

Rebel Governance in Civil War

Edited by Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir,
and Zachariah Mampilly



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This is the first book to examine and compare how rebels govern civilians during civil wars in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Drawing from a variety of disciplinary traditions, including political science, sociology, and anthropology, the book provides in-depth case studies of specific conflicts as well as comparative studies of multiple conflicts. Among other themes, the book examines why and how some rebels establish both structures and practices of rule; the role of ideology, cultural, and material factors affecting rebel governance strategies; the impact of governance on the rebel–civilian relationship; civilian responses to rebel rule; the comparison between modes of state and non-state governance to rebel attempts to establish political order; the political economy of rebel governance; and the decline and demise of rebel governance attempts.

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Introduction

Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly

“Civil war” occupies many different places within the popular and academic imaginations: Confederate generals doing battle with Lincoln’s army; Latin American revolutionaries waging war against right-wing dictators; African peasants fighting and dying in wars of profit, plunder, or liberation; European partisans warring over honor and nation; the Sunni Awakening transforming the Iraq war. The ubiquity of civil war, and its fundamental effects on the societies that experience it, suggests that it should be considered as much a part of the political landscape as the state system itself. At core, all civil wars are a battle for control between a government and its competitors over civilians and the territory upon which they reside. Investigating how such competitors interact with the populations they seek to control is elemental to our understanding of both the dynamics and consequences of civil war. This volume draws comparisons between a variety of recent and historical conflicts from around the globe in regards to a single dimension: the governance of civilians by armed groups.

When rebels secure territory, they must decide how they will interact with local residents. They can rob and rape them, they can recruit them, they can ignore them, or they can try to govern them – for better or worse. The choice a rebel group makes is always momentous for civilians. A surprisingly large number of rebel groups engage in some sort of governance, ranging from creating minimal regulation and informal taxation to forming popular assemblies, elaborate bureaucracies, schools, courts, and health clinics. Some also focus on organizing non-combatants for commercial pursuits. Civilians have their own interests and, although usually unarmed, often have unexpected influence over how they are governed. This book examines what rebels do when they decide to govern, why they do it, and how civilians respond.

Over the past decade, analysts have made important advances in furthering our understanding of civil war. Scholars have shed light on many aspects of

the relationship between rebels and civilians, including the mechanics of violence, recruitment, collaboration, and displacement.¹ Deploying a variety of methodological approaches and often braving difficult research environments, this scholarship moves us beyond broad generalizations and generic correlations to document and decipher the behavior of those engaging in protracted political violence. Many sacred cows have been slaughtered. Grand ideological explanations focusing on macro-level cleavages have been modified by approaches that emphasize the malleability of preferences. Broad economic interpretations concentrating on the material interests of actors have been reworked with more nuanced conceptions of human rationality. New studies revealing complex motivations and incentives driving political behavior have replaced earlier work that sought to position either incumbents or insurgents as purely moral or entirely immoral actors.

Although this research has advanced our understanding of several features of civil war, many aspects of the impact of war on civilians remain to be explored. In particular, evidence of the relations of insurgents and civilian populations in war zones has been scarce. In this book, we endeavor to advance the study of violent rebellions by focusing on a dimension of insurgent behavior that is not solely defined by the deployment of military force: governance, or the administration of civilian affairs. Although we think of insurgencies as continuously violent, in reality war-making is simultaneously exhilarating and mundane as conflicts start and stop in a syncopated rhythm. Civilians caught within warzones face periods of brutal violence punctuated by prolonged moments of tense calm during which they struggle to regain some semblance of normalcy. Rebels play a central role in defining how civilians live their lives during wartime not only through violence, but equally through the development of structures and practices of rule.

Civil war is the common condition for rebel governance. Though definitions vary, scholars generally agree that a civil war involves a protracted armed conflict that takes place within a recognized sovereign state between parties subject to a common authority at the onset of fighting (Kalyvas 2006). Civil war differs from several cognate phenomena such as riots, ethnic conflict not involving the state, domestic terrorism, coups, genocide, and purely criminal activities, though each of these may relate to a civil war in specific ways. Combatants may espouse a variety of ideological agendas, including those with economic, religious, or ethnic overtones. They also may engage in profit-motivated actions. But civil war is political because it involves parties that disagree over some fundamentally *political* aspect of the state. While rebels, by definition, break the laws of the state, they differ from criminal bandits who violate rules solely for profit or revenge.

¹ There is a vast literature that covers this terrain: recent additions include Mamdani (2001); Petersen (2001); Wood (2003, 2009); Kalyvas (2006); Weinstein (2007); Downs (2008); Ibáñez and Vélez (2008); Steele (2010); Arjona and Kalyvas (2011); Balcells (2011); Parkinson (2013); Viterina (2013).

Civilian collaboration is often *the* central immediate concern for the warring sides in a civil war, as writers have long recognized (Mao 1963; Guevara 1968; Ahmad 1982; Laqueur 1976). Civilians present rebels with both opportunities and challenges. They are an essential source of food, supplies, information, and recruits. But civilians' ties to the incumbent regime put rebels in constant danger of betrayal. The determinants of civilian support for rebels have frequently been debated. Recent scholarly trends have replaced ideology or cultural values as explanatory factors with coercion and material incentives (Weinstein 2007; Wood 2010; Kocher et al. 2011). But rebels cannot fight wars effectively while holding a gun to the head of every civilian, nor have financial rewards alone proven sufficient for ensuring civilian compliance.

By creating systems of governance, rebels seek to win over local populations – or at least dissuade them from actively collaborating with incumbents. Such governance may deploy existing ideological or cultural beliefs that increase identification with the insurgent cause. It may also provide goods and services that improve civilians' lives. At the same time, developing a governance capacity may also threaten existing authority structures and turn civilians against the rebellion. Rebel governance can, therefore, be a crucial factor in shaping the civilian–insurgent relationship. Insurgents who develop effective and legitimate governance systems can reap rewards, while those that fail often weaken their capacity to achieve their larger strategic objectives.

By casting a critical lens on this neglected aspect of civil war, the emerging field of rebel governance seeks to understand rule by insurgents who provide public goods and regulate conduct in areas they hold.² Conceptualized broadly as the set of actions insurgents engage in to regulate the social, political, and economic life of non-combatants during war, the study of rebel governance opens multiple underexplored avenues in the rebel–civilian relationship.³ A focus on governance allows scholars to analyze rebel–civilian relations with greater nuance, recognizing a larger set of interactions between the two. From insurgent taxation practices, provision of public goods, management of local economic affairs, and regulation of criminal activity to more symbolic expressions of power drawing on mythical or religious dimensions such as burial traditions, cleansing rituals, cultural ceremonies, and spiritual protection practices, contributors to this volume scrutinize many understudied facets of the rebel–civilian relationship.

A better understanding of rebel governance also promises to enlighten debates around several social processes related to civil war. Patterns of

² We use the term “rebel” or “insurgent governance.” But many of this book’s insights also apply to armed actors allied with the state or other violent militias, and to rebel groups competing with other rebels in states without any governments, such as Somalia after 1991.

³ This definition builds on the work of Wickham-Crowley (1987); Branch and Mampilly (2005); Kasfir (2005); Weinstein (2007); Arjona (forthcoming); and Mampilly (2011).

violence, recruitment strategies, and sources of insurgent funding – prominent subjects in recent studies of civil war – are all affected by rebel governance in ways that are only now gaining attention (Arjona 2014; Mampilly 2011). Civilian governance organized by rebels affects processes of social transformation unleashed by violent conflict. The literature on the social conditions of civil war, developed mostly by anthropologists, suggests that war leads to profound societal changes at the local level (Lubkemann 2008; Nordstrom 1997). Violence has deep consequences for political mobilization, polarization of social identities, militarization of local authority, transformation of gender roles, and fragmentation of the local political economy (Wood 2008). The presence or absence of rebel governance is an integral aspect of these social processes. Understanding how the various manifestations of rebel governance relate to social disruptions caused by civil war will not only supply a deeper appreciation of how and why they occur, but also of their long-term legacies.

Lastly, the field of rebel governance promises to illuminate broader questions in the social sciences. Rebel leaders who establish relations with civilians demonstrate significant political creativity in developing vastly different approaches to governance. For scholars, their ingenuity opens a novel category of governments to comparative analysis. The differences in insurgent patterns of governance offer new insights into the various conditions that rebels face as well as into the differences between the practices of conventional regimes and those of non-state actors. Comprehending rebel governance can also enhance the study of other forms of non-state governance (Risse 2011). And a better understanding of the diverse modes of rebel rule promises to open new avenues in the study of state-building and its presumed relationship to war-making (Tilly 1992).

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Taken together, the chapters in this book raise numerous new questions about rebel governance and, more generally, about rebel and civilian behavior during wartime. What are the attributes of rebel governments? What role do factors such as natural resources and state capacity play in the emergence and consolidation of rebel governance? How does a group's ideology impact its ruling strategies? How do civilians respond to rebel governance? What role do different segments of society play in shaping the emergence, functioning, and decay of rebel governance systems?

The questions are diverse, and so are the disciplinary standpoints and methodological tools that the authors rely on to address them. Some take a purely theoretical approach; others offer hypotheses, illustrating their feasibility with field observations; still, others present rich empirical evidence that raises questions about existing theories and suggests new possible explanations. The book is also diverse in its geographical reach, bringing

together experts on conflicts in states varying greatly in their ethnic cleavages, terrains, economies, and political systems.

The cases of rebel governance they analyze are taken from four continents: Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Liberia), Asia (India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka), Europe (Greece), and Latin America (Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Venezuela). They include different types of armed organizations, some sustaining insurgencies that persisted for several decades, such as those in Colombia, India, and Sri Lanka, and others that lasted only a few years, such as those in Congo (DRC), Cuba, and Venezuela. Some analyze secessionist movements, such as those in Côte d'Ivoire, India, Indonesia, and Sudan. Others investigate attempts to overthrow state governments, including those in Colombia, El Salvador, and Greece. A third type concerns rebel groups ruling territory independently while maintaining ambiguous relations with the state they appear to have rebelled against – for example, the Mai Mai in Congo (DRC).

Although each chapter strives to make an original contribution, our goal is to provide a coherent approach to the study of rebel governance. The chapters are organized around six basic questions. First, how should the “field” of rebel governance be conceptualized? Second, which factors lead to the formation and which to the decline of rebel governments? Third, what sorts of images and routines of existing states do rebel governments adopt? Fourth, how do fundamental principles embraced by insurgents – whether from political doctrine, cultural values, or both – influence their governance practices? Fifth, how do unarmed civilians shape rebel governance? And sixth, what kinds of rebel governance result when insurgents rely heavily on violence against civilians for predation or for ideological goals? These are far from the only important questions, but they help to lay the foundations for further study. The chapters discussed below begin to develop answers.

Defining the Field of Inquiry

If rebel governance of civilians is to be accepted as a distinct field of study, its concepts, definitions, and categories of behavior need to be specified. This is the subject of the first section of the book. Eventually, shared understandings among analysts will determine which notions facilitate inquiry, help build a knowledge base and generate testable hypotheses. In the opening chapter, Nelson Kasfir offers an overview of the domain of rebel governance – the production of government for civilians during the protracted violence and high levels of coercion produced by civil war. To incorporate the remarkable variation in rebel governance, he takes a broadly inclusive approach to the field's basic parameters.

According to Kasfir, the starting point for conceptualizing the field is deceptively simple: to create government, rebels must first secure populated territory – even if their control remains contested – under conditions of violence

or threat of violence emerging from civil war. Second, they must choose to engage with at least some of the civilians resident within this area. These are the basic scope conditions establishing the field's boundaries. Presumably, rebel leaders organize governments for civilians when they think it is in their interest. Yet, they must devote part of their resources for this purpose, despite often being militarily weaker when they initiate governance than the states against which they rebel. Why do they do it so frequently, yet so differently? Valid answers to these questions require classification and comparison.

To keep the classification of types of rebel governance as free from unintended assumptions as possible, Kasfir turns to the basic categories of politics, administration, and wealth. He asks in what ways, if at all, rebels involve civilians in making political decisions; forming administrative structures that supply them with public goods; and organizing civilians for the production of income for the benefit of rebels, civilians, or both. With these categories as starting points, it becomes possible to start comparing different patterns of rebel governance.

Identifying comparisons naturally raises the question of why they occur. The determination of causes is too complex a task for this chapter. As the field matures, future researchers will establish causal arguments. Kasfir limits himself to a more preliminary task. He examines rebellion, one of the field's basic concepts, to illustrate plausible causes. Taking rebellion as the entry point, he considers whether causes of rebel governance are exogenous or endogenous to civil war. He urges researchers to compare insurgents' pre-civil war doctrines for civilians with their motives that emerge during civil war. Beyond this, he suggests: first, that insurgents consciously or unconsciously carry into war values and ideas about governance that grow out of the cultural norms they absorbed before they rebelled; second, rebels often shape their governance to solve problems they encounter during their rebellion; third, civilians have values and ideas of their own that often cause rebels to modify their schemes of governance.

Conditions of Growth and Decline

The second section extends the discussion of causes by comparing how states and rebels respond to basic social expectations of local residents. It also considers when their expectations cause deterioration in either state or rebel governments. In most cases, decisions over whether and how to organize civilians are at least partly responses to immediate issues rather than plans carefully formulated in advance by the rebel command.

In [Chapter 3](#), Timothy Wickham-Crowley analyzes the conditions that allow rebels to initiate and sustain local governments. He illustrates his propositions with detailed evidence from Latin American insurgencies. He makes three claims. First, rebel governments are likely to emerge in areas where state presence is weak. Second, political organizations that are recognized by the

state government and partly replace the state in areas where it is absent can either hamper or enhance rebel governments. For example, rural non-radical political parties such as the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana party in Peru and the Acción Democrática Party in Venezuela mobilized against rebellion. By comparison, communist political parties helped rebels take power in the Lara state of Venezuela and the so-called peasant republics of Colombia.

Wickham-Crowley's third claim is that state abuse or alienation of civilians often turns peasants into rebel supporters. In several countries, state violence – particularly counter-insurgent operations that involved large-scale victimization of the civilian population – enhanced support for rebel governments, as did the failure of state governments to attend local residents' basic needs for security and material well-being – for example, by ignoring land reform, especially when the government implemented it in other regions. On the other hand, he shows that the state can compete with a rebel government by providing public goods to win civilians back. For example, he points to the widespread success of civic campaigns launched by governments and military units in many Latin American countries, either when the threat of insurgencies was imminent or soon afterwards.

Wickham-Crowley also inquires into the collapse of rebel governments. He argues that state military action often trumps rebel cultivation of "hearts and minds." When state forces destroy rebel bases, they dismantle rebel administrations for civilians. In addition, macrosocial and political changes, such as the introduction of elections and political competition, can reduce rebels' influence over local populations. Not all causes of rebel decay result from state initiatives. Rebels can cause their own failures by violating their obligations as governors. In particular, Wickham-Crowley argues, a rebel government is likely to collapse if it fails to protect civilians from the state as their enemy; or, even worse, if it turns its own weapons against civilians, beyond punitive actions aimed at preserving public order. Finally, like states, rebels may sow the seeds of their own failure by pursuing policies that undermine peasants' material well-being.

Imitations of the State: Symbols and Diplomacy

The incumbent state provides a powerful model for rebels, even as they propose to overthrow it or break away. Two chapters explore aspects of this issue in the third section. [Chapter 4](#) looks at how rebel groups use symbols, particularly those borrowed from states; [Chapter 5](#) considers the use of international diplomacy by rebel governments, demonstrating that it is not the exclusive preserve of states.

