Does Counterinsurgent Success Match Social Support? Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Colombia

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Dominant theories of counterinsurgency suggest that state forces must win over citizens to identify insurgents among them. Yet even where state forces are losing, polling shows consistently strong support for counterinsurgents. How can we explain this discrepancy? Dominant theories of counterinsurgency could be incorrect, or, as we posit, individuals systematically may falsify their reported preferences. This study builds on the intuition that individuals feel pressure to report consistently strong support for the military when asked directly, perhaps especially when they rely on an illegal organization or economy. We argue that this pressure decreases when individuals are asked indirectly, in a way that allows them to conceal their response. To assess, we randomize whether support for the military is measured directly and indirectly in a survey experiment in Colombia. We find lower rates of support with the indirect measure, and the difference is most pronounced in areas of insurgent control.

Decades of studies on counterinsurgency have established that social support is crucial for securing military victory (e.g., Mao [1937]; research reviewed in Berman and Matanock [2015]). All sides require social support to have a shot at winning: insurgents need it to recruit members, generate resources, and blend into the population, while counterinsurgents (the military, but also state institutions more broadly) need it to identify insurgents.[1] "Killing the enemy is easy. Finding him is often nearly impossible" (Kilcullen 2010, 31). These prevailing theories anticipate variation in social support for counterinsurgents: insurgents succeed at least in part because individuals side with them and do not report on them, so that counterinsurgents struggle to identify them. When insurgents are successful militarily, counterinsurgents should have less support in the population.

Puzzlingly, however, reported rates of social support for counterinsurgents are consistently strong, even during long-standing contentious campaigns and even in contexts in which the counterinsurgents have had little success against insurgents. For instance, despite wins and losses, survey questions in Afghanistan consistently show over 90% support for the armed forces over the past eight years (from 2007, according to Asia Foundation [2013], for example),[2] and the rates are relatively uniform across the country (Asia Foundation 2013, 39). Colombia, the case we study in this paper, also displays surprisingly high rates of support for counterinsurgents, even in insurgent strongholds. The

1. While modern counterinsurgency may differ, since insurgents fight for the status quo and use a faith-based approach, "much of classical counterinsurgency remains" (Kilcullen 2006, 124–25).

2. Wording the question as "trust" produces a level of support consistent with the Colombian case, below, and also remains consistent over time and across regions (ATR Consulting 2014, 3).

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Americas Barometer–Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey has found high levels of trust in the military over time—almost 70%—and with low variance despite substantial setbacks and public scandals (see fig. 1). We show uniformity in responses, even in guerrilla-controlled and coca-producing regions, where the military has fared worst (presumably due in part to the population's noncooperation).

In short, prevailing theories anticipate variation in social support across counterinsurgencies, but reported support for counterinsurgents is consistently strong, even when insurgents have been militarily successful. What accounts for this discrepancy? There are many possible explanations. Perhaps these long-standing counterinsurgency theories are incorrect, and insurgency requires less social support than thought (e.g., Leites and Wolf 1970, 45) or, perhaps individuals *are* supportive of these forces, maybe due to low expectations of force effectiveness (e.g., Vincent, Eles, and Vasiliev 2010, 119).

An important component of the explanation, however, may be that individuals have incentives to falsify their reported rate of social support. We posit that, when states seek to measure social support among the population, individuals have incentives to default to standard supportive answer in response to direct questions. Individuals who rely on insurgents to protect them and who engage in illicit activities should be both unsupportive of counterinsurgents and, we theorize, hesitant to reveal that information, suspecting that counterinsurgents can use it against them. Preference falsification is likely to be acute in these areas. However, certain survey questions offer indirect methods of expressing support, concealing individuals' responses, and reducing pres-

sure and potentially fear. We posit that these questions allow individuals to deviate from standard answers, producing greater variation in social support. We test whether support that is reported using direct measures is consistently high and whether it is lower when reported using indirect measures, which would be consistent with our proposed causal chain. We expect to see these differences across measures, particularly in contexts where deviating from the expected response could affect respondents' lives or their livelihoods. Preference falsification may explain why consistently strong social support may be reported even in places where counterinsurgents are not succeeding militarily (which otherwise is inconsistent with dominant theories). We also theorize about systematic variation in incentives for preference falsification across conflict contexts.

To test the differences in social support for counterinsurgents in indirect and direct measures, we conducted a survey experiment in Colombia in May 2010, a canonical case of insurgency with cross-national variation in insurgent success, measuring support for state forces. We randomized assignment of direct and indirect question types, wherein the indirect question is a list experiment, a method used in other contexts to reduce pressure on respondents to falsify preferences due to fear of coercion or sanctioning (see Holbrook and Krosnick [2010] for a review).

We find differences between direct and indirect measures that are consistent with our theory and thus informative about the underlying social process of preference falsification potentially driving the puzzling deviations from prevailing theories. Respondents report lower levels of support for the military in the indirect measures than in the direct measures across all contexts. The difference is greatest in municipalities with guerrilla control and coca production. In these areas, individuals may not support the military because it does not protect or provide for them, but they may fear punishment for saying so from the state unless, as we expect, we use a measure that conceals individuals' responses. While we cannot directly test this mechanism with our experiment, we turn to qualitative evidence to confirm its plausibility. This study takes the first step toward showing that context, such as guerrilla control, but also individual characteristics, such as education, do not have the same correlation with support for the military when measured directly versus indirectly.

