



# Why civil war? Grievances

POL 126

Prof. Juan Tellez  
Spring 2022

# THIS WEEK

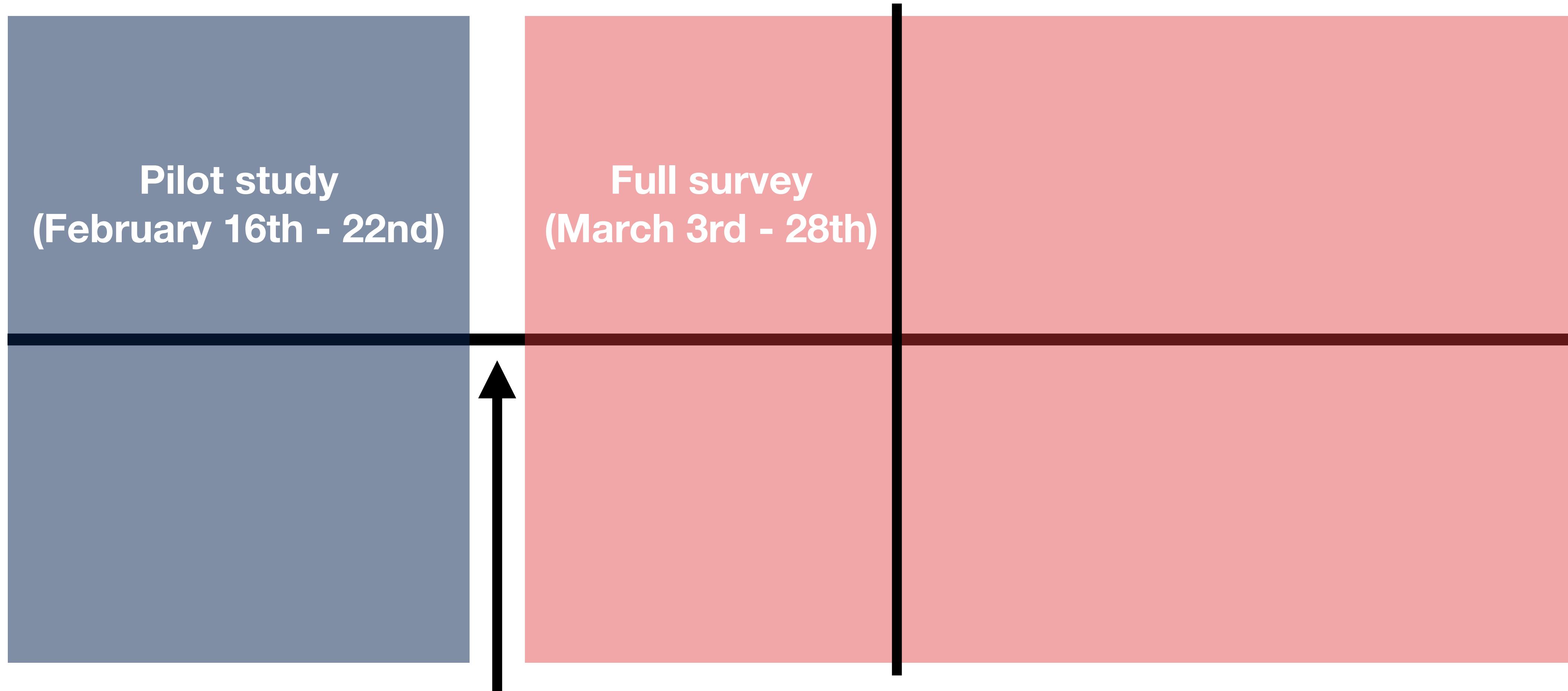
Why civil wars?

