areas of operation was *matooke*, a staple crop, which provided no source of income for the movement. The leadership talked to potential recruits about the economic opportunities and political positions they would have if the NRA succeeded in its campaign, but the risks to participants were enormous.

Potential members of Renamo encountered a more favorable situation (Minter 1995; Cabrita 2000). New recruits were based at a guerrilla camp across the Mozambican border in Rhodesia. Former Rhodesian soldiers served as military instructors, preparing new recruits for internal operations in Mozambique. Renamo was well supplied by its external patron—with weapons, uniforms, food rations, shelter, and regular salaries offered to all new recruits. Risks to participation were much lower, as combatants lived safely across the border, and Renamo's operations in Mozambique were often supported by air power from the Rhodesians.

### Variation in Identity

Despite this variation in the capacity of the two rebel groups to provide short-term material rewards, both recruited large numbers of participants and grew substantially in their first years of operation. Within two years the NRA had grown from twenty-seven initial members to nearly four thousand. Renamo also grew at a substantial pace,

TABLE 1  
Ethnic and Religious Makeup of the National Resistance Council  
(Historical Members), Uganda

<i>Total Members</i>	<i>Identity Group</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
40	Banyankole	62.5	Other	38.5
	25		15	
40	Balokole	15	Other	85
	6		34	

SOURCE: Amaza (1998).

increasing its membership from less than one hundred to nearly three thousand. The profile of their recruits differed dramatically, however.

The vast majority of NRA rebels were Banyankole, members of an ethnic group from Western Uganda (Kampala, 1020, 1102, 1106, 0124, 0115).<sup>15</sup> Many had grown up in the same villages and attended the same schools; their families had been close to Yoweri Museveni, the guerrilla leader. A significant percentage also came from born-again Christian families—products of the Balokole movement that had swept through Western Uganda nearly fifty years earlier. They had attended church together, been raised in families that eschewed alcohol and embraced education, and been channeled into professional careers as a way of improving the economic and social conditions of their communities. Many recruits abandoned their studies at university to go underground and join the NRA's struggle.

A brief look at the membership of the National Resistance Council (NRC) reinforces this picture of homogeneity. The NRC was the political wing of the NRA and included most of the senior NRA leaders and their civilian collaborators. Looking only at the historical members—those that joined during the bush war—the predominance of Banyankole is evident. In addition, Balokole made up 15 percent of the leadership core, including the leader of the movement, the head of the rebel army, and senior members of the political and military establishment (see Table 1).

The situation was substantially different in Renamo. With the early Renamo leadership and the Rhodesian government actively recruiting from among the discontented exiles outside of Mozambique, the population of recruits was quite diverse. Many Mozambican exiles were from the center or northern parts of Mozambique—regions that feared persecution from the new Frelimo government—but they came from a large number of ethnic groups and lacked a coherent political ideology. Despite their shared regional ties, it was not until the mid-1980s, nearly ten years after its founding, that Renamo presented a clear platform making the case for a coordinated movement against the political and economic dominance of ethnic groups in southern Mozambique.

One can get a rough idea of the diversity of Renamo's social base by looking at its first National Council (see Table 2), established in 1981 and largely composed of the

15. Interview citations refer to the location of the interview, the month, and day.

TABLE 2  
Ethnic and Regional Makeup of Renamo's National Council, 1981

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Region</i>
Aphonso Dhlakama	Commander in Chief; President	Ndau	Center
João Macia Fombe	Deputy Commander in Chief	Manyika	Center
Vareia Manje Languane	2nd Battalion Commander	Sena	Center
José Domingos Cunai Calção	Secretary, Defense Department	Manyika	Center
José Luís João	9th Battalion Commander	Sena	Center
Raúl Manuel Domingos	Secretary, Defense Department	Sena	Center
José Marques Francisco	Head, Training Department	Sena	Center
José Manuel Alfinete	Head, Telecommunications	Lomwé	Center
Mário Franque	3rd Battalion Commander	Manyika	Center
Joaquim Rui de Figueiredo Paulo	Deputy Battalion Commander	Shangaan	South
Henriques Ernesto Samuel	Deputy Battalion Commander	Chope	South
Ossufo Momade	Deputy Battalion Commander	Makua	North
Olímpio Osório Caisse Cambona	Head, Telecommunications	Yao	North
Albino Chavago	Head, Health Department	Ronga	South

SOURCE: Cabrita (2000).

early joiners (Cabrita 2000). The leadership structure encompassed a broad range of ethnic groups including the Macua-Lomwe, the largest group in the country, but also members of the Ndau, Manyika, Sena, Shangaan, Chope, Yao, and Ronga tribes. The majority of members had no education beyond primary school, and few preexisting ties linked members to one another.