Starting from the perspective that accounts of rebel governance that focus solely on public goods provision and regulation are inherently inadequate, Zachariah Mampilly explores the role that symbols play within rebel

governance. Symbolic processes, Mampilly shows, are common in rebellions – including the display of flags, the use of anthems and mottos, and the establishment of currencies. Why, Mampilly asks, do rebels devote resources and put effort into creating these symbols and popularizing their use? First, he argues, they do because they want the legitimacy these symbols bring to states. It is precisely because states have relied on such symbols that rebels find them so effective. Second, they do because symbols help ensure compliance of civilians and facilitate their identification with the rebel organization.

To articulate these answers, he first discusses the ways in which states use symbolic processes. When states can achieve compliance of citizens through symbols, they reduce the probability of resistance that coercion is likely to engender. By the same token, he argues that promoting identification of civilians with rebels through their governance boosts legitimacy, fosters civilian collaboration, and reduces the necessity to resort to coercion. Symbols carry messages, but rebel leaders confront different audiences, beginning with the differences between fighters and civilians. They must maintain backing from core supporters, attract new recruits, and avoid overly antagonizing potential opponents. They also try to reach their diaspora and transnational actors. Rebels need to craft messages accordingly. Insurgent leaders often take advantage of the “multivocality” of symbols that carry different meanings to different constituencies.

To illustrate the existence and effectiveness of symbols, Mampilly relies on evidence from different armed conflicts. He shows not only how widespread and varied are the symbolic actions that rebels use, but also how important they seem to rebels and, often, to civilians. Symbolic repertoires, Mampilly argues, offer a collective frame of reference between the insurgent government and non-combatants. Their sources include communal motifs, national signs, and ideologies. These are often expressed ambiguously to preserve unity. He notes how rebels frequently re-enact the state by using the same images as and similar rhetoric to state officials to reinforce behaviors that benefit the rebel group’s agenda. By demonstrating the importance of symbols in rebel governance, Mampilly’s analysis stresses the importance of reaching beyond the use of coercion and provision of public goods to analyze both non-combatant compliance with and support for rebel groups as well as the reduced necessity for insurgents to rely on violence.

Rebel diplomacy, as Bridget Coggins points out in [Chapter 5](#), is an important, if frequently unrecognized, extension of rebel governance. Since rebels by definition do not possess sovereignty, analysis of rebel diplomacy requires relaxing the notion that diplomacy is restricted to strategic communication among sovereign states or the formal organizations states create. Coggins discusses the slim basis on which rebels can engage in formal diplomacy. In the past, international law made an exception for a few rebel organizations to participate formally by awarding them the status of

“belligerent” where hostilities became particularly severe and rebels controlled much of the state’s territory. More recently, rebels have sometimes been formally obligated, usually as individuals, to treat civilians humanely, although recognition may have little practical effect in constraining rebel military tactics. More typically, however, rebel military victory is a necessary condition for rebels to engage in formal diplomacy.

Nevertheless, during civil war rebels frequently use diplomacy strategically to promote their objectives or gain specific benefits. In terms of approaches to rebel diplomacy, Coggins distinguishes between “warriors,” where external communication is an extension of fighting, and “shopkeepers,” where the objective is to seek joint advantage with their opponents. For example, rebels may use negotiations with the incumbent state to re-arm or gain territory, usually by disguising their purposes; or, they may participate in negotiations to reach an enduring agreement, usually by looking for a compromise that furthers their purposes. In either case, rebel diplomats must be careful that their proposals do not so far outrun civilian support that their authority is weakened. Coggins points out that rebels are likely to use shopkeeper diplomacy with third parties who hope to profit from economic activity in rebel-held territory, sometimes offering diplomatic recognition in return.

Coggins identifies several ways in which rebel diplomacy directly supports rebel governance of civilians. Rebel leaders send envoys, set up “embassies,” and publicize their efforts in the media in friendly third party countries. Rebels try to reach audiences beyond the civilians living in territories they control. They direct their message to individuals living in other areas of the incumbent state or abroad – particularly appeals for support. They set up humanitarian organizations in other countries. They try to establish diplomatic contact with international organizations and invite them to send representatives into rebel territory. Also, they engage in economic transactions with foreign businesses, particularly involving access to natural resources. Lastly, rebels try to invite supportive third party states to mediate between them and the incumbent government.

Rebel Doctrines, Cultural Values, and Governance

The fourth section investigates how rebel doctrines and cultural values may affect patterns of rebel governance. Some groups may seek to shed vestiges of their past and create new identities unfettered by history. This is especially true for those that embrace transnational ideologies – often those who come from outside. Ernesto “Ché” Guevara is the classic example. Many Islamist fighters in Afghanistan and Iraq also came from elsewhere.⁴ For these groups, doctrines

⁴ The differences in practices of rebel governance adopted by home-grown as opposed to foreign rebel leaders are also worth studying.

that form the political identity of rebel groups often leave their organizational imprints on rebel governance.

Yet, civil war is marked by continuities as well as disruption. The values of the society in which the insurgents have spent their formative years also influence their designs of governance. Local societies have a history that does not disappear when an internal war breaks out. Most rebels are products of their own societies. No matter how much they want to generate change, their upbringing, education, and professional lives may influence their political identity. For these groups, governance routines may reflect pre-existing patterns of social and economic relations. As a result, rebel governance often mimics practices of the incumbent government, sometimes repeating behavior insurgents may have once condemned.

All three chapters in this section investigate the ways in which ideas affect rebel governance. In [Chapter 6](#), Stathis Kalyvas compares the two primary rival rebel organizations that fought for control of Greece during World War II and after. Their political identities differed considerably – one was communist, the other conservative. Their patterns of governance also varied dramatically, even though they held similar amounts of territory and enjoyed about the same degree of security.

During the war, the communists created a new centralized hierarchical governmental structure based on small units in villages where they had military control. Highly motivated party members returned to their hometowns and villages to form these units. This structure of rebel governance over civilians was applied uniformly across communist-held territory. In contrast, conservative army officers governed villages they controlled by organizing prominent families based on their personal relationships rather than by forming new organizations. The communists relied heavily on their operational doctrine; the conservatives depended more on existing social values.

Their policies also differed, although both promoted nationalism and patriotism in response to foreign occupation. The communists created a relatively comprehensive governing system – expanding functions and appointing new officials – similar to communist structures elsewhere. They broke with social values by encouraging women and youth to participate in political and administrative activities and elections, although most decisions were tightly controlled from the top. The conservatives, on the other hand, continued existing routines and policies of local government. They permitted a greater degree of independent local decision-making. Their principles called for traditional engagement based on existing connections to regional notables. Thus, Kalyvas argues that differences in political identity – that is, in reliance on doctrine as opposed to dependence on values – cause variation in rebels' choice of governance arrangements for civilians.

Kalyvas also compares rebel governance by the communists when they could hold their own during World War II with their governing arrangements when

they confronted far greater military pressure in another rebellion after the war. While the communists set up organizational structures similar to those they had created before, they controlled less territory, had fewer available supplies and more limited access to recruits, and could no longer rely on patriotic appeals. Consequently, they ruled with increased coercion and more frequent abduction of local civilians for recruits. As they lost support, their rule became increasingly harsh. Thus, Kalyvas proposes that rebel governance becomes more coercive as territory and resources contract.

In the [subsequent chapter](#), Bert Suykens adds another variable to the contrast between insurgents who argue for a revolutionary ideology and those who support a group's cultural values. He asks how rebel doctrine affects practices of governance when one group calls for the overthrow of the state *and* for novel radical principles, while the other calls for secession from it *and* the imposition of its own ethnic beliefs. The Naxalites proclaimed they would replace the government of India with a revolutionary polity, while Naga groups called for a sovereign "natural" polity in the Naga ancestral homeland separated from India. By "natural," Suykens means that rebel leaders took for granted that the new state they fought for would be based on Naga values, including their conception of Naga political order before colonialism.

The difference between a revolutionary take over of the state and a natural secessionist polity had profound consequences for how each group approached governance. The Naxalites assumed they would have to persuade skeptical civilians through political education to accept their leadership and that their struggle would pass through several stages. The Naga insurgents supposed that shared ethnic identity and the memory of a former Naga polity made their legitimacy immediate and automatic. No instruction would be needed. The logic of this doctrinal distinction also led rebel leaders of the two groups to carry out administrative tasks differently. In the Naxalite case, the rebels believed everyone living in their territory was entitled to protection, even if some of them violated Marxist doctrine – for example, by belonging to a wealthy social class. In contrast, Naga insurgents took an exclusionary view, feeling that only the Naga deserved protection.

Naga rebels believed that all Naga ought to pay taxes as a routinized obligation, with the funds collected used primarily to support members of the insurgent group and their activities. The Naxalites, with less legitimate support, taxed selected social categories, particularly contractors appointed by the local Indian government. They used the revenue to increase social services as well as to support their insurgency. Both rebel groups tolerated Indian schools and hospitals in their domains, although the Naxalites justified this practice as the revolution was in an early stage. In areas fully under their control, the Naxalites introduced agricultural cooperatives, rudimentary schools, and hospitals. Since Naga insurgents worked with Naga officials in the Indian state government and had less administrative capacity, they accepted the social services the state provided.

In [Chapter 8](#), Kasper Hoffmann argues for a moral economy approach to rebel governance in which ideas are central to explanation, rather than a political economy perspective in which they are epiphenomenal. In his field research, Hoffmann found that rebel leaders adopted beliefs they shared with civilians to legitimize their claims to rule. Such beliefs emerged from incongruous sources, principles rooted in an old cosmology combined with much newer notions of both Christianity and nationhood. His emphasis on the independent causal power of ideas leads him to explore an apparent contradiction in virtually all cases of rebel governance. Paradoxically, insurgents who aspire to topple their own political and social structures usually draw heavily on the values of their own society to support the routines of governance they introduce. What is harder to determine is whether they do so strategically or unreflectively.

Hoffmann investigates how General Padiri, a Mai Mai leader in eastern Congo (DRC), and his associates used the influence they acquired from combining pre-existing cultural beliefs, Christian symbols, and political nationalism to govern their organization's relations with civilians. Like many other rebel groups they imitated the incumbent state's administrative structure, centralizing it around the group's military headquarters hidden in the forest. His group began by collaborating with local residents in response to their complaints about the predatory practices of an earlier rebel formation. Padiri's Mai Mai mobilized civilians by organizing "ideological seminars," often insisting that Christian priests lead them.

Hoffmann shows how the intricate combination of customary, Christian, nationalist, and anti-foreigner values gave specific form and substance to rebel governance. Local religious beliefs about how the world is ordered stressed the spiritual interdependence of humans, nature, and invisible beings. Anyone who disrupted the harmonious relations between humans and spirits was believed to expose everyone to spiritual and physical danger. Adherence to this cosmology called for purifying indigenes from greed, selfishness, and other "bad" values. These beliefs endowed the Congo with its sacred character. Thus, Mai Mai discourse also meant protecting the nation from foreigners, both Rwandans and Europeans, who were ignorant of how the world worked. Freeing the Congo from foreigners became a spiritual duty necessary to restore the natural order.

The Mai Mai stressed the prevention of physical and spiritual harm to civilians and fighters. This value system legitimized Mai Mai authority and justified their policies of rebel governance over civilians. As a divine messenger for justice in the world, Padiri acquired charismatic authority, centralizing decision-making in his person. While at first encouraging civilians, Mai Mai rebel governance evolved toward greater authoritarian and coercive regulation. As Mai Mai activities increasingly violated shared norms, civilians began to withhold their support.

Influence of Civilians

The fifth section of *Rebel Governance* shifts the focal point of analysis from rebels to civilians living in territories controlled militarily by insurgents. The basic issue the three authors explore seems almost fanciful at first blush. How much influence could unarmed inhabitants possibly exert over non-state armed actors in determining how they are ruled? Insurgent use of violence or its threat clearly motivates relations between rebels and civilians. Yet in these chapters, they demonstrate that mutual influences among them also affect governance. Thus, the politics of rebel governance, although heavily constrained by the circumstances of civil war, is partly built out of reciprocal exchanges that are accessible to analysis.

As Ana Arjona observes in [Chapter 9](#), civilian resistance to rebels should not surprise anyone. Some level of opposition is a universal feature of political order. Since it occurs under all rulers, it should be expected under rebels who rule. Indeed, civilian resistance is the opposite of civilian support. If civilian support is a staple in guerrilla theory, surely civilian resistance ought to be examined just as carefully. Arjona theorizes the circumstances under which different kinds of civilian opposition to rebel rule emerge. She illustrates her argument with quantitative and qualitative evidence from a random sample of municipalities in Colombia. She differentiates “partial resistance,” when civilians object to particular rebel decisions, from “full resistance,” namely opposition to rebel governance itself.

Arjona makes two claims to explain whether partial or full resistance emerges. First, partial resistance is likely in every instance of rebel governance. Just as citizens in any polity disagree with specific decisions of the ruler, civilians will always disagree with some aspect of rebel governance. Expression of such opposition is likely because civilians find spaces that rebels cannot monitor. Furthermore, rebels can be more effective by giving local residents some space to express their opposition and they often do so. The empirical evidence shows that, despite the danger, civilians often communicate their opposition to insurgents, sometimes suggesting alternative solutions to particular issues and occasionally confronting rebel commanders directly. While civilians need to be careful not to go too far, rebel commanders often change their policies in response.

Arjona’s second claim is that full resistance requires two conditions: that rebels try to intervene broadly in local affairs, attempting to replace a community’s existing institutions; and that those existing institutions are held in high esteem by local residents and operate reliably. Only in such communities would locals want to defend their institutions against rebels’ attempts to replace them; furthermore, only in those communities would locals be able to sustain the collective action that is needed to oppose rebels overtly. In the contrary cases of weaker local institutions, non-combatants tend to defer to armed actors, whether they approve of the rebels’ governance

practices or not. The empirical evidence suggests that communities living under valued and reliable institutions were able to organize and either negotiate with the armed actors (rebels or paramilitaries), or openly oppose them. In certain unusual cases, communities were able to persuade rebels to allow them to rule themselves independently, even confronting fighters en masse without weapons to make their case.

Civilian resistance may be the easiest case to identify where non-combatants modify rebel governance. But resistance is part of a larger category of mutual exchanges that can make rebel governance more receptive to civilian needs. In [Chapter 10](#), Till Förster traces this process by identifying the causes, patterns, and growth of cooperation between rebels and civilians in the city of Korhogo in northern Côte d'Ivoire during the period when rebels held the town. In particular, he examines how their mutual exchanges provided two public goods: security and taxation. The rebels, although possessing the most powerful weapons, did not hold a monopoly of force. Instead, they shared power with local hunters' associations. These neo-traditional groups embodied customary cultural values, particularly honesty, bravery, and provision of communal protection without demanding compensation. Since civilians sought the hunters for security and trusted them, the rebels eventually had to take them into account in order to preserve their authority and maintain public order.

When the rebels first took control, they increased civilian insecurity by using violence recklessly. Consequently, many civilians relied on self-defense organizations or the hunters for security. For this reason, security became a private good for most residents. But as rebels and civilians reached understandings about conduct and punishment, they developed greater trust that led to more predictable governance behavior and greater security. Instead of regarding the two hunters' associations as threats, the rebels negotiated agreements with them. As a result, the rebels shared responsibility for security by relinquishing control within the city at night (and some areas outside it) to armed hunters who were given authority to punish miscreants. Civilians felt that these arrangements supplied more security than when the state had controlled Korhogo.

Regulation of taxes for the transport of goods and travelers evolved differently. To distinguish themselves from corrupt state officials, ordinary rebel soldiers at checkpoints at first made modest requests that travelers paid willingly to support the rebellion. But soon rebel soldiers demanded more. Rebel leaders responded to merchants' requests to limit these "fees." They established fixed rates by type of vehicle and commodity and issued a list of "official" checkpoints. Both were publicized on the radio. To further check corruption, they issued receipt books. Eventually, however, rebel leaders were unable to prevent soldiers from abusing the new system.