Grievances

Identity/ethnicity

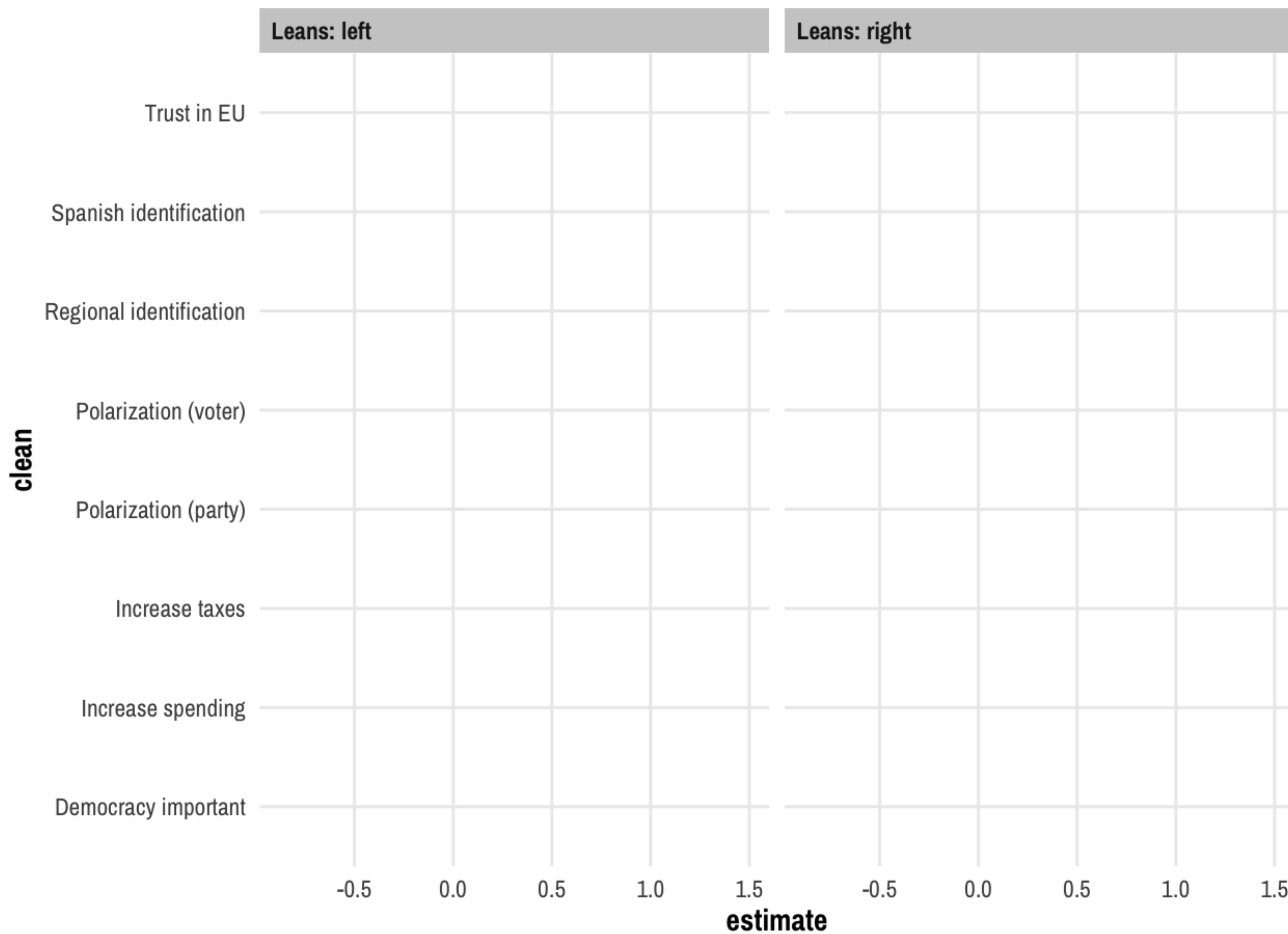
# A surprise in Spain

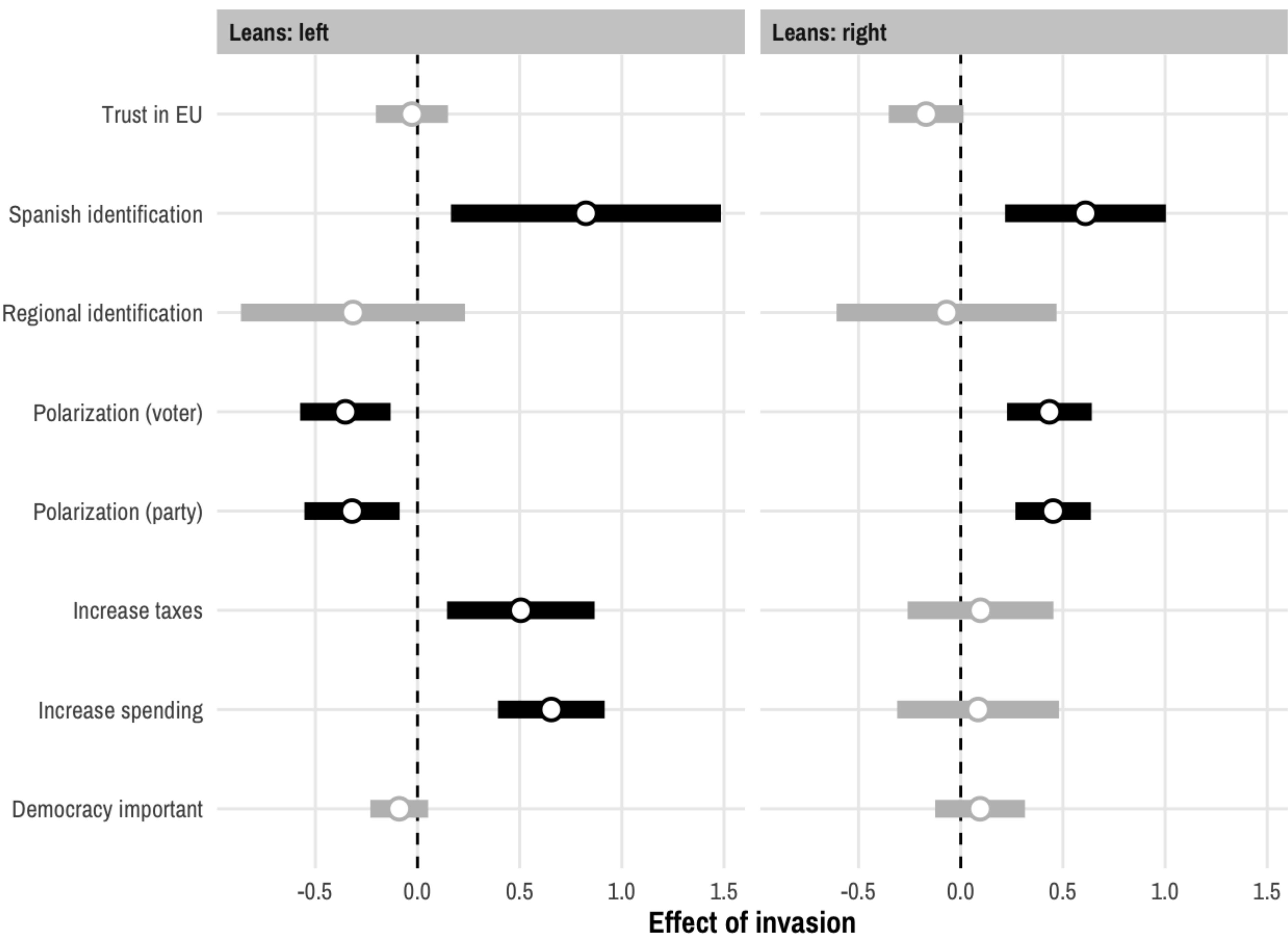
# Interrupted survey



**Russia invades Ukraine  
(February 24th)**

**Enough respondents for analysis  
(March 7th)**





# Why civil wars?

Motive

Opportunity

The **reasons** individuals + groups  
choose to rebel

The factors that make  
rebellion **possible**

# Why civil wars?

The big three **factors** in the literature:

Motive

Grievances + identity

This week

???