### Variation in Strategy

While the NRA's recruitment strategy initially targeted individuals with close ethnic and religious links to the group leadership, that approach was insufficient to meet the recruitment targets for the growing movement. The Banyankole were a relatively small ethnic group and it was difficult to move coethnics from Western Uganda and Kampala to the Luwero Triangle. As a result, within the first year of the conflict, the NRA began to look to the Baganda, an ethnic group based in Luwero, for potential recruits.

Museveni initially relied on local contacts in the triangle—Baganda with whom he had built relationships before the struggle began. These contacts provided the initial cadres of the NRA with food, shelter, and local guides to help them through the unfamiliar terrain. But Museveni needed a broader network of civilian supporters—one tied to the NRA by political, rather than ethnic allegiances.

Operating from hidden rebel camps in the triangle, the NRA began to build networks of civilian contacts (Semuto, 1114, 1115, 1116). The NRA would ask local supporters to select others from the village to form small clandestine committees to provide the NRA with food, guides, information, and recruits. The NRA also approached respected elders within the village, the *bataka*, as well as those who were relatively wealthy (Semuto, 1118, 1122). Central to this process of generating broader support



was the articulation of a political agenda that linked the historical experiences of the Baganda to those of the Banyankole: a shared experience of persecution at the hands of President Obote and a fear of continued Northern dominance of the military. The rebels would explain their political cause, emphasize their desire to defeat the Obote regime, and promise to end ethnic tribalism in Uganda. In eliciting support, Museveni and the rebel leadership also would make promises about the future—the shape of the new regime they would install, the benefits that would come to Buganda, the compensation that those who contribute to the rebellion would receive—at the same time that the NRA took public steps to more fully incorporate Baganda into leadership positions (Semuto, 1115, 1117).

These local networks were the basis for recruitment over much of the next two years. Members of the clandestine committees were asked to deliver “disciplined” recruits to the NRA camps (Kampala, 0927, 1022; Semuto 1115, 1117). In particular, Museveni encouraged the *bataka* to volunteer their sons for the cause (Semuto, 1115, 1116, 1122). Even after these young men were brought into the military units, Museveni remained in close contact with the *bataka*. These tight links helped to make Museveni’s promises credible; social pressures ensured that the NRA received only disciplined recruits.

The recruitment process did not stop there. New recruits were quickly shifted into a period of military and political training. Although it varied in length, the training program always dedicated substantial time to political education. Political commissars, appointed from within the rebel force, were responsible for the training. Lectures included topics from the history of Uganda to political economy and strategies of guerrilla warfare. Where possible, recruits were encouraged to read the books the NRA had on hand including works by Mao and Fanon (Kampala 1022, 1024, 1025). Before passing the training, recruits were required to demonstrate an understanding of the political aims of the movement as well as the strategies of guerrilla warfare the NRA sought to use.

While the NRA expanded beyond its narrow ethnic base through the use of information gathering and costly induction, Renamo turned to coercion to meet its recruitment targets. In 1979, Rhodesia collapsed, leaving Renamo without a source of economic and logistical support. South Africa stepped forward to continue military support for Renamo, but the flow of salaries, clothes, and food that translated seamlessly into selective incentives came to an end (Vines 1991).

From that point on, Renamo recruited heavily by force. Children were abducted on their way to school; homes were raided and young men taken away; villages were destroyed and those fleeing were corralled by Renamo troops and taken to rebel bases (Nampula, 0330, 0401, 0403, 0404; Maríngue, 0518, 0524). Forceful abduction was used even in the areas where Renamo’s cause was popular (Maríngue, 0521). While some of the Renamo rank and file joined voluntarily, it is generally estimated that close to 90 percent were recruited by force (Minter 1995).