This paper proceeds as follows. The first section describes the contributions of this study. The second section examines current thinking on support for counterinsurgency. The third section establishes our analytical framework about preference falsification. The fourth section describes the selection of Colombia and shows qualitative evidence supportive of our theory. The fifth section presents the survey design
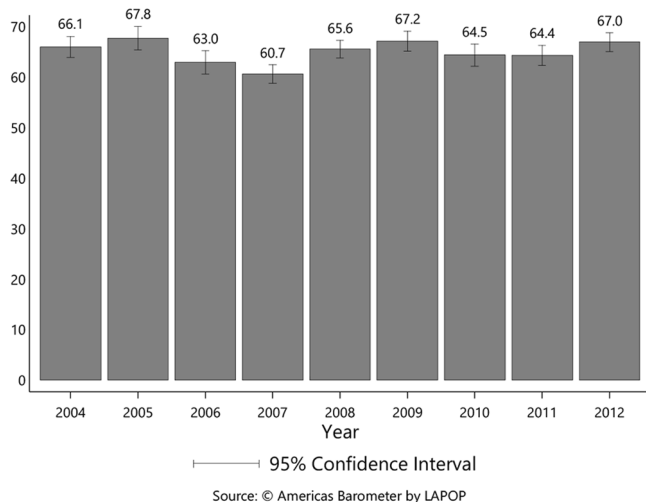

Figure 1. Trust in the Colombian military

and data analysis. The final section considers how to best assess support.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Our theory about preference falsification as the source of this surprising consistency across surveys and our experiment to test it are important for several reasons. First, if we find no indication of preference falsification, we would need to consider that the prevailing theories of counterinsurgency, summarized above, which hypothesize that social support for counterinsurgents is crucial for identifying insurgents, could be incorrect. Understanding whether that evidence is in line with the dominant approach to counterinsurgency has theoretical as well as practical implications: winning social support forms the basis for counterinsurgency policy in many states. Indeed, since 1945, insurgency has been the most common form of intrastate war (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010), so further assessing theories of how to combat it is crucial to secure peace in many places, like Ethiopia or India.

Next, if social support matters for counterinsurgents, understanding how to measure it is critical from a practical perspective. States and other organizations combating insurgencies—including foreign allies who often have even less information—need to measure their support; researchers analyzing attitudes toward armed actors to answer crucial questions related to the study of contentious politics also need to do so. Governments and other organizations conduct numerous surveys in conflict zones, often asking direct questions about social support, and rely on the results to assess attitudes toward counterinsurgents, predict outcomes, and determine counterinsurgency strategy—despite that these questions may not reveal that information.[3]

Due to the difficulties of measuring support for state forces, including potential for preference falsification, some scholars have suggested simply bracketing that measurement (Kalyvas [2006, 101], decribed in Lyall, Blair, and Imai [2013, 680]). Given the importance of information and use of survey measures, however, it seems worthwhile to use the most advanced measures possible to try to un-

derstand attitudes. We are among the first to do so. Prior academic studies that have ventured into conflict contexts have primarily focused on explaining support for insurgents rather than counterinsurgents (exceptions are Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov 2011; Blair, Imai, and Lyall 2014; Lyall et al. 2013).[4] Moreover, Colombia was sufficiently safe that we could ask both direct and indirect questions, testing our theory, which has not been done before during civil conflict. That is, this is the first survey experiment in a conflict context to compare direct and indirect measures (about counterinsurgents or, more commonly, insurgents),[5] systematically testing preference falsification there.

In addition, this study develops new measures of territorial control by armed actors in the context of insurgency, which may be independently useful to those studying asymmetric conflict. It also allows us to test our second contribution: in addition to assessing a general theory of preference falsification, we are also able to test the conditions under which the divergence between support measured directly and indirectly (potentially representing private beliefs and public attitudes) is the largest. Our central contribution is not only in showing that the two diverge but also in explaining variation in their divergence, advancing our understanding of preference falsification in conflict.

If the evidence backs our theory in Colombia, and holds across countries in future work, indirect questions should become common on the many surveys conducted by states and those seeking to study them (e.g., Kilcullen 2010, 41, 57–58). With this change, governments and their allies could estimate where and when support is collapsing, when populations are switching sides, even detect when battlefield conditions might shift. Preferences also may be detectable to scholars before "surprising" outcomes take place. With these measures, studies could better identify whether processes of public preference revelation or preference change drive these shifts.

SUPPORT FOR COUNTERINSURGENTS

Prevailing theories of counterinsurgency argue that support for counterinsurgents systematically varies across contexts of the insurgency: specifically, in regions dependent on insurgent control or involvement in illicit economies, counterin-

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3. The Asia Foundation's Afghan survey, conducted by ATF Consulting and sponsored by USAID, is an example of such a measure. News stories, analyses, and even testimony to the US Congress rely on the numbers in these surveys to estimate whether the government has established control and whether it is accepted by the population (e.g., Christy 2014; House of Representatives 2014). Even those who caution against using metrics like these recognize the need to estimate support and suggest drawing on a variety of measures—many of which are not easily available (Kilcullen 2009, 49).

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4. Work on insurgents includes Blair et al. (2013), Fair et al. (2010), and Fair et al. (2016).

5. It is likely too dangerous in some of these contexts (even illegal) to ask direct questions. Lyall et al. (2013), for this reason, compare different indirect measures. Studies outside of conflict compare direct and indirect measures on sensitive topics (e.g., Aronow et al. 2015; Rosenfeld, Imai, and Shapiro 2015).

surgent support may be lower because the military is a potential threat to life and livelihood. In this section, we draw on the literature on territorial control and insurgent success, showing how these factors may relate to individuals' preferences, and then we hypothesize in the next section that they may also affect preference falsification.

Control is crucial in asymmetric conflict. State forces are militarily stronger by definition, and so insurgents seek to conceal themselves within the population while counterinsurgents seek information to reveal them (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). Each side therefore requires collaboration from the population for military success, which depends on and reinforces control (Kalyvas 2006, 118–24). When collaborators work with armed actors, they may receive rewards but also violent punishment as a deterrent for defection. Individuals thus collaborate when they view the controlling side as capable (Kalyvas 2006, 89–104; also Magaloni et al. 2017; Olson 1993).

In areas dependent on insurgents for survival—including the provision of security, public goods, and social services, where insurgents supplant the state—support for counterinsurgents is likely to be lower. Counterinsurgents may disrupt stability in these contexts. While some individuals may be committed to one side, the majority may "simply want security, peace, and prosperity and will swing to support the side that appears most likely to prevail and to meet these needs" (Kilcullen [2009, 66], drawing on more instrumental ideas from counterinsurgency theory, even Leites and Wolf [1970]). A similar logic operates in areas dependent on illicit activity, predominantly drug trafficking, where insurgents or other illegal armed actors tend to help create conditions for the economy to flourish (e.g., Tickner, García, and Arreaza 2011). Indeed, some cite this as a reason not to deploy a counter-narcotics program when trying to win territory in a counterinsurgency: eradicating crops may alienate the population, increase support for the insurgents, and thus weaken counterinsurgent efforts (Kilcullen 2009, 63).