Natural resources

Next week

Opportunity

Geography

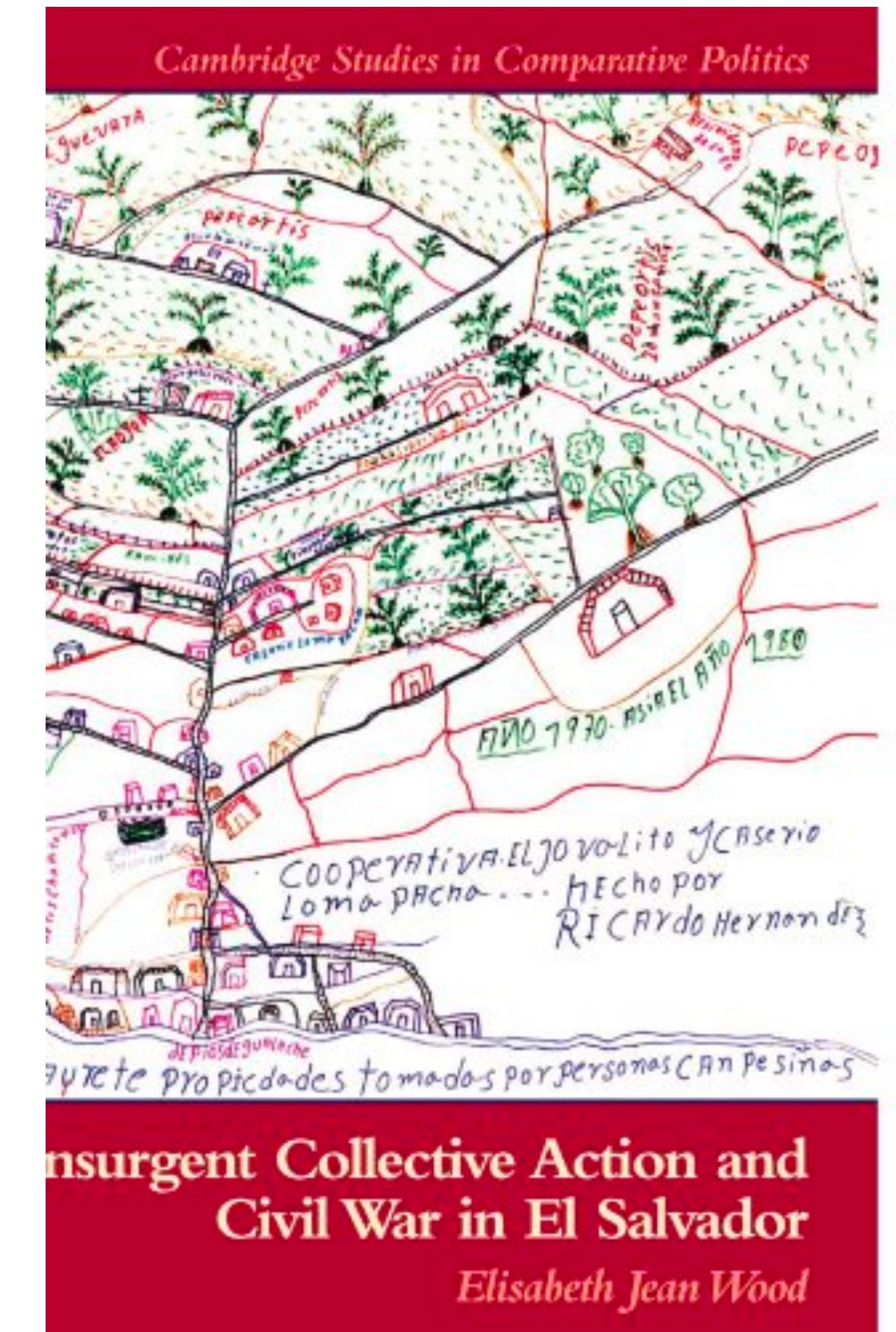
Next week

# Why do people rebel?

Wood's book is one of the classic  
**grievance-based theories of war**

# What is so puzzling to Wood about why people rebel?

# What grievances does she detail?



# *Insurgency in El Salvador*

We lived on the property, unlike so many others. The social relations were intimate, we were appreciated. I helped with birth control projects, through the Demographic Association. The Cotton Producers Association lent us two cars to travel around to give talks. Children were dying from pure ignorance; women were dying in labor. It was hard work. I brought some women here for the operation – sterilization. There are other methods but the truth is that they were so ignorant that you had to sterilize them. It was a nice project. With my friends from the other haciendas, I traveled around. We had equipment, nurses; we took down names, physical data.  
(Interview, San Salvador, 1992)

# Grievances as motive

Grievances provide the fuel  
for rebellion, demand for reform

Often not absolute but **relative** deprivation

*Poverty*

*Political exclusion*

*Inequality*

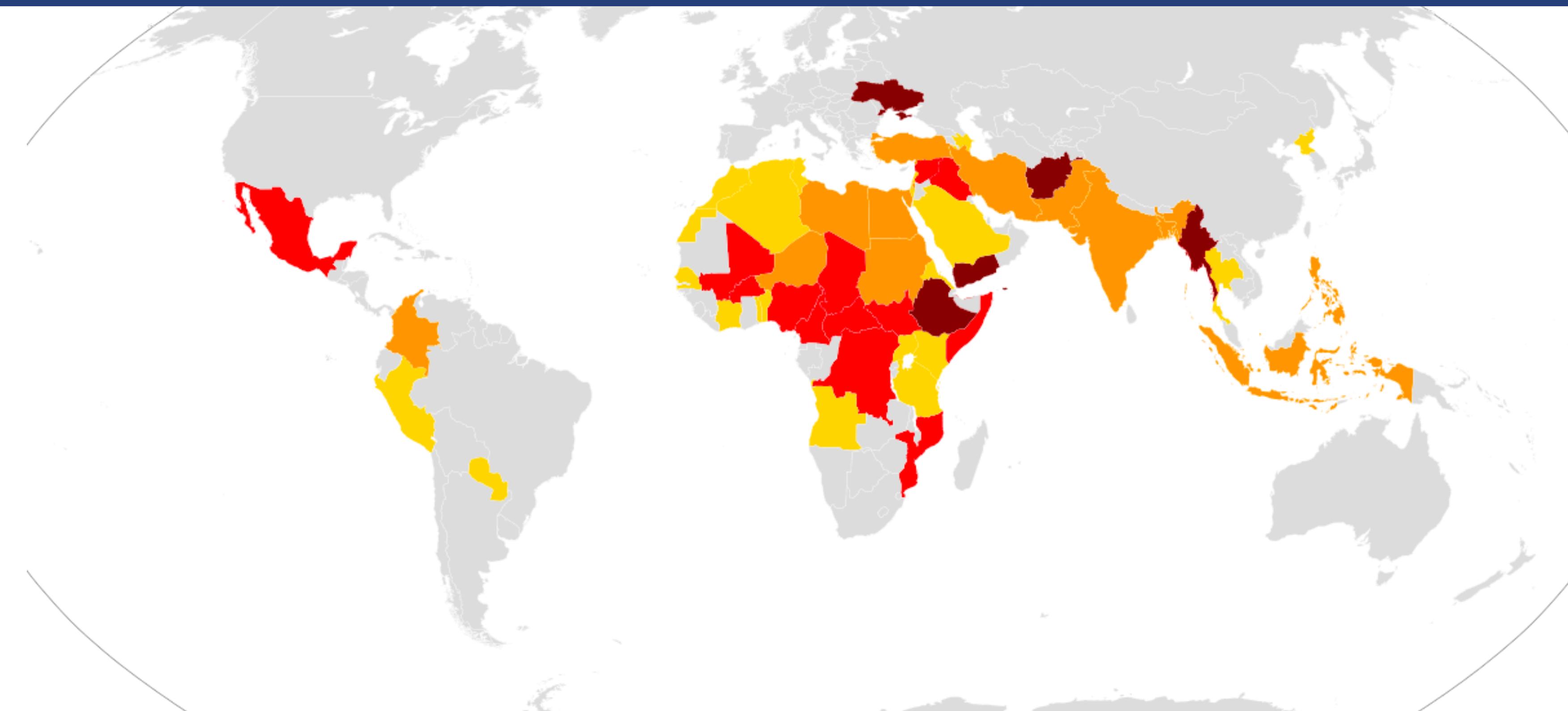
*Marginalization*

*Oppression*

*Violated justice*

# Seems obvious

Robust link between war and **poverty, oppression**



Armed groups **explain actions** via grievances

# Grievances and rationality

Is it “rational” to rebel in response to grievances (Wood book)?

Probably not:

High risk of death

Very low risk of success

Emotional/normative attachments drive action

Self-interest, personal gain

# Local grievances

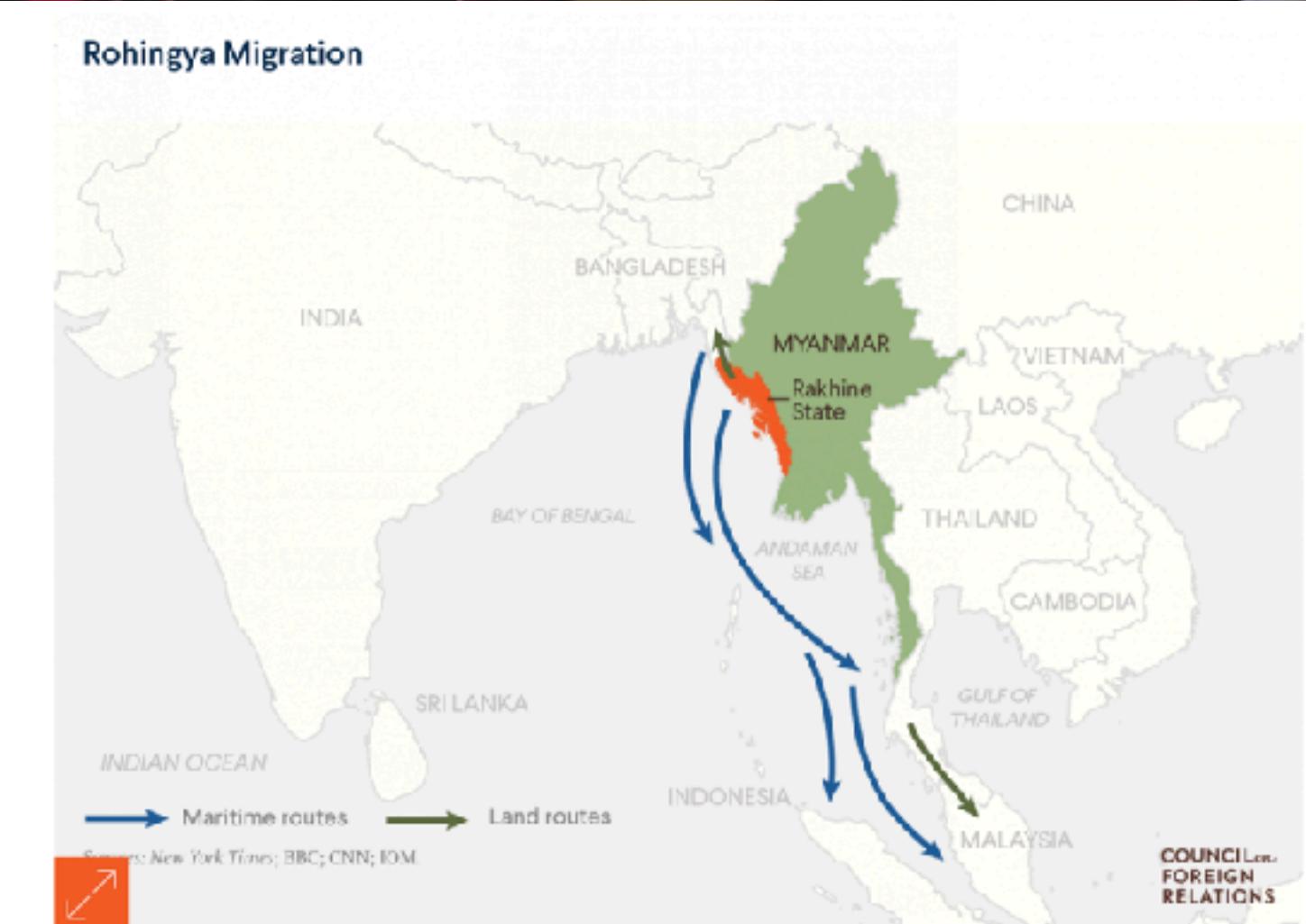
Grievances can be **localized** – affecting one group in particular part of the world

Rohingya: Sufi Islamic community living in majority Buddhist Myanmar

Discrimination + ethnic cleansing

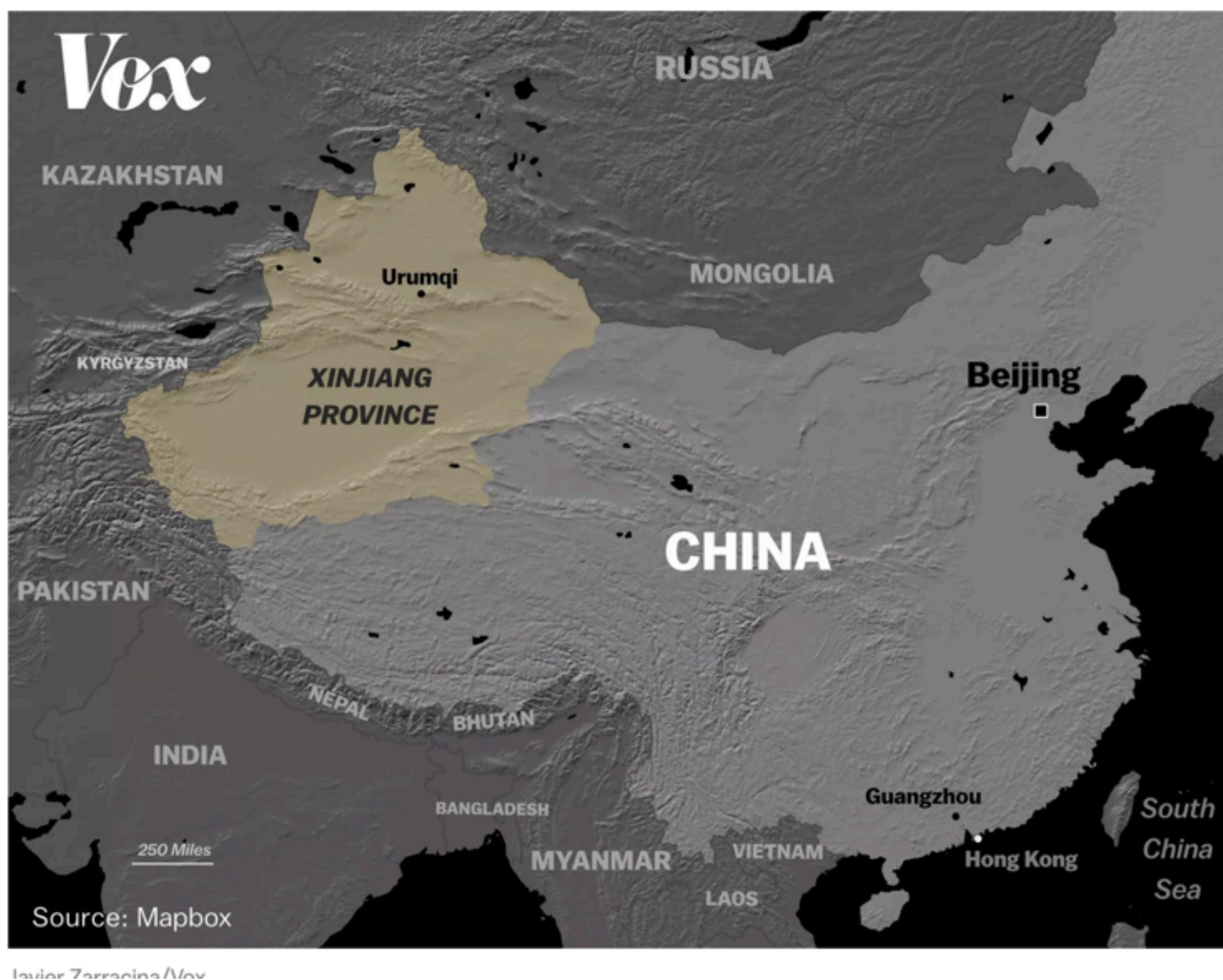


Burmese Buddhist monks shout slogans as Burma to grant citizenship to Rohingya, Fric



# Local grievances

Mass detentions, repression of religion of Muslim Uighur community



**China's "de-extremification" policies against the Uighurs**



An ethnic Uighur man has his beard trimmed after prayers on June 30, 2017, in Kashgar, in Xinjiang. | Kevin Frayer/Getty Images

# Transnational grievances

Grievances can be **transnational** –  
affecting a group or “people” spread  
across countries



Baader, Andreas Bernd.

6.5.47 München

Haftelekt



Meinhof, Ulrike, gesch. Röhl.