Coercive recruitment yielded a rebel movement that lacked any coherent social bonds. The practice of abduction meant that rebel recruits represented the entire diversity of Mozambique’s ethnic and religious population. Little effort was made to politicize new recruits or to screen out opportunistic joiners (Maríngue, 0519). Table 3 pro-



TABLE 3  
Age and Education of Soldiers in Mozambique's Civil War

<i>Group</i>	<i>Number of Demobilized Soldiers</i>		<i>Number Recruited before Age Eighteen</i>		<i>Percentage Recruited before Age Eighteen</i>	
Government	70,902		16,553		23.3	
Renamo	21,979		8,945		40.7	
Total	92,881		25,498		27.4	

<i>Age</i>	<i>Government</i>		<i>Renamo</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
10	289	1.75	791	8.84	1,080	4.24
11	222	1.34	529	5.91	751	2.95
12	401	2.42	742	8.3	1,143	4.48
13	709	4.28	1,004	11.22	1,713	6.72
14	1,452	8.77	1,268	14.18	2,720	10.67
15	2,558	15.45	1,551	17.34	4,109	16.11
16	4,279	25.85	1,556	17.4	5,835	22.88
17	6,643	40.13	1,504	16.81	8,147	31.95
Total	16,533	100	8,945	100	25,498	100

<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Number of Demobilized Soldiers</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
None	26,434	28.46
Primary	25,381	27.33
Middle school	23,754	25.57
Secondary	2,197	0.29
University	271	0.20

SOURCE: Pardoel (1994).

NOTE: The information on soldiers' education levels could not be disaggregated by membership in Frelimo or Renamo.

vides additional descriptive evidence about the makeup of Renamo's growing force. More than 40 percent of Renamo's recruits were below the age of eighteen—clearly abducted before they could achieve advanced education. Data on the population of demobilized soldiers, including both government soldiers and rebels, indicate that less than 3 percent had an education of high school and above (Pardoel 1994). Even if all the university-educated demobilized soldiers had been members of Renamo, they would have represented only 1 percent of the group—an educational profile demonstrably different from that of the NRA.

Renamo had little choice but to turn to coercive recruitment. When salaries disappeared and the comfort of life in Rhodesia was replaced with the reality of poverty as an internal guerrilla movement, what Renamo could offer to potential recruits changed dramatically. Because its initial members were brought together by opportunity rather than conviction, they lacked the social resources to recruit voluntarily in Mozambique. Not based in any particular ethnic group, Renamo had no home region in which to organize. Still lacking a coherent political agenda, Renamo was hard-pressed to credi-

bly promise rewards to civilians who preferred to stay on the sidelines. The situation worsened as the government's counterinsurgency campaign began and civilians were herded into communal villages to prevent their interaction with the rebels.

Yet new recruits tended to stay in the movement. With more than twenty thousand members dispersed throughout the country at its apex, coercion cannot be the entire story.<sup>16</sup> With sufficient capacity to control territory, Renamo began to develop alternative sources of revenue to replace the flow of resources from Rhodesia. Payoffs resumed as Renamo permitted its soldiers to loot public and private property as part of their attacks on civilian areas (Nampula, 0404; Marínguè, 0518, 0521). Because of the dramatic wartime shortage of consumer goods, looted items could be traded in areas of Renamo control for almost anything. In addition, Renamo became involved in the cross-border trade of ivory, which yielded US\$13 million alone in 1988 (Vines 1991). Renamo also obtained funds through the extortion of multinational corporations in exchange for security guarantees. In the end, coercion was a feasible strategy because the payoffs to participation returned. As a result, the movement grew and prospered. Importantly, though, it was a movement that lacked social or political connections linking members, operated without an educated leadership core, and survived by continuing the stream of payoffs to its members.

#### ERITREA AND SIERRA LEONE

The cases of the NRA and Renamo help to spell out the logic of the model in particular contexts. Renamo channeled the resources garnered from its external patron into the provision of selective incentives for its recruits. While the NRA lacked any economic resources around which to organize, its leadership substituted payoffs for promises, using ethnic and political ties to make credible pledges about what the rebellion would deliver to its supporters. These *variations in opportunity* had important consequences for the type of individual attracted to the various movements. The NRA attracted high-commitment individuals, tied together by their social identities, and willing to bear the costs of participation in the hope of realizing future gains. Renamo, by contrast, was flooded with opportunistic joiners, committed only as long as the flow of short-term rewards continued. When the flow of rewards stopped temporarily, the movement was forced to turn to coercion.