By comparing the provision of security with tax collection, Förster illustrates that rebel governance changes over time and varies across domains. Rebels

accepted a ritual group as partly responsible for security. Since tax collection did not require the rebels to ally with any customary authorities, they could impose more rational procedures. Locals' values and expectations help to explain the difference.

Despite their advantage in weapons, rebels, like states, cannot rule civilians without support from important social forces. But acquiring that support gives leverage to civilian social actors to deepen as well as change the direction of rebel governance. In [Chapter 11](#), Shane Barter extends the arguments put forward by Arjona and Förster by demonstrating that incorporation of societal alliances can transform the character of insurgent rule over civilians. Through their participation, the values of those social forces also changed. In the case of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia, the transformation is relatively easy to identify because its new allies – rural Islamic teachers (*ulama*) and urban student activists – held values significantly different from those of the rebel movement as well as each other. The case is even more complicated due to contradictions between the interests and values of the latter two social forces.

For most of its existence as a rebel group, GAM was an ethno-national secessionist movement built around an Acehnese identity without either a religious or democratic agenda. As a result, it had almost no connections in its early years with either ulama or student activists living in Aceh. During the first two decades of GAM's rebellion, local Islamic leaders had maintained strong connections with the Indonesian government, while local student activists had concentrated their efforts on reforming it. Despite their differences, both groups had held pan-Indonesian perspectives and therefore opposed secession and GAM.

The violent military crackdown and abuses that followed the overthrow of Suharto in 1998 made the new alliances possible. GAM became a more powerful military force, even holding territory in some areas. Both ulama and activists needed military protection and wanted to fight the Indonesian army because of its abuses. Islamic teachers revived their connections with rebels, particularly those they had taught. Local activists, embittered that Aceh was left out of reforms introduced elsewhere, revived their Acehnese cultural identity and joined GAM rebels. The ideas of all groups, including the rebels, changed dramatically, converging to some extent. GAM broadened its appeal by introducing Islamic ideas and religious education for its fighters as well as promoting human rights and democracy. Both ulama and activists accepted the secession of Aceh as one of their respective objectives. All three groups changed their principles for justifying Aceh's claim to independence.

These social alliances also broadened GAM's civilian governance. Islamic leaders conducted weddings and funerals, organized rallies, collected taxes, and organized education. Ulama served as the judges in GAM courts and even persuaded GAM's leaders to permit them to impose *Sharia* law. Activists

provided GAM with public relations skills, served as teachers and administrators, maintained official records, collected taxes, and delivered social services in GAM-held districts. Social alliances with ulama and activists enabled GAM to provide far more sophisticated rebel governance than the rebel group had ever managed on its own.

Predation and Coercion

The last section of *Rebel Governance* examines unfortunate and all too familiar cases where non-state armed actors rule by relying heavily on coercion and violence. These rebels govern by wielding force, intimidation, and, often, cruelty, either for ideological reasons or for profit (sometimes both). They may simply be predators, living off civilians without organizing them. But if they coordinate them, however coercively, they are practicing rebel governance.

The two chapters in this section analyze cases in which rebel governments treat civilians harshly, spurning measures to increase their legitimacy – no different from many states. They explore the conditions for governance when insurgents deliberately violate, or ignore, the social contract that Wickham-Crowley holds necessary to prevent civilians from going over to the state. They also open an important discussion into the impact of organizational change among insurgents on rebel governance. In both of these cases, new opportunities for rents and recruitment as well as growing fear of subordinates led to harsher treatment of civilians.

In [Chapter 12](#), Francisco Gutiérrez-Sanín traces the rise and fall of urban rebel militias that relied heavily on violence to provide security and regulate conduct in several neighborhoods in Medellín, Colombia. The goals of these militias changed dramatically over their periods of rule from primarily seeking justice to mostly earning rents. Their experience suggests that reliance on coercion is compatible with either. Gutiérrez-Sanín makes two other important points about rebel governance. First, selective coercion can engender popular support and more effective rule when it serves the community's notions of social justice. But, second, success can lead to the crumbling of organizational goals and the unraveling of rule as rebels act arbitrarily and enrich themselves. In short, while the militias relied on coercion throughout, success led to a shift in their goals from grievance toward greed.

Through superior organization and better military training, the militias drove out the *bandas* (local gangs) that had been harassing inhabitants in Medellín's neighborhoods. They carried out exemplary executions while expressing respect for "the people" – both elements of their revolutionary anti-state ideology. They consulted prominent community members and exercised restraint and judgment in punishing disruptive community members. The legitimacy they gained by protecting local residents provided

them at first with the basis for militia governance. Gutiérrez-Sanín describes how they maintained security, resolved disputes among neighbors, and imposed social and moral reform, particularly regarding drugs. For a relatively short time, they gained enthusiastic acceptance from civilians, particularly for applying “instant justice.” Since they were under threat from the state as well as their immediate enemy, the *bandas*, support of civilians was as important for the militias as militia activities were for providing security to civilians.

Yet, as Gutiérrez-Sanín points out, success presented new temptations. The militias spread into new neighborhoods. Now they needed more fighters, but also had access to new sources of wealth. The militia quickly recruited former gang members and other local youth, but did not give them the same rigorous ideological and political training they had received. These new undisciplined fighters used their powers of life and death impulsively and often for personal profit. Their leaders also took advantage of new opportunities for rents. When the militias lost their capacity for rigorous self-control, the severe coercion that had originally provided them with popular support undermined their legitimacy. Predictability and social justice had made it possible for the militias to rule. When the militias ceased to be predictable, killing unjustifiably in the opinion of civilians and profiting from the community, they lost their authority to govern. In part, this may have been the consequence of the urban arena. Civilians living in cities typically have easier access to other armed actors, including the state.

On the other hand, consider rebels that follow no ideology and use their control of territory for predation. In other words, assume a straightforward case of greed. Does that mean rebels won’t govern? In [Chapter 13](#), William Reno answers no, identifying that there are many cases where they do, although differently from insurgents who seek civilian support. When predatory rebels introduce government, they design it primarily to help themselves rather than civilians. In support, Reno analyzes the rebel government Charles Taylor constructed in Liberia during the early 1990s. Since it was predatory, it was predisposed to continue the reliance on patronage practiced by earlier Liberian politicians, further substantiating the importance of local values as a source for rebel governance, a theme in many of the chapters in this volume.

Reno shows how patronage politics changes when predatory rebels practice it. First, and inevitably due partly to civil war, violence became a ubiquitous feature of the patronage system, more significant than even the importance it had already achieved under Samuel Doe, the military ruler against whom Taylor had rebelled. Second, it had disastrous consequences for the internal cohesion of the rebel organization. Patronage always emphasizes personal rule at the expense of institutions, while predation stresses self-interest. Together the two made Taylor’s organization extremely unstable.

Taylor constantly dealt with the possibility that any of his senior subordinates might acquire the resources to defect or overthrow him. Predatory rebel governance based on patronage requires its leader to engage in a brutal tradeoff. If Taylor allowed his senior military commanders to provide goods or services to civilians, they would acquire influence that would enable them to challenge him. In anticipation of Taylor's likely countermove, his commanders avoided engaging in any rebel governance that benefited civilians. In rationally pursuing the peculiar logic of predatory patronage, Taylor generated insecurity in order to force both officials and civilians to seek his personal protection.

Despite the non-bureaucratic character of this kind of governance, Taylor's rebels did create a veneer of offices and rules. Both were mostly façades, constructed either as a trap to extract bribes or as a lure to attract foreign investment. Still, there were exceptions. One of the puzzles Reno explores is how rebels were able to regulate several large commercial enterprises that extracted natural resources worth hundreds of millions of dollars, despite the uncertainty and mayhem. To regulate them, Taylor's rebels created a few somewhat effective administrative agencies. The enterprises supplied Taylor with the funds necessary for patronage and personal wealth. Nevertheless, the constraints of rebel governance in predatory patronage rule meant Taylor's economic policy concentrated on short-term transactions based on extraction rather than making any investments in permanent facilities that could have increased the NPFL's income.

CONCLUSION

The contributors to the volume focus on the causes, characteristics, and consequences of rebel governance. Rebels and civilians interweave ideologies, cultural values, and instrumental strategies, imprinting the practice of rebel governance differently. The chapters document the impressive diversity of governance practices deployed by insurgents, providing details on how various groups manage their relations with civilians. They include both the degree of governance offered, ranging from spartan efforts to more comprehensive systems, and the variety of governance modes, extending from bureaucratic models borrowed from the nation-state to patterns of rule that rely on shared ethnic norms or cosmological beliefs. The latter often reflect non-western authority practices that require a grasp of complex local contexts.

The multiplicity of governance styles demonstrates that insurgent organizations often exhibit tremendous creativity and adaptability in their relations with civilians. Ranging from the minimalist conception of governance exemplified by Charles Taylor in Liberia to more comprehensive systems of civilian governance such as those introduced by the Communists in Greece, the chapters demonstrate the spectrum of possible patterns of rule

available to contemporary rebel leaders. If analysts are to capture the subtle variations in governance practices, they must be precise in their descriptions of insurgent civilian relations and careful in their conceptual distinctions.

Rebel governance promises to become a new field of scholarly inquiry, increasing the possibilities for comparative analysis by making available a broad range of governments and policies that have not yet been studied systematically. In addition, close examination of the relations between armed actors and civilians enriches inquiry into many aspects of civil war, exposing overly simplistic dichotomies in the literature. Insurgent governance of civilians during civil war is as open to explanation as the practice of governance by sovereign states. *Rebel Governance in Civil War* begins that inquiry.

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Rebel Governance – Constructing a Field of Inquiry: Definitions, Scope, Patterns, Order, Causes

Nelson Kasfir

ABSTRACT

Rebels frequently form governments for civilians living in areas they hold during civil war. Since the causes and structures of these governments vary considerably, they present an underexploited opportunity for comparative analysis. Building a subject area of rebel governance, as for any other field, means finding its boundaries, determining which activities by insurgents amount to governance, deciding which structures and actions to include, and deciding the basis on which differences among them should be evaluated. The first steps are to define rebel governance and establish the scope conditions that indicate which rebel organizations are capable of governing, whether they do so or not. A broad definition of rebel governance is organizing civilians for a public purpose. Three scope conditions are territorial control, a resident population, and violence or threat of violence. Insurgents who form governments organize civilian participation, civilian administration, or civilian production of wealth. Rebel governance sometimes results in rebel political order. The parameters of this new field provide preliminary categories for identifying causes that shape rebel governance. The distinction between exogenous causes that lead rebels to begin civil wars and endogenous factors that affect rebels after their wars begin is probably one of the most important.

INTRODUCTION

Why would rebels, almost always the weaker party in asymmetric conflicts, create and sustain governments for civilians during civil war?¹ At first glance,

¹ I am grateful for suggestions made on earlier drafts by Ana Arjona, Shane Barter, Kasper Hoffmann, Stathis Kalyvas, Jennifer Keister, Zachariah Mampilly, Paul Staniland, Ben Valentino, Elisabeth Wood, and an anonymous manuscript referee, and for comments from other participants at the Yale and Dartmouth conferences that led to this book.

forming governments for them at all would seem to divert resources necessary for military survival. Yet a surprisingly large number of insurgents do establish them.² Do they form governments because they accept Mao Tse-Tung's claim that winning civilian support is essential for victory in protracted armed struggle? Why, then, do some rebels form governments that coerce civilians living in areas they control? Why do others organize civilian governance around commercial production for profit? And why do some insurgents plunder civilians or attack them without bothering to create any political structures to manage them?

Rebel governance is an underexploited area of comparative social analysis involving considerable variation. This chapter presents a survey of the topic as a basis for classification and an approach to explanation of why these governments differ. This requires the answering of some basic questions: What are the boundaries of this area? Which arrangements created by insurgents qualify as "governments"? What activities, behaviors, or interactions should be included, and what excluded? How should we explain their differences?

Rebels govern whenever they engage residents in an area they significantly control to pursue a common objective. Rebels typically create governments to pursue their own interests, either immediate or long-term. To have the capacity to set up a government, rebels must control territory populated by non-combatants. Rebels often harm civilians, but sometimes benefit them. Their governments are frequently fragile, fluid, and short-lived organizations vulnerable to the fortunes of civil war. On occasion these governments provide civilians with a range of public goods, including a measure of order, justice, or health and educational facilities. Some of them encourage non-combatants to make some decisions involving their own affairs.

Because rebel governance occurs during civil war, it always involves significant coercion for civilians, regardless of insurgents' pronouncements. Rebel governments sometimes insist that civilians express enthusiasm for insurgent goals. Nevertheless, civilians often volunteer their support beyond what they must do to stay alive. Yet, most of the time the interests of civilians differ from those of insurgents. Since non-combatants want to pursue their own interests, encouraging civilian participation is likely to complicate rebels' decision-making. Rebel governance may become more coercive or more democratic as a result.

The most enduring adage of guerrilla war is that rebels must seek popular support if they intend to win. But this claim is plainly exaggerated – many rebels triumph despite badly mistreating civilians, for example, Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) (see Reno, [Chapter 13](#), this volume). In any case, eliciting popular support does not necessarily mean creating rebel governance. Mao Tse-Tung's signal contribution to the doctrine

² I use the terms "rebels," "insurgents," and "combatants" interchangeably and restrict the use of "guerrillas" to the classic doctrine of irregular warfare that grew out of the writings of Mao Tse-Tung (1963).

of guerrilla warfare was the importance of political mobilization of civilians; governing them was secondary, and only one of several techniques he proposed for gaining their support (1963).

Rebel governments vary greatly. They may focus primarily on regulating local residents, providing them services or encouraging their participation in decision-making. They sometimes rule through ad hoc decision-making, other times by formal rules. They may organize a wide range of services, or only a few. Where rebels encourage involvement, they may welcome voluntary input or threaten civilians who would prefer not to participate.

Government by rebels can also mean organizing or facilitating civilians to generate high-value goods or services that result in enormous income for insurgent organizations through mining or manufacture, taxation, purchase, seizure, kidnapping, or extortion schemes. Rebels differ from criminal gangs engaged in similar activities because rebels hold territory with the political intention of taking over the state, seceding, or reforming it.

This chapter provides a set of definitions and parameters for analyzing rebel governance as a specific area of study – a framework that facilitates evaluation of different cases of rebel relations with civilians. Such a framework needs criteria that exclude inappropriate cases and identify negative cases – those in which basic conditions are met but no rebel governance occurs. Definitions of who is a rebel and what is rebel governance are discussed in the [next section](#). Then I elaborate the minimal scope conditions that are implicit in the notion of rebel governance and that insurgent organizations must meet before they can be compared properly. An analysis of the set of characteristics that constitute rebel governance follows. There is then a discussion of the conditions determining when rebel governance becomes rebel political order.

Although a general overview of causes lies beyond this chapter, the subsequent section takes a preliminary look at the comparison of exogenous and endogenous causes of rebel governance. Eventually, the field of rebel governance should reflect qualitative and quantitative evaluation of a variety of explanatory hypotheses concerning why rebels form governments during civil wars, why they give them particular characteristics, how these governments change over time, and how successfully they carry out functions typically associated with more conventional governments.

DEFINITIONS

Civil war establishes the class of cases in which rebel organizations can govern civilians. Civil war is appropriately defined “as armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between [or among] parties subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities” (Kalyvas 2006: 5). Thus, governance of civilians by an occupying force in an interstate war is not a case of rebel governance. However, internal rebels opposing a foreign

occupation who govern civilians would qualify, as would rebels aided by a foreign power. There can be several parties, since competing rebel organizations often fight among themselves as well as against the incumbent state's government, if one exists. Each may govern civilians. Difficulties of governing while fighting non-state rivals make these cases comparable to rebellions against internationally recognized incumbents. Thus, this definition includes cases where a sovereign entity lacks a widely accepted incumbent government, as in Somalia after 1991 and Afghanistan in the mid-1990s.