7.10.34 Oldenburg

Haftelekt



Ensslin, Gudrun, 15.8.40 Bartholomäus

Haftelekt



Anger, Ronald,

20.11.49 Amsterdam

Haftelekt



Raabe, Jürgen, 24.7.44 Seefeld

Haftelekt



Jäger, Klaus-Jürgen, 6.9.47 Mannheim

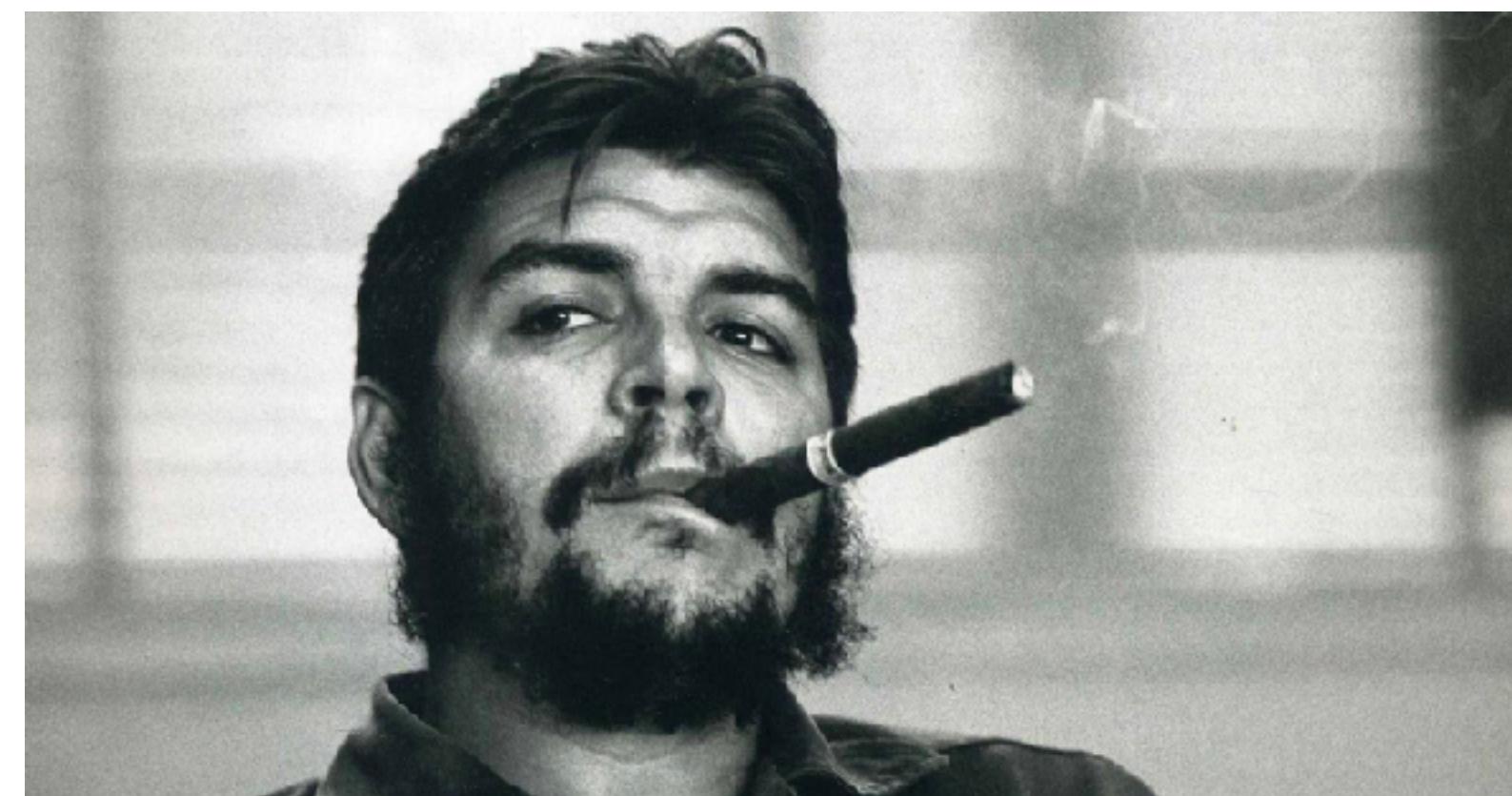
Haftelekt



Stechowitsch, Ingrid, 17.5.54

Frankfurt/M.

Haftelekt



Müller, Ingrid, 13.5.47 Seefeld



EX 12/38

# Local meets transnational

Local grievances can also become  
“internationalized”



Graffiti in St. Louis, MO



Northern Ireland murals

# The sympathizers

Grievances can also motivate outsiders,  
**foreign fighters**

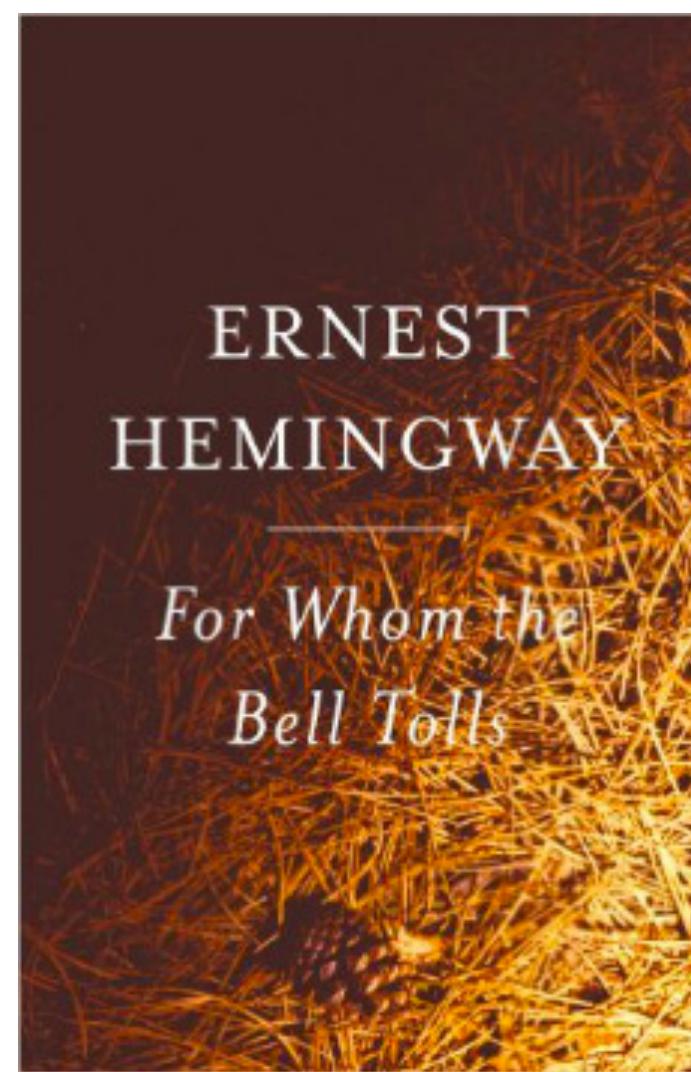
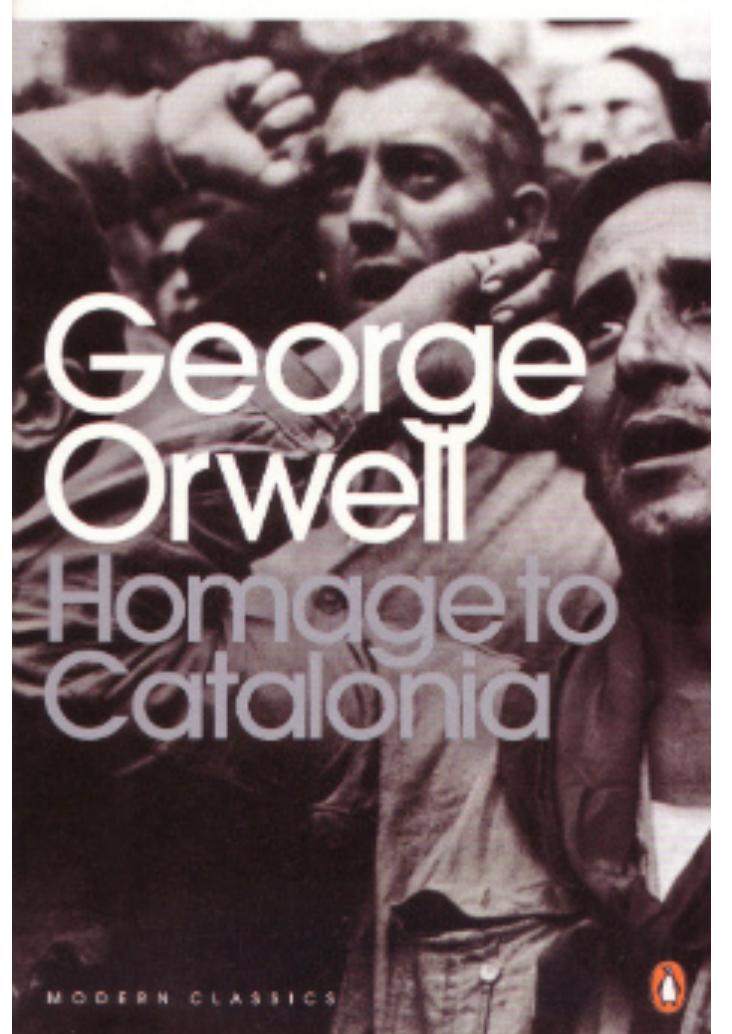
Response to a sense of injustice