Since the dynamics of these cases helped to motivate the theory, it is important to look at additional cases to further probe the model. But in contrast to the evidence provided on recruitment in the NRA and Renamo, which came largely from participant accounts, here I turn to a reading of secondary sources to test the theory's plausibility. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), a guerrilla army that between 1972 and 1991 grew to more than seventy-eight thousand fighters, successfully challenged and then defeated the Ethiopian government in its bid for Eritrean secession. It faced a powerful Ethiopian army, supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba. The EPLF emerged in an environment of dramatic religious and linguistic fragmentation—with

16. A new generation of authors looks beyond coercion and the material incentives that kept many Renamo recruits in the fold. Some have found evidence of a basic political ideology and widespread grievances against Frelimo that drove individual participation (Schafer 2001).

Eritrea divided geographically between Sunni Muslims and Orthodox Coptic Christians, Tigrinya and Tigre speakers (along with Arabic), and a whole variety of tribes and clans within each religious group. This fragmentation was reinforced in the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), a precursor movement to the EPLF, which organized into ethnically and religiously distinct regional groupings on the basis of external financial support. The EPLF broke off from the ELF in 1972, abandoning its sources of foreign support, rejecting its fragmented ethnic and religious structure, and launching an internal civil war (between Eritrean groups) that coincided with the broader struggle against the Ethiopian regime.

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched its insurgency in 1991 in an effort to unseat the ruling single-party state of the All People's Congress (APC), which had overseen Sierra Leone for twenty-three years. The RUF challenged an increasingly bankrupt state that was seeking to maintain networks of patronage through its manipulation of the diamond industry. The weakening of the APC regime in the 1980s gave rise to a political movement of young students on the campus of Freetown's Fourah Bay College (FBC) that began to mobilize in opposition to APC rule. The students linked up with Libya, which was actively engaged in supporting African revolutionary causes, before the APC used its state security services to flush the intellectual movement off the FBC campus. As the student movement melted away in response to repression from the state, the revolutionary fervor shifted to a much different population of potential insurgents—the unemployed, urban youth of Freetown known for their antisocial behavior.

Both the EPLF and the RUF launched insurgent movements in poor, rural areas; challenged personalistic dictatorships that increasingly lacked popular legitimacy; and faced an asymmetry of power with the government forces, with the APC backed by the resources of the diamond industry and the Ethiopian government the beneficiary of external support. The two movements differed most substantially at their founding with respect to what participation in insurgency meant for potential recruits.

### **Variation in Opportunity**

The EPLF grew out of an internal challenge to the strategy and structure of the ELF, the first secessionist movement for Eritrean independence. Critics within the ELF rejected the powerful influence of its external patrons and the highly fragmented structure of the movement, in which zonal groupings reinforced long-standing ethnic, tribal, and religious animosities (Pool 1998). By mounting an internal challenge to the ELF, membership in the EPLF entailed substantial risk. New recruits to the EPLF faced a civil war within Eritrea, for hegemony as the rightful challenger to the Ethiopian regime, and a civil war within the Ethiopian federation, for the sovereignty of an Eritrean state.

These risks were magnified as the EPLF abandoned the external support provided to the ELF in favor of self-reliance. The insurgents organized on the basis of their own resources and sought to capture weapons purely from government forces. While the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and an increasingly mobilized diaspora population provided limited external support, the vast majority of EPLF resources

came from the government itself. EPLF attacks on Ethiopian forces were the single most important source of weapons and ammunition to maintain the insurgency (Woldemikael 1991). Moreover, recruits to the EPLF abandoned personal property at the moment they joined. This commitment to self-reliance, in the face of enormous risks to potential participants, meant that joining was a risky venture that was likely to yield few short-term rewards. The EPLF could only make promises about what victory would bring to its many members.

While the EPLF committed itself to self-reliance, the RUF embraced wholeheartedly the support and resources provided by Charles Taylor in neighboring Liberia. The leadership of the RUF purportedly struck a deal in 1989 with Taylor pledging to help him liberate Liberia, in exchange for an external base and assistance in launching an internal struggle in Sierra Leone (Abdullah 1998). While a small number of the initial RUF cadres received training in Libya in 1987 and 1988, the bulk of the organization and preparation took place in Liberia, before the 1991 launch.

To Foday Sankoh, the RUF leader, and Charles Taylor, participation in the RUF offered recruits an opportunity to partake of new patronage networks, since many were increasingly excluded from the benefits of government largesse in the capitals of Freetown and Monrovia. Both Sankoh and Taylor were emblematic of the emergence of "warlord rulers" in West Africa who used the "extortion of aid organizations, manipulation of drug and diamond trades, profit from forced labor, official looting operations, and control of markets through alliances with foreign commercial partners" to reward their supporters and build a base of political power (Reno 1997, 479). The RUF became a vehicle for personal enrichment, and the diamond mining area of Eastern Sierra Leone was its first target.