We address the correlation between insurgent control and illicit activity empirically below, but we note here that they often operate together. In contexts of insurgent control and illicit activity, moreover, states usually interact with the population mainly through the military and police, often negatively, further reducing support for counterinsurgents (e.g., Lerman and Weaver [2014] in the US context, and supported by qualitative evidence in the Colombian case below). Some may receive goods or services from the state; these are often less available in insurgent-controlled areas.

Other contextual factors may be relevant for counterinsurgent support. For instance, territories with shifting levels of control may see varying levels of social support. Once the military moves into a region with insurgent control or illicit activity, it disrupts the illegal organization. In areas of contested control, distinguished by active conflict between the sides (Kalyvas 2006, 118–24), social support may look different. Individuals may lean toward the side that has been providing services or they may lean toward the side they anticipate is more likely to win and then to provide services (e.g., Leites and Wolf 1970; World Bank 2011). The government is often militarily stronger, and so side switching could happen where insurgent control becomes contested (e.g., Lyall and Wilson 2009; Stoll 1993). However, counterinsurgents could lose support in these regions because they tend to have more casualties and collateral damage.[6] The expectation in contested contexts is thus less definitive.

While we focus primarily on expected differences in social support across counterinsurgency contexts, and incentives to falsify preferences across contexts, the literature on conflict has identified other factors that may affect support. These include individual beliefs about the legitimacy of states' tactics and goals, participation in combat, victimization, and individual characteristics not related to combat, including education, gender, and socioeconomic status. These results come from surveys of rebel support and surveys outside the conflict context, often surveys in the United States on attitudes about foreign insurgencies more broadly (e.g., Baum and Groeling 2010; Blair et al. 2013; Brooks and Valentino 2011; Fair, Shapiro, and Malhotra 2010; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/6; Mueller 1971). The factors shaping support in these studies may thus be quite different from those that motivate support for counterinsurgents in conflict contexts (a point made by Lyall et al. [2013] with regard to blame for casualties, for example). Nonetheless, they could change support for counterinsurgents, and so we include those we can capture, and we examine differences across the measures of support for these variables, too.

HIDING SUPPORT?

We posit that individuals falsifying their preferences drives consistently high survey support for counterinsurgents and, specifically, that preference falsification systematically varies by context in counterinsurgency. We expect to find support

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6. Although the attribution of casualties, and whether they affect support, may be conditional on perceived success and ideological closeness with combatants; in different cases, see Condra and Shapiro (2012), Gelpi et al. (2005/6) (US surveys), and Lyall et al. (2013).

for the prevailing theories of counterinsurgency, especially less support in areas of control by insurgents, in indirect measures.

Initially, we examine whether preference falsification could be consistent with the evidence on support for counterinsurgents overall. Driven by social desirability, or even fear, individuals may over- or underreport their support for coercive actors, especially when asked directly by surveyors potentially affiliated with the state. This "preference falsification," a specific form of lying, aims to manipulate others' perceptions about one's attitudes but also produces personal discomfort (Kuran 1995, 4–5). Based on the ideas above that individuals seek to survive and thrive during counterinsurgency, we expect that better provision of order and other public goods (now and in the future) shapes support for each side. However, we posit that individuals filter their expressions of support depending on who will receive that information to avoid social sanctioning or danger.

We therefore have expectations for how support for the counterinsurgents varies. We expect that support varies by counterinsurgency context but in ways that are not detectable by the standard direct questions, only indirect questions. Work about territorial control and success in insurgency suggests that certain variables may shape preferences, and we hypothesize that those variables also affect preference falsification. Specifically, in areas under insurgent control or involved in illicit economies, support for counterinsurgents may be lower because these forces pose a potential threat to life and livelihood (see above)—but, we hypothesize, revealing such attitudes to the counterinsurgents is also dangerous. While respondents may have fewer reasons to support counterinsurgents (and instead back insurgents who provide services or protect illegal industries), they also have incentives to falsify their preferences to appear to support counterinsurgents.

The conditions are essential: we define "insurgent control," including in Colombia, as dominant but not total insurgent control. Rarely are there "no go" zones for the military in insurgencies, where civilians supporting insurgents would expect to be entirely safe from military punishment (because these asymmetrical conflicts feature governments with greater repressive capacity but less information; e.g., Berman and Matanock 2015). Even in areas "controlled" by the rebel group individuals can expect the military to monitor reported support and punish pro-insurgent responses. Across contexts of insurgency, then, individuals can usually identify the "correct" answer when asked about support for the military, specifically depending on audience, and they have incentives to provide that answer. Perceived links to the government—as in our survey—can increase social pressure and fear of punishment further.[7] When the audience is linked to the state, individuals in insurgent-controlled areas have the strongest incentive to express support for the military—even falsifying their preferences if necessary to avoid identifying themselves as potential collaborators with insurgents or participants in illegal activity—at least when the questions are direct.[8] However, we argue that the incentives change if the questions conceal their responses.

Other contextual factors may also be relevant for counterinsurgent support, as described above, but predictions about preference falsification are less clear. For instance, territories with shifting levels of control may see shifting levels of support as individuals assess which side is most likely to deliver security and other services or which is responsible for damage. It is also possible that individuals in these contexts falsify their preferences at even higher rates, perhaps knowing the state could easily target them in these areas in which it is active. But they may also feel less pressure to do so because much of their support for one side or the other can also be directly revealed by the conflict. We thus do not have strong expectations about preference falsification in these contexts.

Testing preference falsification

In testing these hypotheses about preference falsification, we draw on different measures that vary in their ability to protect anonymity. Different methods of measuring individual preferences may be associated with differing degrees of falsification, potentially over- or underrepresenting support. We posit that providing better response protection may reduce pressure in counterinsurgency contexts.[9] Expressing preferences that differ from the standard response, if one exists, should not be so worrisome when individuals' responses are concealed. Manipulating only whether the measures conceal responses, then, should allow individuals

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7. An alternative hypothesis would be that, especially in areas of insurgent control, individuals fear expressing support for counterinsurgents because insurgents may punish them. Given the scope conditions discussed in this section, we theorize that these individuals have much more to fear from the military learning their true preferences in this case (and we test the hypothesis). If these conditions were different, the audience gaining information could be the insurgents, and individuals may adapt their answers accordingly (something future work should test in other cases).