Broader ideological commitments (e.g.,  
Marxism, violent jihadism)

# Americans in the Spanish Civil War

2,800 Americans (illegally) fought in the Spanish Civil War

40,000 international volunteers fought against Franco



Lincoln Brigade

# Westerners fight against ISIS

Dozens Of Westerners Join Kurds To Fight ISIS In Syria

March 15, 2018 · 3:47 PM ET

SAMANTHA RAPHELSON 



Caleb Stevens (fourth from left) in Raqqa, Syria, with other members of his unit. Stevens, a 23-year-old from Michigan, traveled to Syria to fight with the Kurdish People's Protection Units or YPG.

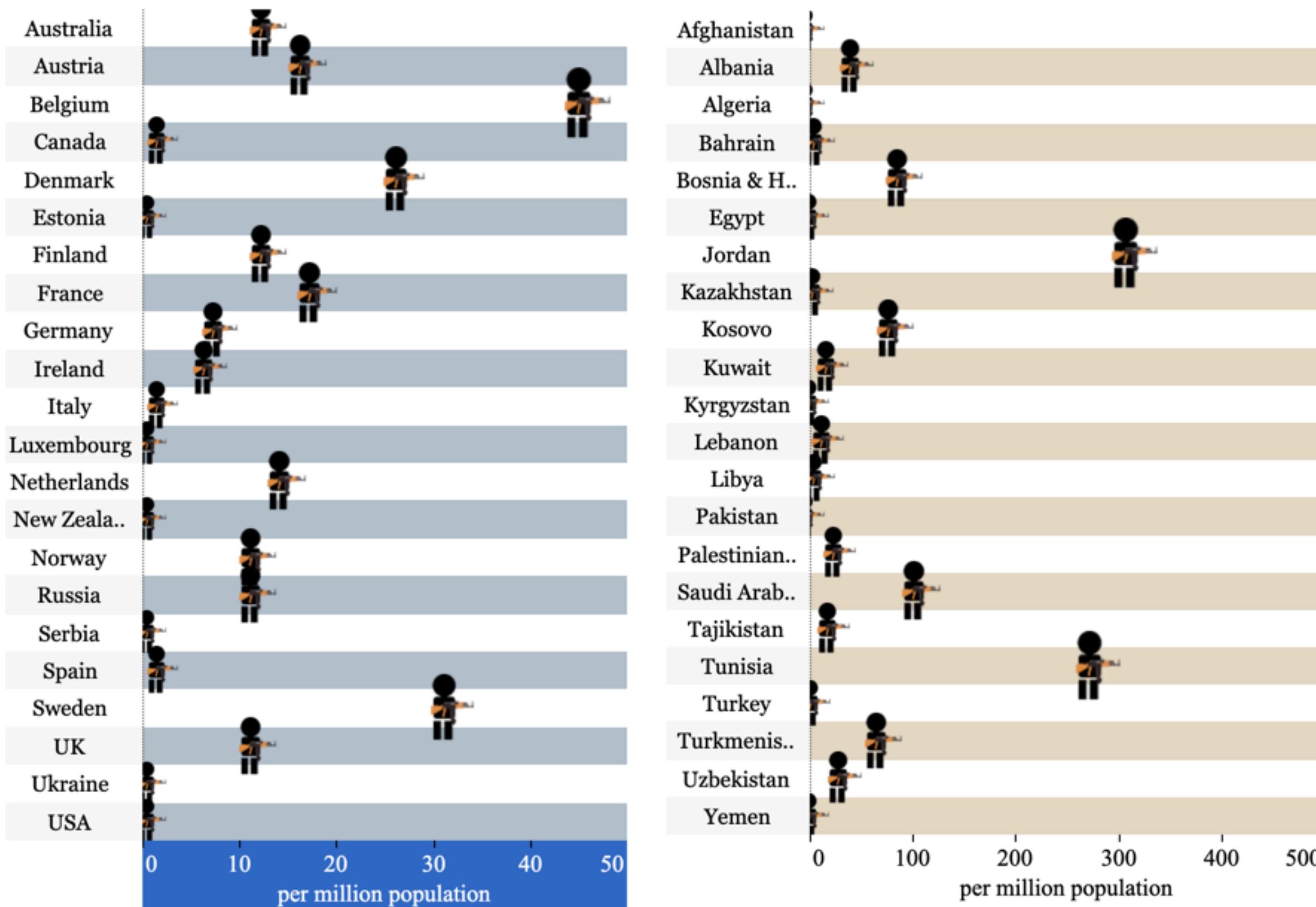
Courtesy of Caleb Stevens



Ideological commitments, injustice

# Westerns fight for ISIS

Number Of Fighters Per Capita  
(per million people)



Istanbul is a point of entry for many foreign fighters

↓  
Foreign fighters travel to Sanliurfa or Gaziantep near the border

↓  
They then travel to Turkish border towns...  
↓  
...before finally crossing into Syria

Atlantic Council



Sources: International Centre For The Study Of Radicalisation And Political Violence 2015, New York Times, Associated Press, State Broadcasters (see tooltips)

# Puzzles in the grievance literature

Grievances → ??? → rebellion

The low information rebel

# Grievances, action

The New R...  
Jihadists and right-social media strategy

By The Editorial Board  
The editorial board represents the opinions of the board, its editor and the publisher. It is separate from the newsroom and the Op-Ed section.