### **Variation in Identity**

Different opportunities yielded substantively different pools of recruits. The EPLF leadership hailed from urban areas and from lower- or middle-class backgrounds, and many had left secondary school or university settings to join the movement. Initial recruits typically gained access through networks of classmates recruiting on behalf of the EPLF. Its membership incorporated large numbers of "educated, skilled, and technically trained workers," putting their skills to use in the context of the insurgency (Pool 1998). The movement's commitment to literacy training, and the large population of educated cadres in its leadership, made it possible for the EPLF to attract what Pool (1998) referred to as "markedly superior" recruits (to those in the Ethiopian army).

Explicit efforts were also made to recruit from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds and from the full range of ethnic, linguistic, and familial groupings in Eritrea (Markakis 1990). These group differences were overcome by the EPLF's sustained commitment to building a common identity for its recruits, a nationalist identity, that superseded tribal and familial loyalties (Woldemikael 1991). While the membership was heterogeneous with respect to preexisting ethnic, religious, and linguistic categories, it was homogeneous in the sense that members shared a collective identity—one forged through six months of mandatory political training, mobilization, and shared work effort (Connell 1993).

The RUF, on the other hand, attracted a population of potential recruits referred to by one of the original student leaders as the “wrong kind individuals” (Abdullah 1998). As the original FBC student movement disintegrated under pressure from the APC government, a small number of nonstudent revolutionaries began to mobilize the population of *lumpen* youth in Freetown. These youths were mostly unlettered, second-generation residents of Freetown without access to employment. They were known first and foremost as thugs, drug users, and tools of the political elite when dirty work was required. After Sankoh and his colleagues returned from training in Libya, they turned to the lumpen youth as a source of recruits (Abdullah 1998). Sankoh and his colleagues lacked any networks among the educated classes and had slim community ties in rural areas because of their marginal existence in urban and peri-urban areas.

When the RUF launched its insurgency in 1991, it was composed of two small forces, 100 to 150 soldiers in all. The first group included these Sierra Leonean youth, recruited and trained in Liberia in preparation for the war. The second group was composed of hard-core fighters from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), on loan from Taylor to the RUF. Taylor’s NPFL fighters had also joined to access patron-client networks from which they had traditionally been excluded. One fighter commented, “Eating in the bush is better than starving in Monrovia” (Reno 1997). Taylor gave his fighters the right to inflict violence, loot, and profit from the control of trade in areas that they controlled. Under Sankoh’s leadership, the lumpen youth and the NPFL fighters shared a common commitment to maintaining the flow of material rewards, rather than a political ideology or shared ethnic allegiance.<sup>17</sup>

### Variation in Strategy

Different initial conditions also gave rise to different strategies of recruitment. While the EPLF relied on networks of classmates from secondary school and university to identify potential participants, a mandatory six-month political training was the essential element of the recruitment process. This program of socialization, developed by EPLF leaders as a consequence of their experience in the ELF, sought to forge a common identity for recruited fighters—shaping their consciousness of history and society, the political purpose and message of the movement, and their understanding of the structure and strategy of the EPLF (Pool 1998). Participation in the People’s Assemblies of the EPLF, community groups not mobilized for military service, also required participation and success in the program of political education. This strategy—a form of costly induction—used a coherent political message to form a common identity out of representatives of a fragmented society (Connell 1993).

What made it work, however, was that advancement in the EPLF depended on success in political education. The secret party within the EPLF was recruited from the most active and ideologically sound members of the guerrilla army. Selection for the cadre school, which trained EPLF members for positions of authority in the movement, depended on literacy, commitment, and hard work, along with success in previ-

17. In fact, only 10 percent of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) fighters indicated that they joined for political reasons (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004).

ous periods of political education. Costly induction was not a one-time effort in the EPLF. One needed to demonstrate dedication, sacrifice, and belief in the common identity to be promoted.

While selective recruitment was central to the EPLF, the RUF was unable to escape its reliance on short-term rewards. Its initial membership was diverse, representing two countries, multiple ethnic groups, and a shallow set of political beliefs. With an initial force of 150 soldiers, the RUF was sufficiently large to quickly gain authority in Kailahun and Pujehun Districts. But even in these environments, long opposed to the APC regime, the looting, destruction, and violence wrought by the first RUF attackers did little to capture the support of natural opponents to the Sierra Leone government (Richards 1996).