Rebel organizations are consciously coordinated groups whose members engage in protracted violence with the intention of gaining undisputed political control over all or a portion of a pre-existing state's territory. They are rebels because they violently oppose the existing state government and/or any other rebel group.³ Thus, they include both defecting conventional military forces and irregulars who use guerrilla strategies. In order to allow for rebel continuity over quiescent periods, "protracted violence" includes the threat of violence after initial fatalities in addition to ongoing attacks. Those who try to overthrow the state, insurgents who fight for secession, or those who force the government of an incumbent state to reform are rebels within this definition.

Rebels differ from civilians because they plan, lead, and participate in combat. Civilians do not become rebels simply by providing them with popular or material support. Typically, they turn into rebels when they are incorporated into planning or carrying out military operations. Rebel groups vary in terms of how sharply they differentiate between these roles. In some cases, individuals move informally from one to the other (Förster, [Chapter 10](#), this volume). In situations of danger to the rebel organization, the importance of protecting the security of fighters typically results in a relatively clear distinction between civilians and rebels.

The field of rebel governance analyzes the behavior of governments formed and operating under armed threat without benefit of sovereignty. Rebel governance, at a minimum, means the organization of civilians within rebel-held territory for a public purpose. These purposes include rebel encouragement of civilian participation, provision of civilian administration, or organization of civilians for significant material gain. The presence of any aspect of one of these three types of activities is sufficient to indicate governance. It also includes rebel acceptance of pre-existing local government (Arjona, [Chapter 9](#), this volume). It may be entirely informal or involve rules regulating civilian activity. A rebel group that did nothing more than regulate religious observance for a significant period of time would be engaging in governance, albeit minimal. This broad definition is intended to set a low threshold for inclusion, within the scope conditions discussed in the [next section](#). It leaves to empirical inquiry whether rebel governance actually creates or supplies any public goods, pays attention to

³ Some writers extend this definition to include all armed groups that create governments, including militias allied with the state.

any civilian demands, or organizes civilians to provide material benefits to rebels.

Rebel governments end when insurgents lose or negotiate a compromise with the incumbent state. Their regimes may persist if the rebels win, but they are no longer instances of rebel governance. Alternatively, rebels who take over states may choose to rule through the former incumbent's state structures rather than continuing with their insurgent governments. In either case, they have become different kinds of governments with different pressures and resources, particularly if they receive international recognition as sovereigns. In indeterminate situations, rebel governance may continue when conflict or its threat persists despite declarations by both sides that their civil war is over.

SCOPE

To engage in rebel governance, an insurgent organization must meet several scope conditions. First, it must hold some territory within the state against which it is rebelling, although its control over specific territory may fluctuate temporally and spatially. Second, civilians must reside in that area. Third, the group must commit an initial act of violence to become rebels and then either continue hostilities or credibly threaten them in territory it governs. Only actors who meet these three conditions are capable of rebel governance. These conditions refer to the rebel group. It makes no difference whether it is operating in a state that has a recognizable government or in one that has none. International recognition provides an important resource to incumbent governments, but no guarantee of victory.

The presence of government is more difficult to determine for insurgents than for existing states. For the latter, sovereignty is generally a sufficient qualification for identifying government and is usually taken for granted. Sovereignty is the most important characteristic that rebel governments lack. Rebellions by insurgents mostly occur in countries whose states are sovereign primarily by judgment of the international community (Jackson 1990). Extending the well-known ambiguity between juridical and empirical sovereignty to entities not recognized internationally is a recipe for confusion. Writers on civil war who refer to sovereign rebel organizations (Kalyvas 2006: 211, 145; Wood 2003: 121–59) often mean only that insurgents have predominant control over a specific territory.⁴ In some civil wars, both sides claim to be the sovereign although neither demonstrates territorial control.

The degree of domination is a better starting point for understanding how rebels govern during civil war. It is also a more useful criterion than sovereignty to identify rebel governance by competing insurgent organizations in states

⁴ International law does not presently provide any basis for giving sovereignty to rebel organizations that create governments (Mampilly 2011: 245). Mampilly makes an eloquent and nuanced argument for including rebel groups in international humanitarian law that might eventually open limited possibilities for a legal basis for “counterstate sovereigns” (*Ibid.*: 246–51).

without governments. Domination and territorial control must be conceptualized differently since rebels may choose to hold territory without governing its residents. Domination refers to the degree of civilian compliance an insurgent organization can elicit within territory it controls (Weber 1978: 901). Territorial control refers to the capacity of a rebel group to keep its enemies out of a specific area.

Even meeting all three scope conditions does not mean that rebels necessarily create government. It is important to identify negative cases – those in which insurgents could govern but do not. The analysis of negative cases poses the question of why rebels sometimes choose not to govern civilians even when they control territory. In this regard, Mancur Olson’s metaphor is beguiling but an overgeneralization: all insurgents who hold territory are “stationary bandits,” but not all of them form governments (2000: 6–12).⁵ Negative cases provide an important control for testing hypotheses about the presence and varieties of rebel governance.

Insurgents may have no interest in civilians or may regard them merely as targets for predation or ethnic cleansing. They may see civilians as a burden rather than a resource. When insurgents are few and not well known to civilians, they are likely to husband their resources for fighting rather than governing. Insurgents with direct access to natural resources or external assistance can decide to ignore peasants (Weinstein 2007: 173). For others not so well off, deciding not to govern may be a strategic calculation to concentrate resources in order to survive. Or they may regard local civilians simply as a source for collective or personal enrichment. Incentives to keep fighters loyal may include giving them permission to loot, rape, or terrorize civilians with impunity so that governing them becomes impossible. On the other hand, unsympathetic local residents may refuse to join rebels even though they usually cannot prevent them from holding territory – as happened in Ché Guevara’s insurgency in Bolivia (Wickham-Crowley 1991: 48).

Nevertheless, most rebel groups seem to expend resources on governing civilians. In fact, it is hard to find rebels who control populated territories but do not establish some form of government. Selective bias of journalists and analysts could be one reason. They are more likely to report cases of rebel governance than take note of their absence. The difficulty of conclusively establishing any negative case is another.

Most rebel groups in the Liberian civil war of the 1990s, aside from the NPFL, controlled territory but seem to have regarded civilians merely as targets

⁵ Olson asked why local residents would prefer “stationary” to “roving” bandits who would leave the area after robbing them. His answer was that the stationary bandit would limit the fraction she took from each civilian in order to optimize her own share over time. His analysis presumes that all stationary bandits “tax” civilians and thus govern. But rational bandits might make a longer-run calculation that spending resources on defeating the state would pay better than spending them on managing local residents.

of opportunity (Alao et al. 1999: 45–48; Ellis 1995: 184). There is no persuasive evidence that they formed governments. The rebellion of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) lies on the boundary of eligible cases. Never a match for the Serb military, the KLA held territory briefly and vacillated between trying to protect civilians and consciously putting them in danger (Perritt 2008: 70, 72, 76; Judah 2008: 81; Sullivan 2004: 151, 192).⁶ Its goal was to arouse international support, not govern civilians. Instances of likely negative cases suggest hypotheses about the absence of rebel governance. For example, the absence of civilian governance seems associated with rebel leaders who allow their fighters to loot indiscriminately.

Many groups claiming to be rebels do not meet these scope conditions. There are significant differences between groups that claim to administer civilians and insurgents who actually govern them.⁷ A variety of groups opposed to existing states claim to form regimes that rule people they consider oppressed. Many of these groups – urban intellectuals issuing public manifestos or rebels located outside the state – are not in a position to elicit civilian compliance. They are different from rebels holding territory inside.

Rebel governance can occur only after an insurgent organization gains control over territory that contains civilians and decides to create or encourage civilian structures. These structures produce governance when their occupants organize or purport to organize civilians living within rebel territory. There must be some possibility for civilian compliance. In many cases rebels introduce civilian structures, but limit governance to symbolic presentation. For example, insurgents may be interested in governing only to persuade outsiders they are a viable alternative to the incumbent state.

Territory

Rebel territorial control in the incumbent state is usually ambiguous and frequently changes during civil war. Military success establishes control, although civilians sometimes contribute significantly. Control often comes in stages. In the evolution of one typical rebel sequence, the classic guerrilla story, a small number of poorly armed insurgents secretly infiltrate an area and initially depend on civilians to feed and protect them by not informing state officials of their presence. Only later when rebels acquire the military capability

⁶ Protection of civilians, if they lived in territory held by the KLA, would be a minimal form of governance. “But their leaders were arrogant, incompetent, and seemingly willing to put Kosovo’s entire population in grave danger. The guerrillas knew that when they attacked Serb troops, retaliation would be swift and brutal, and that they would not be able to protect their people. Yet they did it anyway” (Sullivan 2004: 203).

⁷ Groups that cause death and destruction in an incumbent state with no intention of winning territory are not rebels, as the term is used here. These groups might be labeled “terrorists” were that term used less arbitrarily.

to defend the area, do they gain a perceptible degree of control over it. In this particular sequence, their capacity to govern can only begin in the second stage.

Control can vary from contested to fully dominant (Kalyvas 2006: 210–20).⁸ It is particularly difficult to establish whether rebels hold territory in the situation common to many civil wars where the existing state's army rules by day and rebels by night. The issue is whether the rebels, the state, or another insurgent group exercises preponderant control.⁹ One of the tests for capacity to govern is whether the degree of territorial control is sufficient to permit rebel leaders to organize structures in which civilians actually participate. A second is how safe civilians feel in obeying insurgent orders or using services rebels provide.

Thus, effective control over territory makes governance possible. It allows an insurgent organization to give orders with which civilians can comply with a reasonable probability of avoiding immediate punishment were their compliance to become known to the rebels' opponents. Typically, rebel leaders are the best judges of the boundaries of such areas. Another method to specify territorial control is to verify that insurgents have sufficient military power to prevent an existing state or competing rebel group from maintaining or instituting its own governmental structures that could achieve significant civilian compliance. This approach would also help establish negative cases.

Holding territory is a matter of interpretation. A safe or "liberated" zone provides the best evidence that rebels possess an area, even if its boundaries constantly change. The Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) participated in a Palestinian rebel government holding territory in the Transjordan that eventually led to a civil war with Jordan from 1968 until its defeat and expulsion in 1971 (Bailey 1984: 34, 62):¹⁰ "Operational bases and staging areas were completely under fedayeen jurisdiction, flying the Palestinian flag overhead" (Bailey 1984: 34). The National Resistance Army (NRA) in Uganda had firm (although never entirely secure) control over a safe zone for two years early in its civil war: "life was like you had another republic in Uganda" (Kasfir 2005: 288).

⁸ Kalyvas's discussion of degrees of territorial control is subtle and extremely useful. See also Kalyvas (2006: 132–38). He correctly suggests that the degree of control of territory may vary spatially.

⁹ There are also cases where territorial control is especially ambiguous because civilians obey the rules of both the existing state and the rebels.

¹⁰ Fatah presents an unusual case, but one within the scope conditions. It held populated territory and rebelled against Jordan, even though it regarded Israel as its ultimate enemy. Jordan made several efforts to "eradicate" Fatah fighters from the East Bank, finally succeeding in 1970, memorialized by exiled Palestinians as "Black September" (Quandt et al. 1973: 195). Fatah was a member of an umbrella organization, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) that "officially" created the rebel government. Fatah fighters carried out most of its activities. However, other organizations in the PLO apparently committed a reluctant Fatah to civil war by attempting to assassinate King Hussein (Bailey 1984: 56).

Despite their claims, many rebels never hold territory at all, exclusively, or long enough during civil war to possess the capacity to govern civilians.¹¹ The African National Congress (ANC) never held territory in South Africa, nor did the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK) in Turkey (Lodge 1983: 195–96; O'Leary 2007; Ergil 2007).¹² The Maitatsine movement in northern Nigeria engaged in violence supported by high levels of civilian compliance in confrontation with Islamic and secular authorities, but never gained any territorial control (Steed and Westerlund 1999: 67–68). Its Muslim followers gave full allegiance to its leader Alhaji Muhammadu Marwa, despite his unorthodox message. The Maitatsine engaged in repeated armed insurrections in urban areas, attempting but failing, to take control of the main mosque in Kano in 1980 and others in succeeding years.

Civilians

In order to be able to provide governance, there must be a population living in the territory a rebel organization controls. Some insurgents occupy terrain that contains no civilians, perhaps preferring an unpopulated area because it creates less of a threat from an incumbent state. A rebel organization whose territory in the state consists solely of military training camps is likely to prevent civilians from living nearby for security reasons.¹³ Civilians who live in areas the insurgents occupy may flee upon their arrival or be forced out. The incumbent state may be able to deny the rebels contact with the population, often by moving residents to fortified villages.

The Mau Mau fighters in colonial Kenya only held inaccessible terrain in the mountain forests in the Aberdares range and on Mt. Kenya where no civilians lived (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 296–303). While they began the war with widespread popular support among Africans living in the central highlands and Nairobi, they had few weapons and little knowledge of guerrilla tactics. On the other hand, if military weakness causes rebel organizations to base themselves in remote locations, some of them choose populated areas in order to increase their resources by organizing civilians. The Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL) in El Salvador established its base in

¹¹ There are cases, including some discussed below, in which rebels holding no territory are able to organize civilians inside an incumbent state to some extent. Because this notion expands the idea of governance beyond its conventional use in explaining state behavior, it is inappropriate to apply it to cases involving rebel organizations.

¹² For the ANC, even implanting its own intelligence operation in South Africa was extremely difficult: "Vula [1988–1990] was probably the ANC's most successful operation, a compensation for a long and distinguished history of failure" (O'Malley 2007: 262).

¹³ Many of these groups do not intend to gain control over territory, so they do not meet two of the scope conditions. The Harkat ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI), which hoped to turn Bangladesh into an Islamic fundamentalist state, established several training camps "for recruitment and weapons training" in inaccessible areas in Bangladesh near the border with Burma, but held no territory containing civilians (Wilson 2005).

eastern Chalatenango, one of “the poorest and most peripheral areas in the country,” where its cadre built “support for the group’s political-military struggle” (Byrne 1996: 31, 36).

Civilians may fear to remain in areas that rebels infiltrate, especially if insurgents enter as a well-equipped army without engaging in any advance political mobilization. During its civil war, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) eventually created a liberated zone in northern Rwanda after it changed from conventional military to guerrilla tactics. But in its initial invasion “this ‘liberation’ was ambiguous, in that everyone ran away from the Front fighters, even the Tutsi” (Prunier 1998: 131).

In other civil wars, civilians prefer either the cause or protection of the insurgents to that of the government of the incumbent state, particularly where the latter engages in severe counter-insurgent tactics. In some cases they even leave their homes to follow the rebels. Between 200,000 and 500,000 civilians voluntarily left with the NRA when it retreated from its liberated zone to a safer although less hospitable area during the Ugandan civil war (Kasfir 2005: 288–89, 294). When the Indonesian army invaded East Timor in December 1975, much of the population followed the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) as it retreated into the rural and mountainous areas (Chega! 2005: part 7, 18).¹⁴

Violence

The expectation of protracted violence is also a defining condition of rebel governance. The first act of violence by the rebel group against a state government or another rebel group provides an appropriate starting date for a rebellion because it signals the rebels’ intent to its opponent. Before that date it is not a rebel group. The incumbent state’s army or that of another rebel group responds by force of arms to eliminate the threat to its territorial control if it can, or threaten supportive civilians if it cannot. So long as a credible threat of violence persists, it makes no difference that no fighting occurs for long periods.