Nov. 24, 2018

f t m 211



Communication technologies might create **focal points** for action, or create **consciousness of grievance**

Mohammed Abdullah  
Majed Moqed

Hani Hanjour  
Tarek Maaroufi  
Essoussi Laaroussi  
Rami Bin al-Shibh  
Khalid Almihdhar  
Mohamed Abdi  
Ziad Jarrah  
Nawaf Alhazmi  
Salem Alhazmi  
Ahmed Al Haznawi  
Ahmed Alnami  
Saeed Alghamdi  
Hamza Alghamdi  
Mohand Alshehri  
Ahmed Alghamdi  
Raed Hijazi  
Waleed Alshehri  
Mustafa Ahmed al-Hisawi  
Nabil al-Marabah  
Satam Suqami  
Wail Alshehri

Legend:  
○ Pilots  
□ Hijackers  
▽ Other Al Qaeda  
FLIGHTS  
Green AA #11  
Red UA #175  
Pink UA #93  
Blue AA #77

# Grievances, action



Sayyid Qutb  
(1906 - 1966),  
Egyptian author and  
theorist

Today he sleeps on the floor, with no mattress, in a cell with 10 other people. He told me that ISIS members imprisoned with him try to recruit him frequently. He says there are more than 100 ISIS members inside, and they openly sing Islamic State chants together at night. They bring him food. They talk to him about his father, who was killed in 2013 along with nearly 1,000 others, when the government crushed two sit-ins in Cairo.

They tell him he should take revenge.

When he refuses, he says, they threaten him and call him an unbeliever. He's afraid of them.

"I'm stuck in a circle," he says. "The Egyptian government from one side and ISIS on the other."

Prisons are non-trivial source of radicalization!

## As Egypt's Jails Fill, Growing Fears Of A Rise In Radicalization

August 24, 2016 · 5:02 AM ET

Heard on [Morning Edition](#)



LEILA FADEL



# The low-information rebel

If rebels motivated by grievances, why do many seem to know little about the cause?

[Home](#) | [Middle East News](#)

## Leaked ISIS Documents Reveal Most Recruits Know Little on Islam

At the height of ISIS' drive for foot soldiers in 2013 and 2014, typical followers included French bar-hoppers and Britons who ordered 'The Koran for Dummies.'