8. Communal concerns about retribution, as opposed to individual, are less likely to factor into preference falsification in this case because the military appears to know which municipalities are guerrilla controlled (as evidenced by the Espada de Honor program; see the methods section).

9. We draw on work on measurement of falsified preferences before revolutions, another context in which surprises abound, in developing this testing strategy (Kuran 1995).

to deviate from the norm, perhaps producing differences in expressed support. The effects may be especially large depending on which side respondents perceive to be watching them, as well as how well known a "correct" response is. When collecting data about individual preferences, studies tend to use anonymous surveys (e.g., Blumenthal 1972), but respondents still hide their preferences in these surveys when they do not believe that their answers will be truly anonymous and anticipate punishment; however, more concealed measures seem to better predict behavior (Kuran 1995).

Hypotheses

Drawing on this analytical framework, we generally expect that individuals have incentives to report consistently strong support for the counterinsurgents, the perceived "correct" response in a survey tied to the government, if asked directly. We expect that support varies to some extent, however, and that by providing a concealed response, we can detect systematic differences. So, consistent with decreasing incentives for preference falsification,

> **H1.** We expect high levels of support for the military, with little variance, when we use direct measures that do not conceal individuals' responses, and lower levels of support for the military when we look to "indirect" measures that conceal individuals' responses.

Moreover, support but also preference falsification may vary by context, if the dominant counterinsurgency theory is correct. Therefore,

> **H2.** We expect evidence most consistent with preference falsification in regions of insurgent control.

> **H3.** We expect evidence most consistent with preference falsification in regions of involvement in illicit economies.[10]

Specifically, we should see the difference described in hypothesis 1, but even more pronounced in the regions stated in hypotheses 2 and 3.

To measure support for the military with a concealed response, we use a list experiment, a method designed to overcome social desirability bias. Compared to direct questions, these indirect questions reveal much higher reported engagement in socially condemned attitudes and behavior,

including racism in the United States (e.g., Holbrook and Krosnick 2010). While it is normally used to increase the population estimate of an undesirable statement, we apply it to decrease the population estimate of a desirable statement. Half of the experimental sample receives a list of control items, the other half receives the same list with an item of interest added, and respondents in each sample are asked how many items they support. The difference in means between the two groups represents the level of support for the item of interest in the sample. If the survey is designed correctly, no individual reveals his or her support for the item of interest, which would occur if he or she answered all or none, and the experiment identifies support for our item of interest only in subsamples.[11]

We chose a list experiment for several reasons. First, existing work demonstrates that list experiments produce similar results as other survey experiments, but each has its own strengths and weaknesses: for example, endorsement experiments rely on subtle signals that may be hard to compare across regions, while list experiments rely on aggregation across communities due to the difference in means comparisons (Blair et al. 2014). Since we expected support to differ by community depending on territorial control, but we wanted to examine results for municipalities throughout the country, the list experiment was a better fit. Moreover, since we were working with a survey firm in Colombia that had not conducted an experiment, we piloted different experimental types with them, and this one made the most sense. Pretesting also helped ensure that the sensitive item did not stand out in comparison to control items and that respondents would not choose all or none of the items in the list, which could reveal their preferences (and, indeed, our list passed the tests available on this, as described below). The relative simplicity of list experiments compared to conjoint experiments, for example, also helped ensure smooth randomization in paper questionnaires.[12] Finally, list experiments are only useful if respondents want to convey the answer just without identifying themselves as conveying it. The premise of preference falsification theory is that individuals

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10. Other contextual factors may also be relevant for counterinsurgent support, but their predictions about preference falsification are less clear, and so we add controls but not hypotheses about them.

11. Methodological advances have improved the design and analysis of list experiments (Blair and Imai 2012; Corstange 2009; Glynn 2013; Holbrook and Krosnick 2010; Imai 2011).

12. Conjoint experiments are also better designed for attitudes that can be expressed by rating alternatives that are comparable, like politicians' attributes, which is not the main focus of this paper; even a comparison between different armed actors, rating legal and illegal organizations, may induce cognitive dissonance (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2013). We initially sought to measure support for the FARC in a separate experiment, but, unlike this experiment, it showed design effects. Measuring support for multiple sides without cognitive dissonance would be a nice extension to this study.

would like to communicate their attitudes but fear doing so (Kuran 1995). A list experiment is therefore a good fit.

SUPPORT FOR THE MILITARY IN THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT

The Colombian context is useful for assessing our intuitions qualitatively and testing our hypotheses quantitatively. Colombia has long struggled with political violence, and the current civil conflict dates back to 1964. The insurgents are left-wing guerrillas, notably the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The Colombian army, alongside the Colombian national police, has led the counterinsurgency (Borrero 2006). The military has become significantly stronger over the course of the counterinsurgency, although it has also gained some civilian oversight. The military has both worked with right-wing paramilitaries against the guerrillas and has targeted these paramilitaries (e.g., Dudley 2004). We study Colombia because it is a canonical case of insurgency for which the existing survey evidence shows consistently strong directly reported support for the military; it also has different counterinsurgency contexts across which we can examine support.

Consistency in reported support in existing surveys

The Colombian case provides conditions to test the analytical framework. First, individuals consistently report strong support for the military over time and across areas in Colombia (the "correct" answer that respondents have incentives to give when asked directly by state-linked enumerators). Most surveys ask about "trust" in the military. These direct measures indicate that, during the last decade, trust has been sustained at almost 70% with low variance over time, despite setbacks and scandals in the counterinsurgency (see fig. 1).[13] Our data also show that these responses hold across different areas of control. This consistently strong support is reinforced by media—especially widely watched television news—that primarily covers spectacular military operations and increasing safety (rather than abuse) (García-Sánchez and Wills 2011; Gutiérrez 2006). The media's consistently positive message about the military may add pressure to individuals to report support for the military, perceived as the socially desirable view.[14]

Respondents may also assume that those conducting surveys on the military are linked to the government, which potentially contributes to this consistency in directly reported support. Many surveys are required to disclose who is funding the research and how the researchers will use the data. For example, our respondents were told that these data may be used by government agencies in the United States,[15] which has been allied with the Colombian government, so this may support beliefs that the military may have access to this research (despite our assurances of anonymity). Individuals' doubts and concerns about possible punishment may therefore shape their responses to the direct questions. The military, as discussed above, is able to operate in all regions of Colombia; there are no "no go" zones for the military, where individuals would expect to be entirely safe from sanction. Thus, in Colombia, there is a clear baseline establishing the "correct" response when asking individuals directly about their support for counterinsurgents, and, in our survey, the military is tied to the survey data, matching the condition that allow us to apply the analytical framework.