Violence varies in intensity and whether attacks are mainly directed toward civilians or the opposing military. While civilians may bear the brunt of assaults from either side or both, the ensuing violence will likely target military positions considered vulnerable. It is worth stressing the obvious point that the state prefers to use violence that subdues insurgents to violence that reduces civilian support for insurgents.¹⁵

¹⁴ FRETILIN became the governing political party after it won the March 1975 elections that ended the Portuguese occupation. It declared independence the following October. It turned into a rebel organization when the Indonesian army seized the capital, Dili, and it began its resistance.

¹⁵ Kalyvas’s ingenious argument explaining why “full control makes violence redundant” refers only to violence against civilians and not to violence against the rebel military (2006: 220).

Insurgent decisions on governance usually rest on strategic calculations that presume the presence or threat of violence. Violence against civilians is often asymmetric, preponderantly employed by either incumbent states or rebels. Where a state's counterinsurgency strategy involves wreaking violence on villagers suspected of supporting rebels, insurgents can sometimes benefit from instituting civilian structures that offer protection and possibly social services, particularly medical assistance. Where the rebel organization causes most of the civilian violence, it may not create any civilian governance or it may establish highly coercive civilian administration.

For almost two years, the Ugandan government constantly underestimated the military deployment required to destroy the safe zone created by the NRA – a rising force requirement since the NRA's consolidation of territory also grew (Ondoga 1998: 69–82). It eventually succeeded by deploying three-quarters of its army to encircle the area. In addition to frequent bombardment and military assaults, Ugandan soldiers wreaked havoc in virtually every village they entered in the battle zone. One study determined that government troops were responsible for at least 45 percent of all incidents while all rebel groups (including the NRA) committed only 17 percent (Weinstein 2007: 211).¹⁶ While some degree of coercion in the NRA safe zone was unavoidable, the attacks by government soldiers left civilians receptive to the structures of governance introduced by the NRA (Kasfir 2005: 284–88).

The complete disappearance of the threat of violence means that the group no longer meets this scope condition – technically it is no longer a rebel organization. Rebels may hold territory when violence ends without receiving foreign recognition. Although they may have won or forced a stalemate and built or inherited a state apparatus, they may be ignored internationally (Pegg 1998). For example, the rebels whose control over their breakaway regions was informally accepted through ceasefires by Moldova (Dnester), Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), and Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) no longer governed under the pressure of anticipated violence and thus ceased to be cases of rebel governance (King 2001: 529). The same result occurs when an external power intervenes to protect an insurgent group. Violence ended temporarily for the insurgency of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in 1991 when the United States instituted a no-fly zone (Romano 2006: 208–09).¹⁷

¹⁶ Of the 711 incidents recorded in the press, 38 percent did not specify who was responsible for the violence (Weinstein 2007: 211). Considering the level of repression practiced by the Ugandan government during this period, it seems likely that a large portion of these should be attributed to government soldiers. In the five years of fighting, between 200,000 and 300,000 people, mostly civilians, were killed, primarily in the area close to Kampala where the NRA's safe zone was located.

¹⁷ Even with the U.S. no-fly zone, civil war re-erupted in 1994 when the KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) fought each other (Romano 2006: 209–10).

PATTERNS

What constitutes rebel governance? The range in choices insurgents make about organizing governance is extraordinary – first, whether they institute any civilian structures at all, and, if they do, what patterns they create. Second, whether civilians make use of these structures and for what purposes. Third, whether significant traits of rebel governance change and why. To begin to think about these questions, we must first decide how to identify and classify configurations of rebel government.

A useful scheme of governance should account for the presence or absence of political input, service output, and material enrichment. Thus, the field ought to distinguish among insurgent behaviors that encourage civilians to participate in their own rule, provide them with administrative services, and, if relevant, organize them so that rebel organizations acquire significant monetary income. A broad notion of governance would include encouragement of civilian participation, formation of civilian administration, and regulation or taxation of commercial production of high-value goods or services. Rebels practice governance if they provide any trait of at least one of these three clusters of variables. The insurgent organization must persist long enough to realize its capacity to govern, if it so chooses.

Rebels who control territory usually have sufficient dominance over civilians to decide how to organize governance, if they decide to introduce it. The initiative to form and maintain civilian governance almost always belongs to them. Nevertheless, civilians who are united and believe deeply in the legitimacy of their own institutions can sometimes successfully persuade rebels to let them maintain their own practices (Arjona, [Chapter 9](#), this volume; Förster, [Chapter 10](#), this volume).

Once rebels commit to governing civilians, the reactions of civilians frequently become important. Although rebels make the basic decisions about design, they often do not anticipate civilians' responses. Civilians are likely to influence how governance is practiced, whether they support rebel objectives, or try to use rebel government structures to achieve other purposes. Where civilians have some room for maneuver, they may try to manipulate rebel governance structures to promote their individual or group interests.

Civilians have many motives that affect the extent to which they participate in rebel governance. Some civilians participate because they are persuaded by the rhetoric or threats of insurgents. Others participate for their own ends, often to increase their income or advance their status, protect their families, or settle private disputes. They may not participate at all if they feel safe in remaining uninvolved. Zimbabwean youth, women, and strangers could sometimes manipulate their connections to Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) rebels to improve their standing with elders, men, and royal lineages respectively (Kriger [1992](#): 179–206). Some village chairs appointed by the NRA in the zones they controlled in Uganda took advantage of their positions by

favoring friends and relatives and keeping property seized from opponents of the NRA for themselves (Kasfir 2005: 286).

Coercion greatly limits the extent to which civilians can modify rebel governance for their own interests. However, coercion is not constant during civil war. In general, coercion depends primarily on the imbalance in weapons and the possibility of betrayal. A complicated evolution in rebels' relations to civilians can sometimes be traced to changes in the relative threat they pose to each other. When rebels have few weapons and depend on civilians to hide and protect them from the state's police or army, civilians hold the upper hand. Later, if rebels acquire weapons, and especially if they form a liberated zone, they hold the advantage (Kasfir 2005: 279–80). Changing fortunes in their military struggle with the opposing government may cause rebels to change their pattern of governance. As the Communists in the Greek civil war began to lose territory, they increased their coercive treatment of civilians (Kalyvas, Chapter 6, this volume).

Rebel organizations grow and contract during civil war. In response, civilian governing structures evolve over time and vary over space. Creating new organizations takes time. In classic guerrilla theory, groups start out small, typically in areas in which the incumbent state's presence is weak or nonexistent and then acquire recruits and weapons, eventually gaining sufficient control to exert authority over civilians (see Wickham-Crowley, Chapter 3, this volume). As they expand into new areas, they usually need to repeat the process. Consequently, rebel duration and territorial expansion typically result in both temporal and spatial variation in implementing civilian governance.¹⁸ Furthermore, the conditions of guerrilla war make it difficult for leaders to maintain control over their rebel commanders, who may have their own ideas about governance or encounter unexpected problems as they enter new terrain.

In other cases, the guerrilla story is irrelevant. Some rebel organizations begin relatively well funded by external patrons. Others emerge from conflicts that split governments into two or more armed segments. The faction that loses control of the state apparatus begins a protracted struggle relying on its control over part of the military and effective possession of part of the country. The Forces Nouvelles (FN), rebels in northern Côte d'Ivoire who emerged from a mutiny, continued some older administrative structures while adding new services in response to civilian demands (Förster, Chapter 10, this volume). Secessionists who select existing administrative or participatory institutions without altering them practice rebel governance. For example, the failed secession of Biafra from Nigeria between 1967 and 1970 began with a rebel army occupying a well-defined civilian administrative apparatus (Stremlau 1977).

¹⁸ It is exceptionally difficult to find information on spatial variation in rebel governance in the secondary literature. Arjona and Weinstein designed their fieldwork to include it (Arjona forthcoming: chapter 4; Weinstein 2007: 53–54, 201–02).

In such cases, the availability to rebels of the incumbent state's offices, local civilian connections, and taxation will not only be an attractive resource for initiating a civil war, but is likely to influence the design of rebel governance. It is not foreordained that they will prefer to organize governance in that way. If their rebellion is ideologically or religiously driven, rebels who defect from state armies may prefer to relate to local civilians through new structures they create.

In addition, rebel governance often changes dramatically if the civil war persists for a long time. It is commonplace but seriously misleading to characterize rebel groups as if they were unchanging organizations perpetually committed to a single doctrine or practice. Groups that pursue rebellion for many years frequently experience severe fluctuations in their military fortunes. They may change their principles to protect their organizations (Metelits 2010: 13–14, 26–28). Some rebel groups that entered civil wars as principled Marxists turned to commercial production when severely threatened by their rivals. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which started as a dedicated Marxist group, reorganized to devote much of its efforts to the collection and sale of diamonds. UNITA's governance of civilians also changed, becoming increasingly hostile and coercive (Malaquias 2001: 314).

Civilian Participation

The most important issue about civilian participation is whether rebels encourage it at all and, if they do, whether they always coerce participation or sometimes encourage voluntary involvement.¹⁹ Rebels introduce civilian structures to solicit support from civilians for ideological reasons, to gain foreign assistance, or just to improve their chances of winning. Early covert political mobilization can help rebels with few resources prepare for governance.

Popular support of insurgents by civilians is not in itself civilian participation in rebel governance. It becomes civilian participation when it flows through formal or informal rebel-sanctioned structures, either those that rebels create or civilian structures that they accept in territory they control. Rebel creation of legislatures, civilian advisory boards, or local councils is evidence that rebels encourage civilian participation. Rebels may announce their commitment to civilian participation, yet refuse to permit it or take it seriously. Civilian involvement indicates that rebel governance is working.

Whether civilian participation is voluntary in any respect rather than based entirely on coercion is difficult to establish. Some level of coercion will be found

¹⁹ Since observers are attracted to cases of civilian participation and not to its absence, selection bias is hard to avoid.

in every civil war, no matter what claims of liberation or popular support insurgents make. Coercion may account for civilian participation in governance more accurately than portrayals of popular enthusiasm.²⁰ All actors have incentives to mischaracterize the amount of civilian voluntarism. Non-combatants undoubtedly take part for mixed motives – including prudence and self-interest as well as support for rebel goals. Nevertheless, in some civil wars civilians volunteer. The presence of voluntary participation can be demonstrated by showing that civilian involvement exceeds the level of underlying coercion implicit (or explicit) in rebels' expectations for appropriate civilian behavior.

Indicators that rebels intend civilians to participate voluntarily include the creation of structures for expression that operate with significant autonomy from rebel oversight, insurgent deference to civilian choices within some range of decisions, and respect for civilian choices not to participate. In Guinea-Bissau, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) introduced elections for village administrative committees and judges in village courts (Rudebeck 1972: 9, 13–14); “the PAIGC interfered little with the choices made” (Chabal 1981: 96).

If civilian participation is present, it is either organized or conducted ad hoc. Insurgents who create participatory structures offer better evidence of commitment to civilian participation than those offering impromptu invitations to non-combatants to share their views. Rebels may encourage participation throughout the territory they hold or only in specific places. Even when rebels encourage civilian participation, the level of civilian response is likely to vary among cases and over time in the same case.

If enemy attacks force insurgents from an area, they have to withdraw their support for civilian participation there. However, a lot can be learned about their commitment to civilian governance from whether and how they dismantle civilian structures – and also from whether they restore them, if they re-establish control over the same territory. Not only did the NRA plan and assist civilians to withdraw *with* them at a critical point in the Ugandan civil war, they reinstated the form of village democracy they had originally promulgated when they regained the upper hand (Kasfir 2005: 289–90).

Civilian Administration

The first question concerning civilian administration is whether rebels create one or not, and then whether it is organized informally or on the basis of rules.

²⁰ Kriger provides an excellent discussion of the importance of coercion rather than popular enthusiasm in explaining peasant support in the Zimbabwe African National Union's (ZANU) sector during the Rhodesian civil war (1992: 116–69). In evaluating the importance of coercion in that case, it would be helpful to keep in mind that ZANU's army never held territory in Rhodesia (nor did its main insurgent rival).

Bureaucratic civilian administration is a vastly different enterprise in intention and, if implemented, in execution than services supplied informally to civilians. If initiated, civilian administration usually begins informally. The interesting issue is whether it becomes rule-based.

Two years after the PAIGC began to hold territory, it took civilian administration out of the hands of its guerrilla commanders and began to routinize it (Chabal 1983: 82, 112, 115, 119). While it fought the war, the party leadership created a bureaucratic structure for civilian management and rapidly expanded health and education services throughout liberated areas. On the other hand, the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia made little effort to create any civilian administration during its first two decades (Pizarro 1992: 178). But in the mid-1980s it expanded its political control over villages and towns in the areas it held, “practically playing the role of *de facto* state dispensing justice, regulating market relations and protecting the environment” (Richani 2002: 89).

Beyond supplying public order, taxation is probably the most common trait of rebel civilian administration. Many rebel groups demand regular payments in money or goods in kind from civilians in territories they hold, and virtually all of them collect food and other supplies. Pay-offs to prevent damage or kidnapping are a form of taxation. The ELN raised funds by requiring protection payments from large multinational oil companies (Rochlin 2003: 105).

When rebels collect taxes, they may do so either informally, or according to rules they establish and officials they appoint. The state-building literature suggests that taxation should lead rebels to build more elaborate civilian administration (Tilly 1992: 84–91). In other cases, insurgents abolish taxes instituted by the predecessor state. For example, the PAIGC abolished taxation throughout the war to increase popular support (Chabal 1983: 113). Nevertheless, it built a complex civilian administration.

If there is a civilian administration, it may operate throughout or in only part of the rebels’ territory. Civilian administrations differ in how much use local inhabitants make of the administrative services rebels organize for them. Rebels may make all the decisions in civilian administration, if there is one, or they may allow civilians to exercise some independent influence in decisions made in certain offices. Taliban fighters and rebel leaders held most of the offices administering civilians in areas the Taliban held in Afghanistan before it achieved victory in 1998 (Rashid 2000: 29, 40, 97–98). The Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), on the other hand, frequently arranged for villagers to elect civilians to organize local activities, although under the surveillance of political commissars who were rebel officers (Henriksen 1983: 148).

Civilians who hold public office in rebel structures are usually acting against self-interest because they are at serious risk of being targeted by state officials. Where civilians supply public goods – for example, serving without salaries as teachers in schools or nurses in clinics organized by rebels – they are likely to be

acting voluntarily. In El Salvador, literate village supporters of the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) taught in local primary schools in return for food and economic help (Binford 1999: 18).

Commercial Production

Where rebels manage civilians primarily to produce income, their arrangements form another kind of civilian governance. Since all rebels must obtain funds to support their operations, all of them must devote some energy and resources toward this purpose. But some rebel groups that have the opportunity to acquire significant economic rents will choose to devote rebel governance primarily to income production. Where civilians are an important resource for generating economic rents, rebels are likely to organize them for production or acquire their goods by sale, seizure, or taxation.

Such income can come only from those high-value accessible goods and services that rebels can defend against attack by the state or other insurgent groups. Services include both those that civilians would consider desirable, such as organizing markets or facilitating transport of their smuggled goods, and those they would regard as undesirable, such as kidnapping and protection rackets. Certain high-value goods are not accessible to rebels, because, in most circumstances, they cannot defend the installations necessary for production – for example, oil wells (as opposed to oil “bunkering”) or deep shaft mines (as opposed to alluvial mining). If the state or competitive insurgent groups are extremely weak, even income from these installations could become accessible to rebels.

Occasionally, rebels may expel civilians from certain areas so their fighters can produce the good or service. Since that means organizing civilians for a public purpose, it amounts to rebel governance (albeit minimal) if the civilians remain in rebel territory. The income created may assist the rebel war effort, benefit civilians in insurgent territory, or be used by rebels personally. Insurgents’ methods of organizing civilians for production will also depend on the nature of the good itself – alluvial diamonds pose different production issues from turning coca leaf into cocaine.