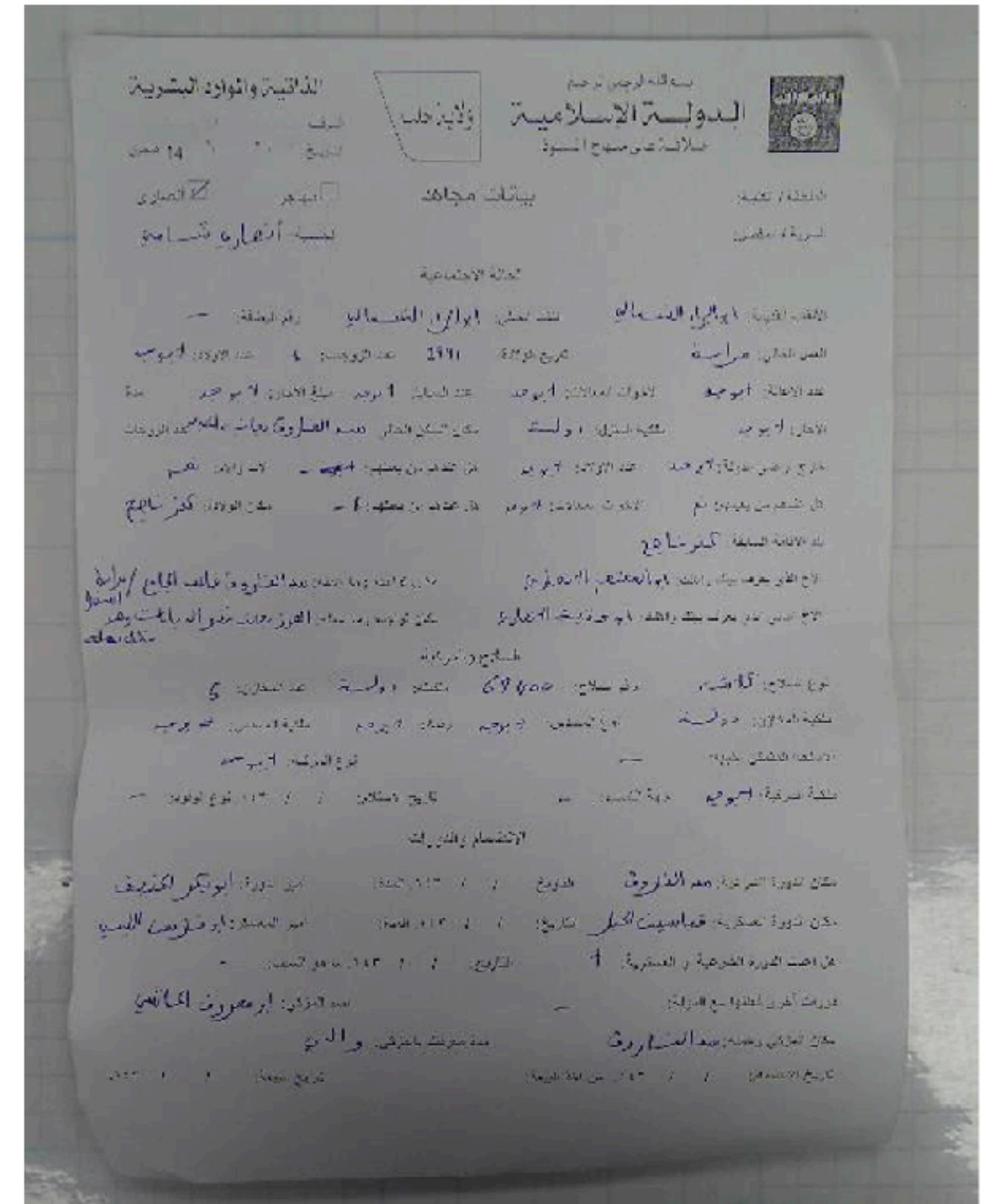


Figure 1: One page of the long-form personnel record

# War and boredom

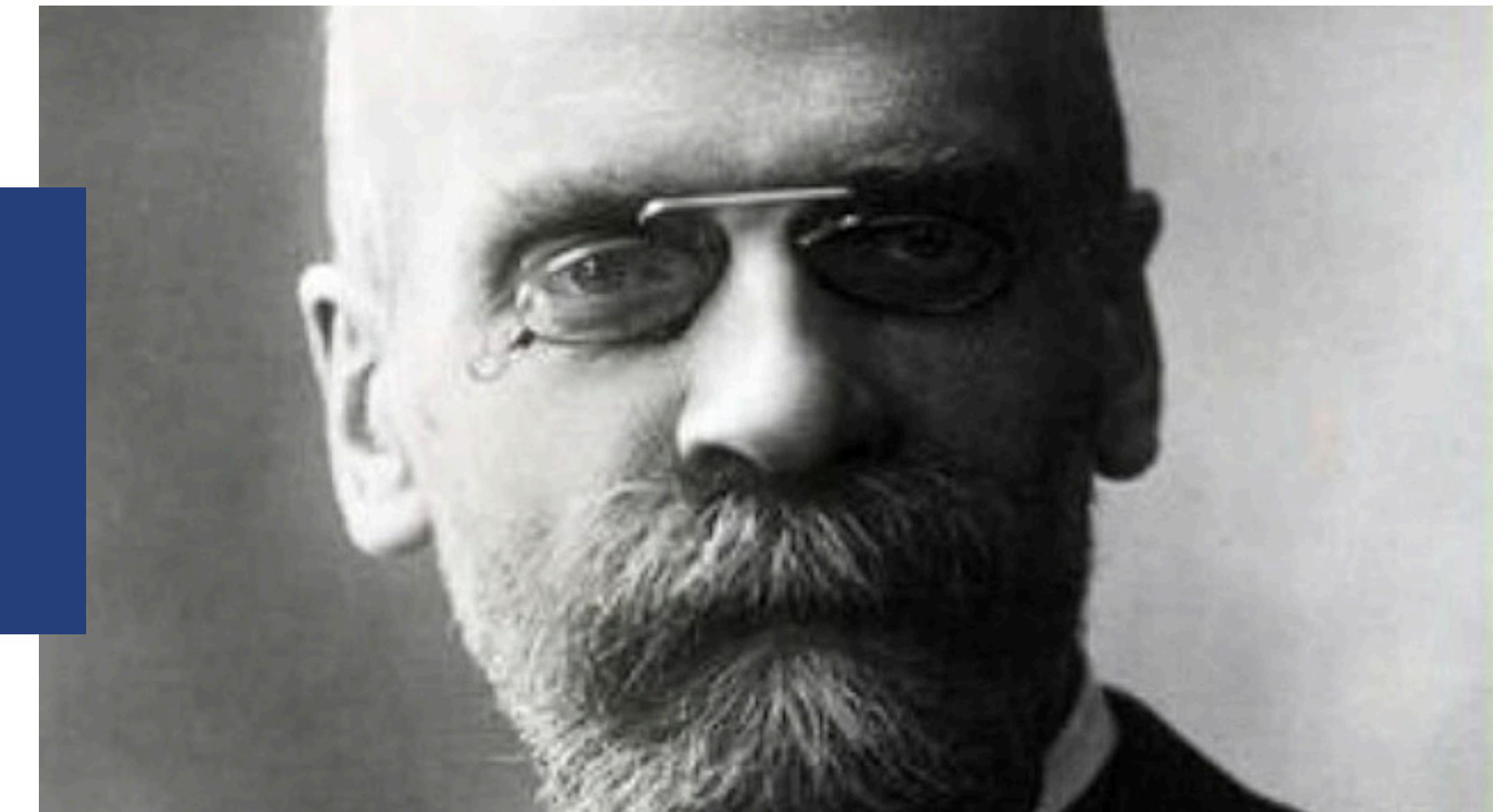
But two researchers at the Naval Health Research Center in San Diego have found another deployment experience that can be an even greater precursor of bad behavior later: boredom.

A survey of 1,543 Marines at Camp Pendleton, Twentynine Palms, Calif., and the Marine base in Okinawa, Japan, found that the Marine most likely to disobey orders, get into physical confrontations, neglect his family or run afoul of the police is one who reports that his war zone deployment was marked by boredom.

Psychological/sociological factors → war

# War and purpose

Anomie – “the condition in which society provides little moral guidance to individuals”



Durkheim

# Mishima on boredom

**Yukio Mishima**  
(1925–1970)

**Right-wing Japanese nationalist,  
tried to inspire coup, failed,  
committed suicide**



**You might call this the boredom of living.**

# Very metal

‘the people's blood has a rich perfume, like jasmine, daisies, geranium’

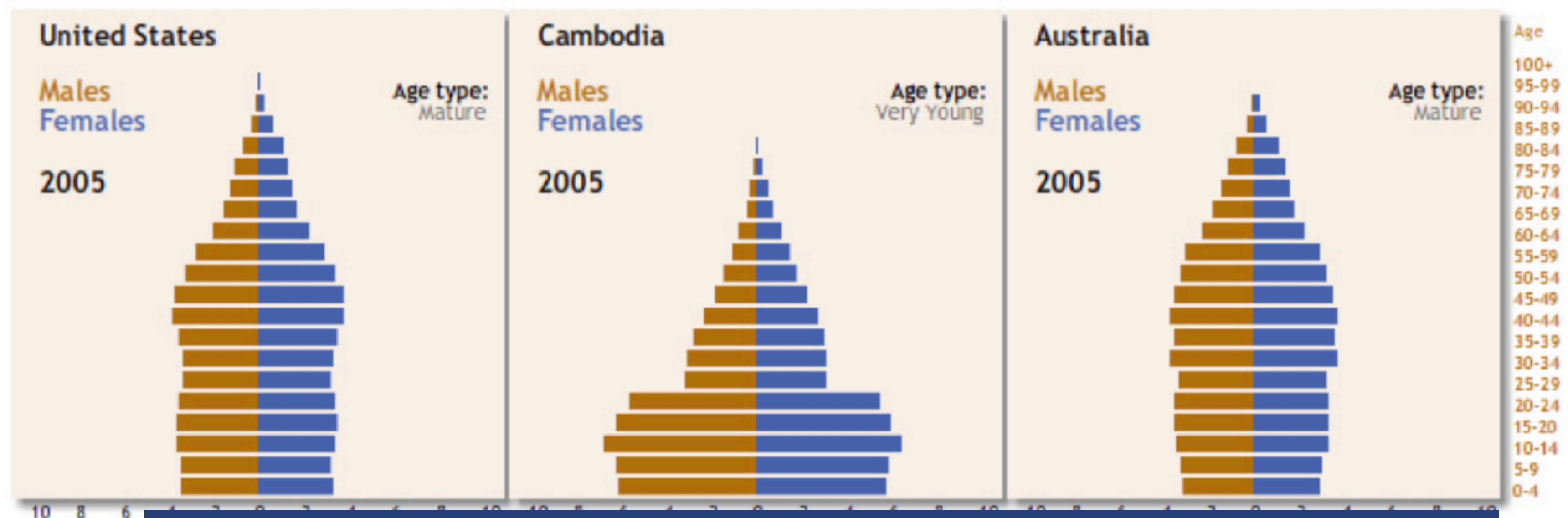
Thousands upon thousands of martyrs have heroically laid down their lives for the people; let us hold their banner high and march ahead along the path crimson with their blood!

The land, O my comrades, is thirsty; the blood of the martyrs will irrigate it  
I listen to the sound of guns, in which the poor seek help

“The revolution is a tree irrigated by the blood of the pure”

# Boredom and war

War can provide sense of meaning, purpose to alienated (often) young (often) men



Fits pattern of youth bulges → war

Understudied (and hard to study!)

# The problem with grievances

Identifying motivations is **difficult** (can we take rebels at their word?)

Making sense of the patterns:  
is relationship between poverty and war a sign of  
**grievance, self-interest, or even anomie?** How could  
we tell?

# In their own words

**How do people who commit  
violence talk about their  
motives?**

**Choose a manifesto from the  
class website, skim briefly**