Qualitative assessment of support across contexts

Security in Colombia has improved significantly over the past decades, so it is possible that the majority of the population simply supports the military. But there are convincing reasons to believe that support for the military has varied over time and across regions, suggesting that these directly reported rates are influenced by preference falsification. The first is that human rights violations have occurred that should shift support. Though security has increased, especially since the 2000 US-funded Plan Colombia counterinsurgency initiative, the military has violated human rights during their campaign (e.g., Dudley 2004, 52, 126).[16] In fact, serious abuse took place just before our survey: in February 2010, with mounting pressure from the president to eradicate guerilla forces, army units executed civilians falsely labeled as guerrilla combatants.

The second reason to believe support for the military varies across regions is qualitative evidence about attitudes in differing contexts of control within Colombia.[17] Under guerrilla control, these sources identify popular distrust of

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13. Our measure presents a slightly higher hurdle for both direct and indirect questions—supporting more autonomy for the military in conducting the counterinsurgency—but, as we show in the data section, our direct measure indicates almost as much support as these other direct measures do.

14. Research has demonstrated that regularly exposing individuals to a majority or dominant view leads them to "accept" or to silence their disagreement with that position (e.g., Nemeth 1986).

15. This was a condition of our funders and a requirement of our institutional review boards.

16. The state has granted the military leeway in managing security issues, in exchange for the military's pledge not to intervene in politics, although the military's leeway has waned over time (Leal 2010).

17. We use this section to examine our theoretical expectations with qualitative evidence before presenting the evidence from our survey experiment (similar to Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012).

the military, apparently driven by the close connection between communities and insurgents. These communities see insurgents as shaping cooperation and productively regulating local economies (Ferro and Uribe 2002; García and Aramburo 2011; León 2005): "[Guerrillas] sponsored peasant associations, unions and all types of social organizations. They promoted cocoa commercialization, and they lent money to peasants to start their businesses. Individuals not belonging to the groups organized by guerrillas were social outsiders" (León 2005, 202). Insurgent governance distanced these communities from the state and especially the military. In addition, in insurgent-controlled regions, popular distrust of the military is not only a by-product of positive relations with the guerrillas but also a consequence of negative relations with the military. The military labeled such areas "subversive" or simply the "enemy" (Ramírez 2001). An army officer deployed in a municipality controlled by guerrillas noted, "I used to tell my soldiers: 'you have to hate these people, civilians are our enemy'" (León 2005, 213). Outside of these areas, qualitative sources describe closer community relations with the military (León 2005; Madarriaga 2006; Medina 1990).

Coca cultivation also leads to lower levels of support for the military, according to these accounts. Both insurgents and paramilitaries are deeply involved in coca cultivation (Camacho 2006; Medina 1990; Tickner et al. 2011). Over the past decade, the Colombian government has been cracking down on coca cultivation with increasing success, an unpopular pursuit (Grossman and Mejía 2008). State institutions are disliked and provide only minimal services in these regions (García-Sánchez 2014). An ethnography of the *cocaleros* (coca growers) shows that popular distrust of the Colombian state—including the military—is high in regions with coca cultivation; these attitudes are driven by perceptions of government institutions as unresponsive and repressive of their economic mainstay (Ramírez 2001).

Finally, existing testimonies and qualitative analyses indicate that the population shifts its loyalties toward the military during active counterinsurgency operations (Aranguren 2001; León 2005). Carlos Castaño, a paramilitary commander, summarizes these shifts: "[People] choose to join the group exercising the most power" (Aranguren 2001, 144). Once the military's strategy started to gain ground, army units were able to regain control of municipalities. In many of these areas, despite close community links with insurgents, individuals grew supportive of the military. "At the beginning not a single peasant talked [to the military], it was like if they were an occupation army. As the days passed and the military continued its patrols in the area—they went with the peasants to harvest their crops or they got involved into

community activities—people started to trust. . . . Soldiers started to receive pieces of paper with names and information on the places where guerrillas were hiding supplies and weapons" (León 2005, 254). Our analytical framework did not have definitive hypotheses on these areas, but the case suggests strong support and little preference falsification in areas with active operations.

SURVEY EXPERIMENT ON MEASURES OF SUPPORT FOR THE MILITARY

In order to test our hypotheses, we employed a survey experiment. We randomized whether individuals received a survey comprising an indirect or direct measure of support for the military, so that we could analyze counterinsurgent support reported with and without concealed response.

We selected the survey sample of 1,900 adult men and women from the noninstitutionalized Colombian population, including a nationally representative sample and an oversample of conflict regions that we identified by their level of violence. Forty-five municipalities in the six regions were chosen. Because we oversampled conflict regions, we apply weights to all our observations to achieve national representativeness.[18] A survey firm, the Centro Nacional de Consultoría (CNC), conducted the face-to-face interviews in May 2010. As discussed, our grant stipulated that the survey's consent script note that actors including US government agencies would have access to the anonymized data; we leveraged this condition in the experiment's design.

For the experiment, we divided the sample into several randomized subsets to answer different indirect and direct questions so as not to bias the results through priming. The list experiment was run on 1,423 individuals, of whom 474 received the treatment and 949 received the control. From among the control group, 474 respondents also received the direct question.[19]

Variables

The analysis focuses on the difference between direct and indirect measures of support for the military. The direct question asked: "Some people believe that the Colombian military forces should have more freedom to defend the nation in the way they see fit. Do you think that the Colombian military forces should have more freedom to defend the nation in the way they see fit?"[20] The initial re-

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18. The appendix details the sampling frame and sampling design.

19. We had just one point of randomization. We also varied the order of items in the list.

20. Spanish wording is in the appendix.

sponse was a binary yes/no, matching the indirect question in that the list experiment can only produce an indicator of support within the sample.