The ELN used its leaders and its fighters to acquire its income. Its “production” techniques involved skills in violence and negotiation requisite for extortion, kidnapping, and bank robberies, each an important ELN source of income (Richani 2002: 64). None of these procedures could be entrusted to civilians. These “services” were highly undesirable to their “clients.”

ORDER

Rebel governance sometimes becomes rebel political order. The concept grows out of Max Weber’s characterization of “political communities . . . aimed at subordinating to orderly domination by the participants a ‘territory’ and the

conduct of the persons within it” (1978, II: 901). Rebel political order occupies the other end of the governance continuum from unilateral, direct, and arbitrary use of coercion by insurgents. When rebel political order occurs, rebel governance becomes more clearly comparable to governance in conventional polities.

Rebel political order is a reciprocal process engaging rebels and civilians (Arjona forthcoming: 33ff; Förster, [Chapter 10](#), this volume). It may also include outsiders who have more sporadic relations, frequently commercial, that bring them into insurgent-held territory (Mampilly 2011: 16). It depends on the rules that rebels create through new political structures or through the regulations of pre-existing civilian offices that rebels accept. It is contingent on insurgents’ commitment to sustain the rules they introduce (Arjona forthcoming: 21). In addition, it depends on civilian compliance with orders issued by persons occupying offices in these structures. In all cases, the capacity of both rebels and civilians to follow through is subject to the vicissitudes of civil war.

Compliance counts, not the reasons why people obey. Neither civilian popular support for rebels nor their belief in the legitimacy of a rebel regime is sufficient to establish that they comply with the rules, although both may be indicators. If local residents comply because they deeply value rebel rules, order may be achieved more successfully. The same qualities that create strong communities in which members trust one another sufficiently to enter easily into collective action can generate rebel political order (see Petersen 2001: 19–24). These qualities include the willingness to follow rules in the belief they are both legitimate and effective as well as the expectation that most others in the community will also follow them (Arjona, [Chapter 9](#), this volume). The reciprocity of relations, military and political, between militants and villagers in Shining Path’s early years in rural Peru suggests that the creation of a rebel political order may have been underway (Weinstein 2007: 186–92).

Nevertheless, coercion, which is never absent from civil war, can also form the basis of a political order if civilians consistently obey rebel rules because they dread the consequences while rebels continue to implement their commands on a regular basis. During their rebellion in the 1990s, Taliban leaders ruled on the basis of their own interpretation of Islamic law, which meant excluding civilians from governance: “it is a fact our rules are obeyed out of fear” (Maley 2009: 196).

Since rebel political order must be constructed, it exists under certain conditions including for a limited time, always shorter than a particular rebel group’s control over territory. The fluidity, and often the brevity, of rebel control over territory makes the establishment of rebel political order difficult or impossible in many cases. The establishment of a liberated zone is a prerequisite to establish the basis for upholding the regularity of both rules and compliance with them (see Kalyvas 2006: 118–20). Rebels cannot assure civilians they will continue to uphold rules in zones they contest with the

incumbent state. Nor can civilians regularly comply when they must satisfy two (or more) masters. Duration is also a condition. Building rebel political order takes time in order to create expectations on all sides that the rules will be obeyed, can be relied upon, and will be enforced consistently.

Thus, regularity engenders predictability. Civilians crave predictability for family security, self-preservation, and personal profit. But rebels often avoid supplying it to protect their flexibility in conducting guerilla warfare. On the other hand, if rebels want to construct a political order – for example, because they believe establishing solidarity with civilians is a paramount objective – they have to persuade civilians they can be trusted not to renege on rules they create. They must show civilians that their continuing commitment to political order is credible. Two methods rebels can use to demonstrate their commitment is to bind themselves to rules the violation of which will be costly to them and to build a reputation by enforcing those rules responsibly over time (Weinstein 2007: 168–69). For example, both rebel officers and civilians in Uganda agreed that NRA officials did not interfere in civilian elections to resistance committees they organized and worked closely with the winners (Kasfir 2005: 287).

As is true for political order in states (Huntington 1968; Jackson 1990), the degree of rebel political order varies over time and among cases. Since the extent of predictability and regularity are observable, they can be measured by noting the extent to which rebels persist in upholding rules and to which civilians obey them. As a basis for comparison, instances of rebel governance could be classified as possessing high, medium, low, or no political order. Rebel political order is often unstable, changing over time. Newly acquired authority, though legitimate at first, can lead rebels to overreach for material or status rewards. While more evidence would be needed to show that the militias had established a political order in the *barrios* of Medellín, Colombia, Gutiérrez-Sanín’s description of how their success led to its breakdown demonstrates how difficult it is to maintain rebel political order (Chapter 12, this volume).

CAUSES

The most important objective in elaborating rebel governance as a subject area is to help researchers develop testable propositions about causes. Only careful empirical work examining actual cases, including those presented in this book, can make progress toward explanations of factors that shape the specific traits of rebel governance in particular situations. Exploration of causes is not an appropriate task for this chapter. Nevertheless, consideration of one of the foundational principles entailed in rebel governance deepens this chapter’s overview of the field and suggests its promise for causal analysis.

Since rebellion necessarily establishes the premise for rebel governance, it provides one of its underlying parameters. Rebellion makes rebel governance

possible, although not inevitable. It immediately poses a central question: are the causes of rebel governance primarily exogenous or endogenous to rebellion? Do the prior ideologies, cultural values, and social beliefs that rebels bring to rebellion – consciously or unconsciously – shape their approaches to rebel governance more than the ideas they develop during the war as they respond both to its daily challenges and to larger strategic factors that only become apparent to them after they begin to fight? Developing this issue builds on one thread of Kalyvas's account of the causes of violence in civil war (2006: 82–83, 389–90).

The doctrines rebels articulate before starting rebellions help explain why some of them create governments, although work on the microfoundations of civil war shows that the causal importance of ideology has been greatly overstated (Kalyvas 2006: 44–46). Leaders of many insurgent groups are committed to civilian-oriented ideologies before they initiate war. As rebels, the Taliban styled their governance on the basis of its fundamentalist interpretation of the Koran (Rashid 2000: 29). During World War II, the Greek communist party relied on Marxist principles in organizing village government in territories that its army held (Kalyvas, Chapter 6, this volume).

Rebel goals, as opposed to doctrines, also have substantial consequences for how insurgents govern. One significant difference among insurgents is whether their purpose in going to war is to take over the incumbent state or to create a new state by provoking the secession of a region. This simple distinction produces different incentives for how they will want to govern civilians. Secessionists must justify the new state they intend to form and usually try to legitimate their rebellion by creating new structures as soon as they start governing civilians. Rebels who want to take over an existing state can choose to continue existing government institutions, develop new ones, or do nothing until they win. Naga rebels in India, who began their fight to secede with a vision of an independent Naga state, diverged considerably in governing civilians from the Naxalites, also in India, who followed their ideas of Marxist doctrine with the ultimate intention of taking over the entire state (Suykens, Chapter 7, this volume).

In addition, cultural beliefs and social values instilled in insurgents before they rebel influence their governance of civilians, often more deeply than rebels realize. Though trying to overthrow the political order while upholding the social values that gave rise to it seems paradoxical, rebels cannot govern otherwise (Hoffmann, Chapter 8, this volume). Civilians are more likely to accept governance that embodies values they understand and uphold. Thus, the structures rebels create for civilians often look a lot like those of the previous government and reach more deeply into local cultural beliefs. Mai Mai reliance on a mythical narrative that tapped pre-colonial, Christian, and nationalist values shared by residents in eastern Congo (DRC) led to a highly centralized authoritarian and coercive insurgent government

held together by a rebel leader endowed with charismatic authority (Hoffmann, [Chapter 8](#), this volume).

Experience during civil war often leads rebels to change their prewar doctrines or even abandon them. While many rebels initiate civil war with strong moral convictions, most of them have had no prior experience in governing civilians – they learn on the job. Even if they are strongly committed, the traits of any governments they do set up may not derive from their ideologies. Encounters with civilians and exigencies of military struggle may be more important to their decisions to govern and how to do it. Still, ideology remains important. Ideologically committed insurgents are likely to have different ideas about governance than warlords, whether or not they find their original principles useful once they start to apply them.

Other groups rebel without giving any thought to engaging civilians before victory, but then create governments while fighting. These insurgents discover they need to organize civilians only after they start to fight. Their reasons are usually more materialistic than idealistic – to acquire badly needed food, supplies, or information about the enemy that only civilians can provide. They are likely to justify introducing government to facilitate acquisition of noncombatant resources – a conduit they may not have anticipated needing when they entered the war.

Furthermore, insurgent principles often change as the war continues, leading them to invent new purposes for governments they establish. For example, rebels often govern civilians to solve problems that arise during rebellion. When they rebelled, NRA leaders had made only a vague commitment to make Ugandan democratic institutions work properly after they took over the state. But once NRA leaders appointed village committees to supply their soldiers with food and recruits, local residents started blaming the NRA for their own conflicts with committee members. One of the main reasons why the NRA adopted its novel doctrine of direct democracy was to shift responsibility for committee decisions to civilians (Kasfir 2005: 286).

Or, leaders may abandon their principles in favor of commercial profit. The FARC in Colombia started out governing civilians according to their understanding of Marxist doctrines and changed when they decided to devote much of their efforts to earning extraordinary income from cocaine (Rochlin 2003: 99–100). The lure of material resources that result from acquiring territorial control and the recruitment of untrained youth as fighters can destroy a successful rebel force's ideological coherence and military discipline, as happened in Medellín, Colombia (Gutiérrez-Sanín, [Chapter 12](#), this volume).

At first blush, predatory rebels would appear to respond solely to endogenous incentives – material opportunities produced by the breakdown of political order. One might infer that their attention to profit would be sufficient to determine how they organized rebel governance, if they bothered with it at all. But the experience of the NPFL in Liberia suggests that exogenous

factors also contributed. Politicians who became predatory rebels – Charles Taylor in particular – continued political practices, violence, and patronage, learned from service in prewar Liberian government (Reno, [Chapter 13](#), this volume).

Even if the initiative in rebel governance belongs to the rebels, civilians often have surprising influence over how it evolves. In such cases, they become an additional endogenous causal factor. When rebels incorporate civilian members of social groups, they often change rebel governance. The goals and discourse of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), for example, distinctly changed, becoming more complex, when its leaders absorbed Islamic teachers and student activists into its governing activities (Barter, [Chapter 11](#), this volume).

Competition between rebels and incumbent governments is an endogenous cause helping determine the strength of rebel governance. Incumbent states and rebel groups contend for the support of civilians. Comparing rebellions in five Latin American countries, insurgent governance was more robust where the state ignored or alienated civilians and more feeble where the state or political parties secured peace, introduced democratic reforms, and improved living conditions (Wickham-Crowley, [Chapter 3](#), this volume).

CONCLUSION

The study of rebel governance – the analysis of political relations between rebels and civilians during civil war – is gaining recognition as a distinct area for inquiry. Like any other new field, it will succeed if it produces new knowledge and especially if it deepens our ideas about human nature. A systematic overview of rebel governance will help researchers become more attentive to variations in conditions that affect insurgents' efforts to organize civilians for nonmilitary purposes and in the remarkable variety of regimes they create. To find the field's boundaries and decide what arrangements amount to "government" calls for identifying useful definitions, establishing appropriate scope conditions, and classifying patterns of governing civilians.

The field of rebel governance should be defined broadly to include the greatest range of empirical variation among rebel governments during protracted civil war. The more inexorably the logical implications of its necessary concepts are exposed, the better it will identify those variations. Yet, the more parsimoniously the field is constructed, the more likely it will accommodate that variation. So, as suggested above, "rebels" is a good starting point because it includes both defecting regular military units and irregular guerrillas. The ideas, culture, and military doctrines of those trained to wage war as conventional forces may lead them to approach rebel governance differently from those who rely on guerrilla strategies.

Three scope conditions are sufficient to provide the basic boundaries for this field. To establish governance, rebels must commit acts of initial violence, gain

control of territory, and confront civilians living there. These conditions make governance possible, but difficult to pin down. Territory is often fluid, civilians frequently flee, and violence can be episodic. Domination – the degree to which civilians comply with rebel directions – provides a useful approach to discover which activities are included in a particular instance of rebel governance and why others are not. Thus, for example, rebel governance is likely to be more intensive where rebels hold terrain that is difficult for the incumbent state to access.

Organizing civilians for a public purpose is the basic criterion to determine which insurgent activities qualify as rebel governance. It could involve any formal or informal structure or activity for participation by civilians, administration of civilians, or use of civilians to produce wealth for rebels. While weapons usually give rebels the most influence in designing these structures, rebels sometimes go to surprising lengths to accommodate civilian preferences. Some insurgents create structures that permit local residents to make their own decisions, although usually only on issues that do not risk insurgent military capacity or objectives.

One important difference among rebels who provide systems of justice, taxation, or provision of health or educational services is whether they do so informally or by establishing rules. Some rebel organizations evolve over time, starting with ad hoc arrangements and later bureaucratizing them. Another is whether they acquire wealth by incorporating civilians into production systems or simply loot or extort them. It is an empirical question whether insurgents' motives reflect either greed or grievance – or change from one to the other (see Gutiérrez-Sanín, [Chapter 12](#), this volume).

Rebel governments are difficult to observe, making causal analysis difficult. Even with full control over territory, insurgents often hide any government structures they introduce for civilians. Without secure control, secrecy may be necessary for survival. Early political mobilization in territory controlled by the incumbent state must be hidden, yet can be an important determinant of later rebel structures for civilians. Negative cases, where rebels could form governments but do not, are essential for persuasive explanation yet are even harder to “see.” There is no way to know whether unobserved cases behave differently from those recognized. While this means that findings based on quantitative analysis must be treated with caution, the way forward is to look for patterns in observable cases and hope that previously undetected cases eventually will confirm explanatory propositions.

Understanding how, why, and when rebels engage in governance of civilians has important policy implications for outsiders concerned with a particular civil war. One important issue is the fate of civilians caught in the struggle. Another is whether negotiations are possible. Knowing whether rebels create governance arrangements and what kind may give valuable insight into their motives. Providing governance, especially where it involves encouragement of voluntary participation, and establishing rule-based

administration could indicate rebel propensity to negotiate and to protect civilians. It may also indicate a willingness to accept outside humanitarian intervention for civilians.

Developing the field of rebel governance opens new inquiries into the behavior of governments under the dual stresses of ongoing hostilities without recourse to international sovereignty. This field will deepen an important facet of the study of civil war, perhaps leading to more informed analysis of other military and civilian aspects. Findings in this new area of mostly fragile, secretive, and parallel governments are likely to enhance comparative political analysis in every social science discipline.

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Del Gobierno de Abajo al Gobierno de Arriba . . .
and Back: Transitions to and from Rebel Governance
in Latin America, 1956–1990

Timothy Wickham-Crowley^I

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the conditions that sometimes gave rise to the formation of systems of rebel governance during more than three decades of guerrilla warfare in multiple nations of Latin America, 1956–1990. In those rural areas experiencing an absence or erosion of the effective – and populace-benefitting – exercise of governance by the central authorities, rebels were presented with a basic opportunity to form counter-states. Similar opportunities were provided if politically hostile para-political influences were absent (like non-revolutionary party-loyalties), or if pro-revolutionary para-political organizations were regionally influential. Where central governments responded to the nascent or established presence of rebel governance with predation or terror against local civilians, such actions were only likely to further erode the legitimacy of central governors. Rebels could deepen their initial patterns of governance by performing the classic obligations of governors: promoting material security and welfare, providing police and judicial functions, and protecting the populace from external armed attacks. Yet central governors could also restore or expand their delivery of those same “services” (e.g., through military civic action), and the two types of governments could find themselves competing to become the sole governing body. Declines of rebel governance commonly occurred, too, and could stem from effective military repression, but more interestingly when the rebels themselves violated the obligations incumbent upon governing authorities.