As a consequence, like Renamo, the RUF turned to a combination of forced recruitment and material bribes to maintain and expand its force (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004). Young people with little schooling were particular targets in RUF recruitment efforts. They were molded quickly, not to share a political belief or ideology, but instead to participate in the resource extraction characteristic of the RUF's regime in the East: the mining and trade of diamonds, the monitoring and taxing of trade across the border, and the looting of household property. Initially, looting was rationalized as a reward for the Liberian supporters of Sierra Leone's "political" movement. The population came to realize quickly, however, that short-term material rewards were the name of the game and were used to maintain the insurgent force.<sup>18</sup>

Recruiting on the basis of bribes and abduction did little to harmonize a set of beliefs, strategies, principles, or identities among the members of the RUF. No real attempts were made to distinguish between members who might be willing to sacrifice for the long-term interests of the movement and those who wanted to take advantage of the war for personal gain. In this resource-rich environment, the leaders took advantage of the opportunity to organize around short-term rewards. With members increasingly hungry for more benefits, it was too difficult to turn back.

### AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION

It is useful to briefly examine an alternative factor shaping the membership profile of a rebel group, namely, its leadership. Rebel organizations are reflective of the voluntary and purposive behavior of their leaders: the organizers mobilize initial recruits, define the agenda of the movement, and have great latitude to determine the structure and approach of the guerrilla army (Clapham 1988). Indeed, leading analysts of the NRA and the EPLF ascribe each movement's political agenda, tight linkages with the civilian population, and disciplined behavior to the leadership of its founding members (Ngoga 1997; Pool 1998). But insurgencies, like other political movements, are constrained by the settings in which they operate and their need to undertake the most

18. Humphreys and Weinstein (2004) present statistical evidence that distinguishes the RUF from other factions in Sierra Leone on the basis of significant numbers recruited with the promise of material rewards, few preexisting connections between fighters, and high levels of ethnic diversity at the unit level.



basic tasks of organization, including recruitment. Leadership is a critical factor, but the emergence of a cadre of rebel organizers is shaped by the same factors that impact a group's membership.

To see this, one must relax the model's assumption that a single group of rebel leaders exists. Often, a number of potential rebel entrepreneurs compete to challenge the government in any given country. The presence or absence of economic endowments, which shape who is attracted to participate in various movements, also affects the likelihood that a particular rebel entrepreneur will mobilize sufficient manpower to launch a civil war. Prospective rebel leaders are in a race to form the dominant rebel group—to become the first-mover—that can dictate the terms of the rebellion and the expectations of civilian populations about who is likely to win.

If speed is of the essence, it is no surprise that where economic endowments can be mobilized, rebel leaders who utilize them are likely to emerge as the dominant players. Appeals to identity and ideology take much longer to develop and refine. Leaders that build groups around social endowments jockey for position in this race, but such organizations often fail to fully develop before another group successfully mounts its challenge to the government. In the absence of economic endowments, leaders must build networks rooted in identities and ideologies to succeed. But where material resources are available to meet the start-up costs of rebellion, the extended process of reinforcing identities and forming ideologies is often short-circuited. Analytically, this is similar to the "Dutch Disease" problem in which natural resource booms cause the collapse of manufacturing industries (Lewis 1989). This is generally because sectors experiencing a resource boom draw capital and labor away from other sectors. Because rebel groups can organize quickly in resource-rich environments, collective action rooted in identities or beliefs never takes hold. It is crowded out as potential recruits go elsewhere or stay away when one group becomes dominant.

The cases provide evidence in support of this structural interpretation. In Mozambique, for example, Renamo was not the only claimant for the mantle of opposition to Frelimo. Opposition to the new ruling party had its roots in the independence struggle, which was fragmented along ethnic and regional lines. Frelimo was seen as the party of southerners, while the *Comité Revolucionário de Moçambique* (COREMO) sought to represent the ethnic groups of central and northern Mozambique (Vines 1991). As Frelimo took power in Maputo in 1974, it faced immediate challenges from a host of opposition groups. But Frelimo fought back, suppressing political activity and forcing opposition leaders into reeducation camps in the countryside. Despite this harassment, antigovernment organizing continued among the Macua and Makonde ethnic groups in the north and among local leaders in central Mozambique. With the support of the Rhodesians, Renamo began its military campaign just as domestic political opposition was beginning to grow and solidify. Renamo's leadership took up the rhetoric of the excluded nationalists, yet it was surprising how few of the ideological elite joined its military campaign (Minter 1995). Renamo was the first rebel group out of the gate, and it quickly became the central opposition player in the country. Despite widespread opposition to the policies of Frelimo, no other rebel movement was able to generate the manpower and resources to challenge Renamo's place on the stage.