Unlike other survey questions that ask respondents the extent to which they trust or support the military, we framed the question as an opinion about whether the military should have more autonomy to conduct counterinsurgency. This framing represents a more concrete question for a country facing internal conflict.[21] In these contexts, militaries tend to have positions on how to conduct counterinsurgency, as they are in the midst of such a campaign. These positions are often public, and they may differ from civilian leaders' positions. In the Colombian case, those close to the military have criticized mechanisms to limit its autonomy, while other organizations, often outside the government, demand more civilian design and oversight (Borrero 2006). Thus, our measure captures active support for the military as situated in an existing debate. In other measures of "support," the meaning respondents ascribe could be anything from feeling sympathy for military officers to wishing the military would execute a coup. While the framing may produce lower responses overall, we are interested in the difference between the direct and indirect measures of support, not the absolute level.

The indirect question is a list experiment, asking:

I am going to present to you a list of four things [three in the control group] that some people support and others do not. Please listen to these things and tell me HOW MANY you support. Do not tell me WHICH of these things you support, only how many of them you support.

The South American nations creating a central bank.

The assessment of a special tax to finance the expansion of the parks and green spaces in your neighborhood.

The conservative ideology gaining more influence in the Colombian society.

The military forces having more freedom to defend the nation in the way they see fit [excluded in the control group].[22]

The response is the number of items the respondent supported—zero to three for the control group, and zero to four for the treatment group—not the particular items. We examined existing surveys on policy to generate the control items on the list. We sought items that were topics of debate in public forums and somewhat congruent with our experimental item, so it would not stand out, and we selected the final set of items based on negative correlation within the control list (some, for instance, should appeal to partisans of one political side and others to the other political side). The design helps ensure that respondents will not support all or none of the items, which could otherwise reveal their preferences (tested below). The phrasing of the treatment item in the indirect question was the same as the direct question, so the measures are comparable.

The main independent variables of interest are contextual. The data consist of indicators of armed actor territorial control, variables capturing military actions perpetrated by armed actors, and a measure of coca cultivation at the municipal level. Our measure of armed actor territorial control is based on Kalyvas's (2006) insight that control produces different patterns of violence (which we can observe)—specifically, that contesting control necessitates the use of violence by multiple actors, but then that violence decreases once one combatant group consolidates control. We use longitudinal information on political violence for each armed actor from 2002 to 2009 in every Colombian municipality to perform semiparametric group-based modeling (Nagin 2005);[23] thereby we can identify clusters of municipalities on different trajectories of violence, perpetrated by different armed actors, and combine the trajectories to identify the status of control for each municipality (García-Sánchez 2009).[24] This measure is reliable as it is based on a source with standardized data collection rules, integrates all armed actors, and respects the temporal dynamic of the Colombian conflict.[25] We also ran various robustness checks, including examining this measure against inclusion in the Espada de Honor program, a military initiative that targeted insurgent-controlled municipalities in 2010.[26] We code contested territories as municipalities with military operations

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21. In countries without an internal conflict, this type of framing could be interpreted as external threats, but our understanding at this time in this context was that was clearly interpreted as the internal threat of insurgency, the main threat perceived to people's security and well-being.

22. The items were rotated when read. Spanish wording is in the appendix.

23. We coded these data for this period prior to our survey in 2010 from monthly reports on violence by the nongovernmental Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP).

24. This method is used in other disciplines for such sorting (e.g., Griffiths and Chavez 2004); we describe the procedure, and present the cases of nonstate control, in the online appendix.

25. Other measures are also not available for each municipality, they rely on multiple different sources, and they sometimes capture only guerrilla control (e.g., the Espada de Honor program).

26. Results from these checks are in the online appendix.

(a violent event between the military and an armed group in the prior year);[27] we code coca cultivation as municipalities with hectares of the crop in the prior year (UNDC 2010).[28] The summary statistics are in the online appendix (table SI.0a), as are balance tables that include demographics, political affiliation, number of victims of violence that the respondent knew well, and whether the respondent had been displaced by violence (table SI.0b).[29]

Methods

Our primary method of analysis consists of simple comparisons of means. In order to analyze the list experiment, we compare the mean of the control list (with three items) with the mean of the treatment list (four items), and then report the difference; this is the proportion of respondents who support the military in the sample or subsample (Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997). We then compare the comparison of means for the list experiment (which provides an aggregate mean for the sample) with the mean for the direct question. We do so across several subsamples, such as areas controlled by different actors. We can reduce our confidence intervals with more sophisticated methods, and we do report the results from other tests in the next section; however, these comparisons of means are the most conservative tests of our hypotheses and the easiest to interpret. In analyzing not only whether the different measures show different rates of support, but also whether they have different predictors, we run models in which each variable is interacted with the treatment, which produces estimates of the correlates of support measured indirectly, and compare those to models of direct support.[30]

Aside from randomization of treatment, the data must also meet the assumption of no design effect (for example, they do not experience a floor or ceiling effect) and ours

pass the available tests.[31] To believe the validity of the analysis, they had to pass these tests, and the treatment item must not alter support for the controls (Blair and Imai 2012).

Results of the survey experiment

We examine whether the direct measure shows consistently strong support for the military and whether the indirect measure shows lower levels of support. So we first compare the direct versus indirect estimates for all municipalities.

The results overall are consistent with preference falsification. First, consistently strong support for the military reported in the direct measure across all counterinsurgency contexts (see table 1, as well as fig. SI.2 in the online appendix)—the majority support the military (although support is a bit lower than the LAPOP results due to the demanding phrasing of the question, discussed above)—and, second, support is much lower when measured indirectly than directly (31.3% compared to 52.8%) (fig. 2). The difference is statistically significant (table 1 reports the difference of proportion tests). Across contexts, the mean for direct measure is always higher than that of the indirect measure, and the maximum variance of the former is 6.4 percentage points. By contrast, the variance of the means from the indirect measure is 44.1 percentage points, due to the low rate reported under insurgent control (4.1) and the high rate reported under contestation (48.2). Taken together, these results are what we expected.

A potential risk was that list experiments might reveal a reduction of support not only for the military but also across the board, perhaps because respondents forget items or report fewer items when offered a longer list. To address this risk, we used the same methods to ask about the justification of the use of violence against the armed forces, for which respondents should be unlikely to express support publicly, even if they do not support the military. Using the list experiment, we find greater support than with the direct question (8.8 and 7.1 means, respectively), although the difference is not statistically significant. It thus does not appear that all list experiments in Colombia produce lower rates of support, irrespective of the issue, rejecting this alternative explanation.