^I I am indebted to all of my multiple-conference companions and the volume contributors assembled herein, but especially for meticulous editing and further substantive contributions from Ana Arjona, whose suggestions corrected certain errors and improved the [final chapter](#).

INTRODUCTION

In conditions of Latin American guerrilla warfare, the situation described above in the title of this chapter for mid-1960s Venezuela (Gall 1965: 5) would quite often emerge: the peasantry in selected areas would view themselves as facing two governments: the official one “down below” (*de abajo*) in the cities, and the counter-state formed by the rebel forces “up above” (*de arriba*) in the hills. Yet this elementary formulation suggests an equivalency of political opportunities and processes that cannot be presupposed. I argue herein that the initial emergence and even the later crystallization of “rebel governments” depend upon historically and regionally specific situations wherein the “incumbency” of formal, centralized governance *cannot* be taken for granted; instead, the systemic *absence* or *undermining* of the powers of central governments is a pre-condition for consolidation of guerrilla governments as well as for its subsequent consolidation and duration. Certain domain conditions thus must prevail before the rebel governments of revolutionaries can be realized or long-lasting.

A fundamental weakening or absence of incumbent governance is very likely to precede any rebel attempt to form a counter-state that could challenge that central government. Further conditions affect the *actual* establishment of such rebel governments, the *depth* of that process, and finally the conditions that might lead to the (eventual) *weakening or collapse* of rebel governments. In pursuing these understandings, I wish to re-apply ideas developed by Moore and later employed by myself to understand the “rise and fall” of rebel governments, with a more elaborate analysis of the details of such state versus counter-state competition, and derived from a greater engagement with the larger and later guerrilla movements of the years 1970–1990.

THESES ON RULERS AND RULED

Valencia once argued that if one conceives of the guerrillas as a “counter-state,” then one must surely clarify one’s general conception of state–society relationships (1970: 338–40). Let us proceed in that constructive vein. As I argued elsewhere (Wickham-Crowley 1987), the most analytically consistent and fruitful way to understand the (often mutable) relationships between governors and governed is via a “model” developed by Moore in his book *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (1978).

Predation is a special case of exercising power, to be sure, but points us to more routine processes: those of coercion and repression, however moderately or deeply they may actually be exercised. Such routine processes within any functioning polity thus nod tacitly to the more commonplace fact that *any* form of governance cannot be constituted by exchanges *alone*, and thus I follow Moore in acknowledging the inescapable element of power and even coercion/repression in any relation of governance.

Given the domain assumption that so many of us now trace to Max Weber – the state is that organization seeking a monopoly in using legitimate force with a given territory – such authority is typically *legitimated* via a process of macrosocial exchange that takes place between the (incipient) rulers and those whom they seek to rule (see Förster, [Chapter 10](#), this volume, for a related interpretation). Rulers extract a surplus in some form or other from those whom they govern, and “in exchange” (1) defend the populace from foreign enemies, (2) maintain internal peace and order, and (3) make contributions to the material security of the population (Moore 1978: 20–22, 17, 455–57; Scott and Kerkvliet 1973: 506–07). These logics I applied both to the formal modes of rule by incumbent state managers and to the informal modes of rule by economico-political elites in rural areas, the latter especially in those locales where the “infrastructural power” of the central state has not penetrated well (Schmidt et al. 1977; Mann 1986). In parallel fashion, Zachariah Mampilly also argues that, in cases of rebel governance, there prevails a “set of social norms that define relations between a civilian population and a political authority” ([Chapter 4](#), this volume).

Where any rulers, incipient or well-established, can maintain or even expand those three contributions to the well-being of the populace, then their authority is likely to be accepted as legitimate – for Moore: “rational authority” – and thus major collective resentments against that authority, let alone open rebellion or insurrection, are expected to be scarce or nonexistent (e.g., Scott 1976, 1985; Scott and Kerkvliet 1973). That scenario of legitimation is made yet more likely if the *exactions* that rulers make upon the subject population – the other side of that macrosocial exchange – are few and light, rather than many and onerous. In contrary situations, rulers and/or states might not protect the populace from enemies internal or external, might not maintain peace and order, might actively contribute (instead) to the material *in*-security of the populace, even preying upon then (cf. Moore 1978: 455–57).

Thus the fortunes and misfortunes of rebel governors in Latin America during the years 1956–1970 could be in good part traceable to the particular *balance* of macrosocial exchanges along these lines (Wickham-Crowley 1987). Those trajectories include both the activities of rebel forces in rural areas and those of incumbent governments.

PRECONDITIONS FOR COUNTER-STATE FORMATION: THE ABSENCE OR EROSION OF CENTRAL GOVERNANCE

The Absence of Central Governance

Why should we, as socio-political analysts, *assume* that the state and its authority already “exist” for all populations scattered across the national

territory? We need also to avoid presentist assumptions, remembering what Tilly taught us: “In 1500 no full-fledged national state with unquestioned priority over the other governments within its territory existed anywhere in the West,” and power was often more concentrated in the lower and local levels of everyday existence (1978: 184–85). Therefore, the *absence* of both monolithic and effective power over an entire society might well be our conceptual point of departure, rather than assuming the reverse. Eric Wolf and Michael Mann have given us further tools for thinking critically about such assumptions: the former pointed out the origins of peasant rebellions in peripheral areas far from the sure reach of incumbent rulers (Wolf 1969; cf. Hobsbawm 1965, 1969). Mann (1986) drew attention to the difference between unchallenged rulers (“despotic powers”) versus those who really *could* effectively govern certain peoples and regions (“infrastructural powers”).

In Goodwin’s hands (2001), the regional aspect of weak infrastructural power takes center stage; he identifies such areas as prime real estate for the building up of insurgent forces. An exemplary portrait that drives home this point comes from the 1950s Sierra Maestra and other uplands of Cuba’s Oriente Province. “Since time immemorial the Sierra has served as a refuge for smugglers and those fleeing from justice,” and was peopled in the 1950s by fringe elements of Cuban society, for whom the “state” amounted above all to an occasional military patrol, to which they responded with a non-political, anarchistic opposition. “And Castro was precisely the man to employ and organize their readiness to rebel against all established authority,” to make use of their “extremely individualistic hostility to government” (Allemann 1974: 71, 394). In this volume, Ana Arjona points to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia’s (FARC) decades-long stronghold in Caquetá, a department where “the state was largely absent” (Chapter 9, this volume).

Therefore, if the government’s “presence” in any particular region(s) of the national territory is weak *prior to* the onset of insurgent struggles, such regions provide “better real estate” for building up a counter-state, since the incumbent state’s presence may be largely formal, and practically nonexistent. Conversely, the strong presence of central authority works solidly against any such insurgency even getting off the ground. Moreover, Arjona shows that even strong institutions of *local-level* governance can work against the establishment of rebel authority, or “rebelocracy” (Chapter 9, this volume).

From all accounts, the Batista regime had zero politico-administrative presence in the eastern hills of Oriente Province during the years of rebel struggles, and images of that Cuban zone as a kind of “Wild West” recur in the literature (Wickham-Crowley 1992: 131–32). The sheer absence of a central-government administrative presence was also noted for the Venezuelan state of Falcón, a key insurgent area (Valsalice 1973: 185; Debray

TABLE 3.1 *The Infrastructural Powers of Central Governments in Prospective Rebel Zones: Latin America, 1956–1990*

Period	Nation/Insurgency Zone	Infrastructural Power (Estimate)	Level of Rebel Governance
1956–1970	Cuba/Oriente Province	Weak	Deep
	Colombia/ <i>Violencia</i> & coffee interior	Weak to moderate	Substantial
	Guatemala/northeastern zones	Weak to moderate	Moderately low
	Venezuela/Lara & Falcón States	Weak (to moderate?)	Substantial
	Peru/Junín and La Convención zones	Moderate	Low to very low
	Bolivia/Santa Cruz-Chuquisaca border	Weak to moderate	Very low
	Nicaragua/northern zones	Weak	Deep
1971–1990	El Salvador/northern, eastern zones	Moderate	Deep
	Guatemala/EGP highlands zone	Moderate	Substantial
	Colombia/eastern interior	Weak	Substantial
	Peru/south Andean <i>Sendero</i> areas	Moderate	Substantial

1970: 98–99); more generally, the Andean areas of Venezuela where the insurgencies most took hold, and also the interior *llanos* or plains, both appear in the literature as far from the reach of authority and administration flowing out of Caracas.

Several cases that illustrate this argument are summarized in Table 3.1. It covers the period just preceding the rebels' systematic attempts to go out and rouse the countryside, to build their counter-state, rather than after such political contention was fully crystallized.

The Presence or Absence of Para-Governmental Organizations

In a similar vein, within those nations where political parties have some role in placing persons in the seats of central power, the regionally differentiated presence and influence of such parties, and also certain other organized actors – politically oriented, yet located outside of the polity – can constitute a

para-governmental form of “infrastructural” influence (N.B.: not “power”), one that could compensate in part for the absence of a routine, central-governmental administrative, police, or military presence. The critical difference, however, is that such parties by their influence could either “insulate” populations against rebel-government appeals, or serve to enhance such appeals if they allied with or supported rebel forces.

Non-radical political party-forces working against the insurgents’ causes operated most notably in the rural areas of most of Venezuela, where the *Acción Democrática* party had been mobilizing supporters for decades prior to the 1960s; also in much (but not all) of rural Colombia, home to the historically entrenched “hereditary hatreds” of loyalty to either Liberals or Conservatives; and, across a shorter time-span, in a good part of Andean Peru as of the 1960s, where both the *Acción Popular* party of Fernando Belaúnde Terry and the older APRA party (American Revolutionary Popular Alliance) had engaged in voter-mobilizing efforts and peasant appeals in different parts of the Peruvian Sierra.

A contrasting result would be expected if rebel-allied Communist parties hold sway within a region, and that is what I encountered. Communist parties supporting the insurgents’ causes clearly were effective operatives in Lara State of Venezuela, and in many areas of the “peasant republics” across the violence-ridden interior of Colombia in the 1950s and 1960s (Wickham-Crowley 1992: 141–46, 297–99). Sendero Luminoso (“Shining Path”), for its part, functioned as both a party-organization and a revolutionary guerrilla force in Peru’s southern highlands, later moving into the drug-producing Upper Huallaga Valley. But, rather noticeably, it failed to expand beyond those initial areas of great influence because other political parties had been there first. These three sets of Communist-oriented rebel forces each faced a regionally differentiated set of national political circumstances, ones where the established political parties of the nascent (or continuing) democratic systems had more influence in more regions of the national territory than they did. The rebels were thus clearly hamstrung in their efforts to move beyond those narrower bases. Indeed, by the late 1960s the Colombian rebels had by far the largest regional scope of influence that any of these national cases of insurgency would witness. Yet, by the late 1980s they had been almost completely pushed out of their old redoubts in the coffee-dominated interior, and often moved into eastern jungle areas and nearer to the Venezuelan border. A kind of seesaw followed: first, with a greater expansion in both regions, coming to touch more than half of the national territory, and numbers reaching perhaps 22,000 in the FARC by 2002; yet, second, the rebels never gained broad popular support and saw their numbers reduced to maybe 8,000 by 2012 (Chaskel and Bustamente 2012; Gutiérrez-Sanín 2008; Ferro and Uribe 2002).

A “thinner” version of village mobilization came to the western Guatemalan highlands in the area of greatest rebel influence there, in the shape of the EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor). Nonetheless, their appreciable presence certainly

constituted something like relatively well-established rebel government. Yet they were never able to create safe zones for themselves and their supporters, and thus Stoll (1993) characterized the entire area as one that was caught “between two armies,” the core of which was El Quiché Department with its largely Mayan-descent population. There is some truth to his portrait, for the armed forces themselves mobilized strongly in that region as well: as in El Salvador they also had army veterans placed in villages throughout Guatemala; the army brass used its “despotic” powers to secure so much land for themselves that the area came to be known as the “Zone of the Generals”; and the military more or less coercively recruited peasant villagers to join *patrullas civiles* and to do regular militia-type duty in search of rebels. All of those elements came together during the late 1970s and early 1980s to produce the single greatest wave of civilian killings seen in the entire era of Latin American insurgency. The previous discussion plus further cases are summarized in Table 3.2.

The Erosion of Previous Governance Relations: Matters of Material Security and Well-being

Yet a sheer absence of effective governance is not the only “pathway” that might create openings for those who would create oppositional counter-states. As Moore argued, the old regime’s “moral defeat” and “erosion of legitimacy” had typically *preceded* any political gains by the government’s opponents (1978: 446; also Pettee 1938: 100–03). Central governments therefore might once have had some – even substantial – infrastructural reach into the territories in question, only to see such authority undermined by their actions or inactions. Land hunger, land theft, and (possible) land reform might well loom large in the minds of rural cultivators in all of our cases. Any such material specifics surely will vary across national and time-specific contexts, but some elements are far more generalizable.

Certain nations and insurgency situations stand out in each of these respects. The most extreme versions of land theft or direct assaults on the landed security of rural cultivating classes probably occurred in Cuba during the 1950s and Guatemala during the later 1970s and 1980s. We must also consider the more nuanced instances where insurgency-touched regions seem to have been largely bypassed by land reforms that touched other parts of their own nations. The sharpest such case would be the Sendero operations area in the southern highlands of Peru, especially the Ayacucho region, largely passed over by the land reforms begun under elected president Fernando Belaúnde and even overlooked under the more wide-ranging efforts of the left-wing military regime which followed (Palmer 1986; McClintock 1983: 27–28). Also of this ilk, if less pronounced, are the Andean states of Falcón and Lara in Venezuela during the 1960s, where the two major rebel groups operated, locales little touched by the land-distribution processes effected in the years before and

TABLE 3.2 *The Infrastructural Presence of Para-Governmental Forces in Rebel Zones: Latin America, 1956–1990*

Period	Nation/Insurgency Zone	Presence of Parties and/or Other Non-State Organizations		Level of Rebel Governance
		Pro-Insurgency	Anti-Insurgency	
1956–1970	Cuba/Oriente Province	Moderate	Very weak	Deep
	Colombia/ <i>Violencia</i> & coffee interior	Moderate	Moderate to strong	Substantial
	Guatemala/north-eastern zones	Moderate	Weak	Moderately low
	Venezuela/Lara State	Strong	Very strong	Substantial
	Venezuela/Falcón State	Weak	Very strong	Substantial
	Peru/Junín and La Convención zones	Weak to Moderate	Moderate	Low to very low
	Bolivia/Santa Cruz-Chuquisaca border	Very weak	Moderate	Very low
1971–1990	Nicaragua/northern zones	Weak to Moderate	Very weak	Deep
	El Salvador/northern, eastern zones	Moderate to Strong	Moderate	Deep
	Guatemala/EGP highlands zone	Moderate	Moderate	Substantial
	Colombia/eastern interior	Weak?	Weak?	Substantial
	Peru/south Andean <i>Sendero</i> areas	Moderate	Moderate to strong	Substantial

during the 1959–1964 Rómulo Betancourt presidency (Wickham-Crowley 1992: 120–21). Finally, we have areas that were, instead, clearly and *positively* touched by land reform efforts, including La Covención Valley in Cuzco, Peru (near/in the MIR's *foco*-site), and the operations zone of Ché Guevara's rebel group in Bolivia; each of these zones clearly failed to generate anything resembling support for the insurgency.