Sierra Leone provides a slight variant on the Mozambican experience. The political opposition to the APC regime had crystallized long before the emergence of the RUF, in the form of cells of student activists on the FBC campus in the early 1980s. The student leaders turned to Libya and Ghadaffi's Green Book as they sought to develop a plan for challenging the state. Some fled to Ghana for further education as the APC began to crack down on political organizations in the capital. From their base outside the country, these student radicals began to recruit participants for military training abroad, issuing a call to other opposition groups in Freetown to join the effort. But the largest internal organization, the Pan African Union (PANAFU) rejected participation, feeling that the time was not right to launch the struggle militarily (Abdullah 1998). As a result, the intellectual cadres remained on the outside of the emerging venture, leaving it to Foday Sankoh and a small number of uneducated, unemployed recruits to be the first to undergo military training in Libya. When they returned, Sankoh and his cadres joined up with Charles Taylor, sealing a deal that promised external support for what would become the RUF rebellion. The hard work of building an intellectual foundation for the struggle had been abandoned by some parts of the opposition in favor of direct military action in the diamond areas with the help of an external patron. With the rapid rise of the RUF, a competitor with a clear ideology never emerged.

On the other hand, in environments with limited economic endowments, leaders who attempt to use short-term rewards to recruit fail to develop sufficient manpower to successfully challenge the state. The case of the Vvumbula Armed Forces in Uganda demonstrates this point (Luwero, 1207, 1208). Located on the edge of the Luwero Triangle, just outside of the NRA's territorial base, Vvumbula attempted to challenge the hegemony of the NRA as the force opposing Milton Obote. But Vvumbula was a disorganized military. Recruits were free to move in and out of the rebel camp, to drink as much as they wanted to, and to roam through the villages stealing property and looting shops. While Vvumbula attracted a small number of recruits, its behavior quickly gave rise to growing civilian dissent in the region. Fearing how Vvumbula's reputation might affect civilian support for the NRA, Museveni sent a team to arrest the incipient movement's senior leadership bringing an end to its plundering and banditry. Even without Museveni's intervention, it is unlikely that the opportunity to loot would have been sufficient incentive for potential recruits to join Vvumbula in numbers large enough to challenge the Obote regime.

The case of the EPLF provides the strongest *prima facie* evidence that leadership drives a rebel group's membership profile and strategy. EPLF leaders broke away from the ELF, rejecting its reliance on external financing from the Arab world that heightened Christian and Muslim divisions within the country. One might argue that they chose "self-reliance" as a strategy, and their good judgment served to identify and recruit high-commitment participants as well. But the evidence is also supportive of another interpretation. Many early recruits to the ELF were disappointed with what they found in the movement. Promised an integrated army marked by discipline and control, they encountered a movement led by an external leadership, driven by the agendas of a number of foreign patrons, and built around a series of internal fiefdoms that perpetuated dangerous ethnic and religious divisions. A centralized leadership existed only to channel the flows of foreign funds. No clear political or ideological



message united the group's membership. This had tremendous consequences for discipline and effectiveness (Markakis 1988).

Multiple groups broke from the ELF. High-commitment individuals opted out of the fragmented movement. Each began the difficult work of building a rebel organization anew. Christians, under the leadership of Issayas Afeworki, for example, took refuge in the Ala plain and initiated a process of ideological formation that resulted in the development of a political program nearly three years after the breakaway (Pool 1998). They later merged with a group of Muslims to form the foundation of the EPLF. In building these new movements, they encountered structural conditions akin to those faced by the NRA. The shortage of resources, the threat of military confrontation, and hardship of life in the rebel camps served to weed out opportunistic joiners. Only gradually over time, and at great personal risk, were these individuals able to carve out the shared identity necessary to build a movement capable of defeating the remnants of the ELF and the Ethiopian state.