With respect to our subhypotheses, we see consistently strong support among respondents for counterinsurgents using the direct measure in all areas, as just discussed, and

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27. Even in municipalities contested by guerrillas and paramilitaries, we find that the military is always involved in our case, so ongoing military operations is an appropriate measure. As a robustness check, we also examined conflict-related homicides. The results are similar.

28. More information on how we constructed these variables is available in the appendix.

29. Across the list experiment, and over our experiment (direct versus control), only gender predicts placement in the treatment group at the 0.05 confidence level. The gender indicator is not statistically significant in a simple regression on the direct question, so it should have limited bias.

30. This analysis is the same as the one used in Holbrook and Krosnick (2010); Blair and Imai (2012) and Imai (2011) develop a more sophisticated form of such analysis, but it adds significantly to the complexity of interpretation and is not necessary for this paper, which has relatively simple testable implications.

31. We used a statistical test that assesses whether an individual's response to the nonsensitive items changes depending upon the respondent's treatment status, which yields a Bonferroni-corrected *p*-value of 1 (Blair and Imai 2012). There is thus no evidence of this design effect in the test.

Table 1. Estimated Proportion of Support for the Military: Direct versus Indirect Measures

	Subsample	Proportion of Sample	Direct Estimate	List Experiment Estimate	Difference in Proportion of Support (Direct vs. List)
Basic comparison	Whole sample	100%	51.87% (2.2)	31.33% (4.7)[†††]	−20.54[**]
Control	State	56.11%	53.42% (2.9)	36.09% (6.2)[†††]	−17.33
	Paramilitaries	34.32%	48.20% (3.8)	29.61% (8.0)[†††]	−18.58
	Guerrilla	9.58%	54.60% (6.3)	4.14% (13.4)	−50.46[**]
Coca	No coca	76.47%	52.15% (.3)	35.27% (5.4)[†††]	−16.88[*]
	Coca	23.53%	51.04% (.4)	17.13% (9.3)[†]	−33.91[**]
Military operations	No operations	71.21%	51.83% (2.5)	24.84% (5.4)[†††]	−26.99[***]
	Operations	28.79%	51.98% (4.2)	48.20% (9.0)[†††]	−3.8

Note. † = denotes the statistical significance of the estimated difference between the treatment and control groups within the list experiment, reflecting the estimate of support for that subsample, and indicating the level of support for the military in the indirect measure. * = denotes the statistical significance of the difference between support for the military measured directly versus indirectly with a difference-of-proportions tests.

[†] p < .10.
[††] p < .05.
[†††] p < .01.
[*] p < .10.
[**] p < .05.
[***] p < .01.

much weaker support using the indirect measure in areas of insurgent control and illicit activity, as expected. Table 1 shows that municipalities with guerrilla control and coca cultivation have lower levels of support according to the indirect measure (also see fig. SI.2). Comparing the direct and indirect questions across territorial control by different armed actors,[32] state-controlled municipalities show results similar to the overall sample: support for the military is higher (53%) compared to the indirect question (36%), although it is not statistically significant in this smaller sample. In paramilitary-controlled municipalities, the confidence intervals overlap, and the difference is not statistically significant. The relatively narrow confidence intervals suggest that the number of respondents is not driving the result; rather, those in paramilitary-controlled municipalities seem to report similar levels of support in both measures. Finally, as expected, in guerrilla-controlled municipalities, support reported for the military is 40–50 points lower in the indirect measure compared to the direct measure, and the difference is statistically significant (95% level). These findings, too, match our expectations.

The results for areas with illicit activity are also consistent with our expectations: as shown in table 1, municipalities with coca cultivation have especially low levels of

support for counterinsurgents in the indirect measure (also see fig. SI.2).[33] In the municipalities without coca cultivation, there is a significant difference in the proportion of support for the military between the direct and indirect questions (means of 51.1 and 35.2, respectively), but, as expected, the difference is larger in municipalities with coca cultivation (51.0% and 17.1%, respectively).

To test whether support for the military—measured by either the direct or indirect measure—increases with operations to retake areas controlled by insurgents (which would be consistent with the qualitative evidence presented above), we examine municipalities with military operations. Table 1 (and fig. SI.2) shows that respondents' reported support is lower in municipalities without military operations in the direct compared to the indirect measure, and the difference is statistically significant, as in the overall and state-controlled comparisons.[34] However, in municipalities with military operations, direct and indirect measures show similarly high levels of support for the military.[35] This finding

32. As discussed, we also generated these territorial variables–based data from 1988 to 2003, as opposed to 2002 to 2009, which is shown in a similar figure in the appendix.

33. Coca cultivation and armed-actor control are correlated, as discussed ($\chi^2(1) = 89.8$, $\mathrm{Pr} = 0.00$).

34. We also compared municipalities with conflict-related homicides instead, and the results are almost identical to these (although this measure correlates with military operations at 0.57).

35. Thinking of Kalyvas's theory (2006), we can also model contested regions as a fourth category compared to any level of control (see also nn. 26, 30). The results also hold (see fig. SI.5).
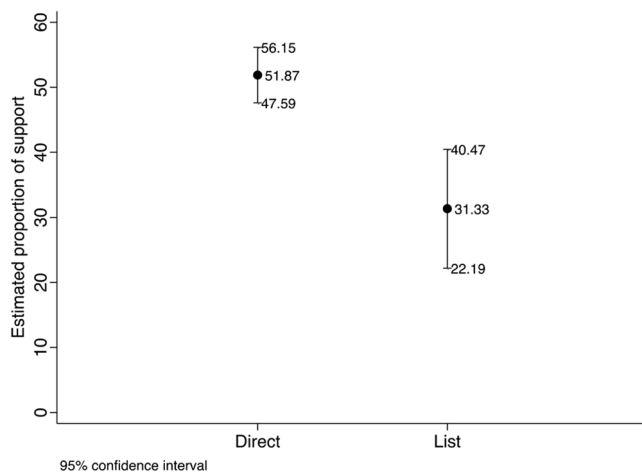
Figure 2. Estimated proportion of support for the military—direct versus indirect measures

suggests that, in contested areas, individuals will back the side expected to win.