## CONCLUSION

This article extends the literature linking natural resources to civil war by focusing on a new issue: how the resource base of a rebel group impacts its character. It explores how the presence—or absence—of economic endowments shapes the rebel groups that emerge to wage war, the individuals who are attracted to join, and the strategies different insurgencies pursue. In doing so, it takes the debate from the macro-level to the micro-level, introducing a focus on the dynamics of the recruitment process.

I offer a new theoretical framework that integrates two factors critical to making sense of the membership profile of an organization: (1) the resource mix of the rebel group and (2) the informational asymmetries that characterize the recruitment marketplace. The model generates a set of testable predictions linking a group's resource base to the membership it is likely to attract and the strategies it is likely to employ. An empirical analysis of four rebel groups—the NRA (Uganda), Renamo (Mozambique), the EPLF (Eritrea), and the RUF (Sierra Leone)—shows how different resource bases are associated with distinct membership profiles and strategies.

The analysis reveals that economic endowments may be a curse for rebel groups. While the presence of natural resources (or other sources of financial support) make it possible for leaders to provide short-term material rewards, such strategies imply substantial challenges. In particular, groups that provide short-term benefits tend to attract opportunistic joiners that exhibit little commitment to the long-term goals of the organization. These *consumers* are unwilling to make investments of time, energy, and resources without receiving the materials rewards they have been promised.

The absence of economic endowments, however, is not an absolute constraint on the organization. It simply makes it more difficult. In these contexts, rebel leaders build armies by making credible promises about the selective incentives they can provide to participants in the future. Individuals signal their commitment to the group by accepting promises rather than payoffs, realizing that opportunistic joiners will be

kept out of the struggle as a result. These sacrifices are a form of *investment*, with future rewards made credible by ties of social and political identity.

My focus on how a rebel group's resource base impacts the profile of its membership illustrates the importance of moving beyond analyses of conflict onset and duration to explore the micro-dynamics of civil war (Ross 2004). Recognition of the different outcomes that follow the recruitment process is only a first step. The sorting of rebel soldiers into high-commitment and low-commitment groups is likely to affect the trajectory of conflict in other ways as well.

Membership differences are likely to have significant consequences for the internal structures of rebel groups. Like any military, rebel leaders must decentralize their forces in an effort to attack the dispersed units of the government military. In formal organizations, established procedures, training, and communications infrastructure serve to ensure that orders flow from higher levels to decentralized units. Rebel groups, however, lack the formal rules, procedures, and mechanisms of professional militaries, magnifying a set of principal-agent problems. Where investors populate rebel groups, linked to one another by shared identities or ideologies, leaders might be able to draw on these social endowments in establishing a set of norms to guide conduct and behavior. Where consumers dominate rebel groups, on the other hand, individual participants are likely to face strong incentives to defect—using their time, energy, and resources to protect and enrich themselves in the course of conflict. Delegation may have negative ramifications in such an environment.

The recruitment profile of a rebel group is also likely to shape how it behaves. Rebel leaders often use violence to maintain civilian support and to prevent defection (Kalyvas 2000). Violence can be an effective strategy because it is both persuasive, sufficiently raising the cost of defection, and selective, providing a credible signal of the costs of defection. But the strategic use of violence requires effective organization. Rebel leaders employ systems of command and control, mechanisms for punishing indiscipline, and decentralized strategies of governance to establish effective authority over civilian populations. Without clear mechanisms for coordinating and controlling the membership, leaders are hard-pressed to use violence selectively in support of the long-term goals of the movement.

Where social and political ties can be employed to develop effective organizations, rebel leaders might have a greater capacity to use violence strategically. With clear guidelines about how combatants should behave and strong mechanisms for enforcing discipline, organizations are in a better position to build cooperative relationships with civilian populations and put strict controls on how force is used. On the other hand, the short-term-oriented behavior of rebel groups populated by consumers may tend to damage civilian populations. The constant demand for a stream of selective incentives may drive rebel combatants to loot, destroy property, and kill indiscriminately—actions that tend to work against the objective of capturing the state.

This analysis suggests that not all rebel groups are alike and that natural resources (and other forms of economic endowments) may shape the types of individuals attracted to rebel in different contexts. As policy makers increasingly focus on identifying instruments to reward, challenge, and constrain the behavior of nonstate armed actors in conflict, they will require a deeper understanding of how these groups form,

the different organizational types that emerge, and the factors that shape how they behave. Studies that explore how differing initial conditions shape the choices of rebel leaders and combatants at the micro-level are a first step in that direction.

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