In addition to these mean comparisons, we ran regression models, and we controlled for individual-level variables in some of these models.[36] In these models (shown without individual-level variables in table 2 and with them in the online appendix), we see persistent differences of context variables as predictors of support when captured by the direct and the indirect measures, as in the mean comparisons (table 1).[37] In particular, guerrilla control and coca cultivation have a negative, statistically significant effect on support as measured with the indirect question (table 2). And, as expected, none of these contextual-level variables have statistically significant effects on support as measured with the direct question. The fact that these contextual variables only predict variation in the indirect measure suggests that, at a minimum, the direct measure is very noisy (which could be due to preference falsification).

Individual-level variables also have different effects across the direct and indirect measures of support for the military. Although they are not tied to our theory, we also ran regression models controlling for individual characteristics. These models, presented in the appendix (tables SI.2 and SI.3, interpreted in table SI.4), include the following variables: age, education, gender, wealth, place of residence (urban vs. ru-

ral), party affiliation, being displaced by violence, and being a victim of violence. In the regression models of the direct measure, education (negative), right-wing party affiliation, and being displaced by violence (both positive) have statistically significant effects in most specifications (table SI.2 in the online appendix). Most other individual factors do not. We modeled the indirect measure by interacting all predictors with a binary indicator of treatment; the marginal effects obtained from combining each coefficient and the interaction coefficient indicate that gender (female) is negative and statistically significant in most specifications. Wealth (positive), urban (negative), and right-wing party affiliation (positive) were significant in some specifications (see especially table SI.4). This suggests that, with the exception of right-wing party affiliation, the statistically significant predictors of support measured directly (education) are different from those measured indirectly (gender, wealth, and urban).

These results could be tentatively interpreted to mean that more educated voters may be more likely to resist falsification by reporting varying levels of support for the military, even in the direct question, but that both groups

Table 2. Models of Support for the Military Demonstrate Different Predictors (Contextual Level)

	Direct Measure (DV)	Indirect Measure (DV)—Coefficients from Interaction[a]
Paramilitary control[b]	−.060	.002
	(.061)	(.103)
Guerrilla control[b]	.004	−.428***
	(.049)	(.111)
Military operations	−.001	.120
	(.041)	(.104)
Coca cultivations	.016	−.152*
	(.064)	(.089)
Constant	.534**	
	(.032)	
N	474	1,423

Note. Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by municipality. This model includes only context variables, but these results also hold in additional models that control for individual characteristics (presented in the online appendix, tables SI.2 and SI.3), which are discussed below, as well.

[a] To capture this, coefficients are the marginal effect of each variable when treatment is equal to 1. Based on an OLS model in which each of these variables is interacted with a binary indicator of treatment. The model, including all interactions, is displayed in the online appendix (table SI.1).

[b] State control is the baseline category.

* $p < .10$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$.

are protected by the indirect question. Our data shows that levels of support differ across measurement methods but also that predictors of support differ—not just based the context, as we theorize, but also based on individual characteristics. Future studies of social support for counterinsurgents, whether focused on context or individual characteristics, should therefore consider indirect measures. As a whole, these findings demonstrate the importance of further studying preference falsification.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Previous surveys use direct questions to measure popular support for counterinsurgents, but they often report consistently strong support, even in contexts where counterinsurgents are not faring well militarily. These survey results run contrary to dominant theories of counterinsurgency, which argue that counterinsurgents fare badly when they lack popular support, because they cannot effectively target insurgents without help from the community.

We posit that these theories may not be wrong but, rather, that the direct survey measures may suffer from preference falsification bias. To address this possibility, our study compares an indirect measure to a direct one. We find a persistent difference in the results yielded by the different measures of support. Direct survey questions consistently indicate strong support for the military, likely because individuals are uncertain their responses will remain anonymous, particularly in state-linked surveys, and so feel pressure to express support. In Colombia, for instance, individuals consistently report strong support for the military in direct measures, despite reasons to expect variation. Once respondents are provided indirect questions that protect their anonymity, they report lower support for counterinsurgents.

We also find that the difference is contingent on counterinsurgency context. These differences are largest in guerrilla-controlled and coca-cultivating municipalities. Support for the military is much lower in these contexts when measured with the indirect question than the direct question. Survival for the individuals living in these territories may depend on the order established by an illegal armed actor or its involvement in an illicit economy. We posit that these individuals support counterinsurgents less but fear for their safety should they reveal themselves as guerrilla sympathizers or illegal cultivators by stating that they do not support the military. Our list experiment, however, conceals individuals' true feelings and should therefore suffer from less preference falsification. The large differences in our estimates in these contexts are consistent with our theory.

While the paper focuses on showing differences in levels of reported support across measures, we also demonstrate

that the predictors of support vary when estimating support directly versus indirectly. Most studies of social support seek to identify its determinants, so the varied effects of potential predictors are important when deciding which measures to use.

Overall, our results suggest that civilians may indeed be more ambivalent in their support for counterinsurgents than their responses to direct survey questions indicate. Our work contributes to an explanation for why the military receives such consistently strong support in surveys, even in contexts where support should be lower: preference falsification, rather than strong support across these places where counterinsurgents are not faring well, is a plausible answer. Our central contribution, however, is not just in showing that the two measures diverge but also in explaining variation in their divergence across conflict contexts, which advances our understanding of incentives for preference falsification.

Finally, these results were derived from a counterinsurgency context with a strong government relative to the militant group. There are scope conditions, about asymmetric conflict in which state forces can operate in most areas but lack information, and wherein the population has an understanding of the expected response when asked about counterinsurgents, especially by state-linked surveys as described, that produce the specific hypotheses about the direction of falsification and its variation across conflict contexts. These conditions likely hold in other insurgencies, the most common form of civil conflict since 1945, which plague countries like Ethiopia and India. Testing this in other similar cases would, however, increase our confidence even further in the findings. Similar problems of estimating state social support also plague seemingly peaceful societies. States that face sudden revolutions, including Middle Eastern regimes during the Arab Spring and the former Soviet states during color revolutions, show consistently strong support in polls just prior to these "surprise" incidents. While some work has theorized that the revelation of preferences shifted as social pressures subsided in these cases (e.g., Kuran 1991, 1995), identifying spatial variation and using indirect measures would allow for further testing of those theories of preference falsification, potentially beyond counterinsurgency cases. The cases, of course, may vary to some extent from cases of counterinsurgency, but these tools may also be helpful to better explain them. These applications, too, merit further study.

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