To summarize the [preceding section](#) ('The Presence or Absence of Para-Governmental Organizations'): the initial setting wherein the construction of rebel governance is possible is that of the absence of, or alienation from, central governments and their exercise of power. That section has dwelt on the socioeconomic processes by which a population could become alienated – when the central government refuses or ceases to contribute to “the material security of the population,” as Moore termed it – thereby facilitating the rise of rebel governance.

TERROR AND PREDATION: SELF-UNDERMINING OF FEDERAL GOVERNANCE OR RESPONDING TO NASCENT REBEL GOVERNANCE

Yet in the greater schema of state decline, and emergent competition between incumbent regimes and rebels' counter-states, such alienation is first and foremost likely to occur when the citizenry is subject to a state turned predatory, when that state fails to maintain peace and order, or – more importantly – turns the instruments of violence regularly against its own populace. Such violent attacks on one's own citizenry are more likely to occur and intensify once the process of political contention has already begun, once the insurgents have begun their efforts to create counter-states (q.v. Wickham-Crowley 1990, or 1991). Beyond such direct attacks, the soldiery in Guatemala and El Salvador and perhaps other nations has been substantially recruited via press-ganging techniques that raided villages to grab young men for military service (Munson 1967: 21; “Stalemate on All Fronts” 1983). Where possible, the populace may openly try to challenge such predatory rule, especially if alternative claimants to rule offer them other options.²

As I have argued elsewhere (Wickham-Crowley 1990, 1991), the regionally specific connections between government-incited terror and popular support for rebel insurgents can be readily traced. As Goodwin (2001: chap. 7) has persuasively shown, if regionally focused terror is paired with the government's inability to exercise actual infrastructural authority in those very same regions, then the result is likely to be persistent insurgencies in those regions, which of course can only be sustained by popular support for rebel forces. In my own previous writings about terror (Wickham-Crowley 1991: 82–87; 1990: 223–29), I also showed that governments are most likely to direct their terror-efforts precisely where they perceive rebel support and rebel governance to be strongest, because incumbent rulers view such rebel governance and popular support as a kind of political “heresy.” Thus, the most likely scenario for the creation and then expansion of rebel governance would be (1) an initial period of rebel-governance buildup, (2) followed by campaigns of greater or lesser

² I will not discuss in detail the obvious other path for those thus preyed upon: the flight of the refugees. That is, the response of “exit” is an oft-used option, instead of open opposition via “voice”; see Hirschman (1970).

government terror therein, but (3) without the capacity to install true central-government infrastructural authority in such regions. All the cases of government terror that I mention below occurred either in areas of strong rebel governance (with other regions left untouched) or areas of major urban uprisings.

Governments in several Latin American nations visited terror upon population subgroups during the insurgencies of 1956–1970 (Wickham-Crowley 1987, 1990). Those cases include Cuba, Venezuela, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, and (a non-instance) Bolivia. In such settings, then, leftist rebel organizations were well-placed to expand or initiate their own efforts to create rebel-governance processes and structures, which became especially noteworthy in eastern Cuba (Oriente Province); very substantially in place in rural Colombia (notably the 1960s FARC emerging within the areas of the 1950s “peasant republics”); in a select few states of Venezuela during that same era (especially Falcón and Lara); and yet more partially in the Guatemalan northeastern corridor where the bulk of the FAR forces operated (for all these cases, see Wickham-Crowley 1992). There was neither terror experienced nor rebel governance established in Ché’s Bolivian operations area of 1966–1967.

Evidence of government-incited terror from the 1970–1990s period dwarfs that for the preceding years (Wickham-Crowley 1991: 102–03). Evidence abounds for Guatemala, where the tally of state victims is thought to be as high as 200,000 (e.g., Maza 1984). Such violence was especially concentrated in western areas – the core-regions of rebel governance exercised by the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, and on a smaller scale by the Organization of the People in Arms, or ORPA. In El Salvador at least tens of thousands were killed by regime or death-squad terror attacks in the insurgent centers in the northern and eastern highlands, but *not* in the western coffee-zones that had seen an uprising and the infamous mass killing of 1932, the *matanza*. In Peru, the governments preceding, but also under, the Alberto Fujimori regime were clearly guilty of large-scale terror in selected Sendero-stronghold areas of the Peruvian Sierra as they sought to suppress the Shining Path and several smaller insurgent groups.

In Table 3.3 I summarize my assessments of the degree of central governments’ predation upon and terror against their own populations during this era of insurgency. This table shows where such actions by incumbent officials were a crucial element in the emergence of rebel governance.

THE RISE OF REBEL GOVERNANCE AND MACROSOCIAL EXCHANGES

As Moore argued, governments worldwide have historically constituted themselves by extracting a surplus out of the underlying populations, and

TABLE 3.3 *The Intensity of Central-Government Predation or Terror in Rebel Zones: Latin America, 1956–1990*

Period	Nation/Insurgency Zone	Level of Predation/Terror	Level of Rebel Governance
1956–1970	Cuba/Oriente Province	Moderately strong	Deep
	Colombia/ <i>Violencia</i> & coffee interior	Weak to moderate	Substantial
	Guatemala/northeastern zones	Strong	Moderately low
	Venezuela/Lara & Falcón States	Weak to moderate	Substantial
	Peru/Junín and La Convención zones	Moderate	Low to very low
	Bolivia/Santa Cruz-Chuqisaca border	None	Very low
1971–1990	Nicaragua/northern zones	Moderately strong	Deep
	El Salvador/northern, eastern zones	Very strong	Deep
	Guatemala/EGP high-lands zone	Extreme	Substantial
	Colombia/eastern interior	Weak to moderate	Substantial
	Peru/south Andean <i>Sendero</i> areas	Moderate	Substantial

using said surplus to “turn it into culture” – in this case, embracing the larger sense of “culture” which comprises all the activities of governance (Moore 1978: 10, 17 [quote], 20–22, 455–57). Unlike Tilly, he does not view governments as constituted by some type of protection racket – the equivalent of organized crime (Tilly 1985). The protection-racket pattern is not irrelevant to us here, for such practices came to typify the Colombian urban militia-group analyzed in this volume by Gutiérrez-Sanín (Chapter 12, this volume), and Charles Taylor’s group in Liberia (Reno, Chapter 13, this volume).

If governments typically constitute themselves by extracting a surplus, how have Latin American *rebel* governments constituted *their* operations as counter-states? The financing of insurgents’ activities in all rural areas raises questions that need answering: How do they arm themselves so as to constitute an effective armed force capable of confronting either minor or major military operations conducted by the incumbent regime? How can they constitute anything resembling a government without resources that might fund such governance efforts? From where do the resources come that allow them to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves, whether those resources are

self-generated or self-supplied or, instead, purchased from the locals? I wish to briefly explore the nearly nonexistent matter of rebels' taxation of the populace to support their activities of governance, because it seems to provide a negative case for Moore's sweeping generalization.

The Mostly Missing Tax Collectors of Rebels' Counter-States

In principle, and as found in at least some cases of rebel governance elsewhere in the world, the insurgents could act as governments routinely do: tax the local populace, extracting from the locals obligatory resources in specie, in kind, or in labor obligations (e.g., *corvée* labor for the Chinese communist insurgency; see Schran 1976: 101). And rebel governors outside of Latin America have routinely taxed local populations, as several contributors to this volume have noted.³ Despite those logical possibilities and the common empirics found elsewhere, virtually no taxes were levied on peasantries during the full-blown Latin American insurgencies of the 1956–1970 period. One exception was the proto-guerrillas in the Marquetalia area of the “Peasant Republics” in 1950s–1960s Colombia, who reported that, “we ... collected taxes on tobacco and alcohol.” This group would later give rise to the FARC guerrilla movement (Lartéguy 1970: 160; Maullin 1968: 6–9). The taxation issue is less clear for the post-1970 insurgencies. For example, the ERP (Revolutionary Army of the People) imposed taxation in kind in Usulután, El Salvador, in exchange for allowing peasants to plant and cultivate abandoned lands in the ERP zone there (Wood 2003: 154–55). Arjona provides another clear set of Colombian exceptions from recent decades (Chapter 9, this volume). Sendero Luminoso, after starting up new operations in the coca-growing areas of the Upper Huallaga Valley, certainly directly taxed coca growers to finance their insurgency, while protecting the growers from government repression or eradication campaigns (Collett 1988), and Colombia's FARC taxed coca-related activities, cattle owners, merchants, and others, mostly since the 1980s (private communication from Arjona).

Instead of taxation, many rebels of Latin America typically provided benefits to the locals, which I have detailed elsewhere (see, in particular, Wickham-Crowley 1987: 483–87; 1991: 40–44). They thus typically avoided imposing economic burdens on the populations over whom they were trying to create, or continue to exercise, political authority. This is a double-edged sword, and both edges favor the creation of rebel governance in rural areas. On the one hand, poor peasants are permitted to hang onto their hard-won crops and incomes; on the other hand, the rebels may find themselves rather flush with incomes, and thus able to pour much-appreciated *pesos* into the local economy.

³ As a general pattern (Kasfir, Chapter 2); for Greece (Kalyvas, Chapter 6); for India (Sukyens, Chapter 7); for Côte d'Ivoire (Förster, Chapter 10); for Indonesia (Barter, Chapter 11) (all this volume).

The local peasantry, as the collective beneficiary of such largesse, might feel the first tugs of social indebtedness. Previous theory-building in sociology suggests that such unbalanced exchanges, wherein one is far more the recipient than the donor of valued resources, are likely to generate a sense of obligation in the recipient, and its obverse (power or authority) in the provider of resources (see Gouldner 1960; Blau 1964).

Forming Counter-States or Not?

We therefore reiterate that Moore's macrosocial exchange-model for building/maintaining legitimate authority "requires" that the governors contribute to the material security of the population, perhaps in the manners just noted. Yet such processes are by themselves insufficient to constitute government, especially without the correlative abilities to defend the populace and maintain peace and order (q.v. Wickham-Crowley 1987). As Bolivian events and outcomes show – Ché was monetarily generous in his peasant-encounters, yet his movement was a disastrous failure – "mere" generosity was not enough, *per se*, to generate a rebel counter-government in rural Bolivia in 1966–1967 (Guevara 1968).

By way of contrast to Ché's Bolivian experiences we can look at several reports from the openly insurrectionary regions of 1980s El Salvador. In the Guazapa Volcano area, witnesses attested to deep, ongoing patterns in which the peasantry was largely mobilized into supporting and joining the insurrection – Guazapa was one of the few places in Latin America where they were reportedly making ammunition for the insurgency. The locals also saw their economic and political lives increasingly intertwined with the FMLN's insurgents, via their provision of food to the rebels and the rebels' efforts at education, propagating Marxism, and trying to control *machista* behavior (Armstrong and Shenk 1982: 204–08; "From Behind Enemy Lines" 1984; "Life with the Salvadorean Rebels" 1982; Clements 1984: 90–96, 124–25, *et passim*).

The extraordinary research and book by Wood (2003) about agrarian lives, insurgency, and politics (and so much more) in Usulután Department unquestionably shows that the Guazapa patterns were closely paralleled elsewhere in El Salvador. Reporting also from Usulután in the 1980s, Kinzer (1984: A8) described in a more capsular form how the rebels' government viewed itself and its authority:

[T]he rebels issued a mimeographed circular to residents proclaiming themselves to be "in political as well as military control." They imposed a nine o'clock curfew, outlawed the sale of alcohol, and established a rudimentary code of justice. Housebreaking, robbery or destruction of private property is punishable by imprisonment, while those convicted of rape or murder are to be subjected to "people's justice." At the bottom of the circular, a special note reads, "Our own military personnel are subject to these laws and decrees."

Similar reports emerged in other Salvadoran departments during the same period (for Morazán, see “Guerrillas Winning Hearts and Minds” 1981; for Cabañas, *New York Times* 1984). Thus, in more than one Salvadoran locale, rebel governments had clearly formed during the 1980s, and were just as clearly exhibiting the macrosocial exchanges (allied with coercive abilities) most likely to produce such a political outcome, however briefly that candle would eventually burn.

DUELING AUTHORITIES AND THE PROVISION OF BENEFITS: EDUCATION, MEDICAL CARE, AND MORE

Incumbent Governments and Military Civic Action

Throughout these decades, however, the rebels’ ongoing efforts to build up loyalty to their own proto-governments at times faced a widespread and often deep-seated obstacle. Any claims they wished to make that they alone, and not the incumbent government in the capital city, were willing and able to make large and impressive contributions to the material security, even prosperity, of the rural populace ran headlong into the widespread use of “military civic action” campaigns by central governments (cf. Barber and Ronning 1966). Under military civic action, roads and schools were built, inoculation campaigns were conducted, and soldiers were even often inducted into teaching literacy. The brute material facts were that, during the 1960s in particular, these efforts were widespread all over Latin America, though I lack the space here to provide the fuller nation-by-nation details on how many children were taught to read, how many inoculations were provided, how many wells were dug, roads built, electrical grids implanted, and so forth.⁴ Latin America’s militaries also furthered the theoretical elaboration of such ideas themselves.⁵

The rebels could certainly try to warn the locals that such “community improvement” efforts by the regimes were being done in bad faith, and even from Machiavellian motivations (e.g., Velásquez García 1975: 117). And those efforts often were targeted at and expanded in insurgent areas.⁶ Civic action

⁴ On Colombia, the region’s “exemplar” for civic action, see Ayerbe Chaux (1966: 181); Colombia, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional (1966: 103–25 and 1967: 5); Maullin (1973: 72); and Buitrago 1977: xiv. For Guatemala, “Contribución” (1965: 30), Munson (1967: 231–56), and “Military Coordinates” (1985). For Bolivia, and long before Che’s insurgency, see “Rol de las fuerzas armadas” (1969); Runa (1967: 213); and James in Guevara (1968: 21–22). For Venezuela, Valsalica (1973: 222) and Adarmas Pérez (1964).

⁵ From Guatemala, “Acción cívica militar” (1960); in Colombia, Ruiz Novoa (1963); in Peru, García Vargas (1962).

⁶ E.g., for Guatemala, Adams (1970: 273–74); for the Campa Indians in Peru, see Artola (1976: 66) and Mercier Vega (1969: 177–79); for Peru, dealing with unrest in La Convención valley during the early 1960s, see Gallegos Venero (1966); for ELN areas of Colombia, see Lamberg (1971: 99); for more sources, Wickham-Crowley (1987: 481).

was also used, albeit perhaps only briefly, in early 1980s El Salvador under U.S. pressure (Wood 2003: 132). But targeted or not, the efforts documented here were obviously substantial.

In fact, and perhaps theoretically stimulating, the one place *without* any serious commitments to or theorizing about these matters was Batista's Cuba. The one serious attempt by an officer to begin civic action campaigns in the Sierra Maestra area was aborted when rivals in the upper echelons of the army – the *tabernillas*, as they were known – killed the efforts shortly after they had begun. Civic action efforts thus played no real part in the Cuban struggles (Maschke 1973: 82).

The problem for the incumbent authorities was less in their efforts in civic action, and more in the sheer, longstanding *lack* of efforts that they and their predecessors had made to provide for the material security and well-being of the rural populations of Latin America. While the Colombian case alone shows that military efforts could be substantial in addressing long-term patterns of socioeconomic neglect by central governments, the very existence of that “historical vacuum” provided an opening into which rebel proto-governors were willing to step. Yet it remains difficult for an outsider to assess the impact of such military efforts on the levels of rebel governance versus federal governance for any national case (for my own fragmentary, comparative attempt to do so, see Wickham-Crowley 1989: 166–68). We may need deeper research as to whether such efforts indeed helped the state to win over areas once insurgent-controlled or not.

The Rebels' Governance-Building Activities

In mid-1960s Colombia, ELN leader Fabio Vásquez Castaño, after mentioning his group's first steps toward becoming a government (“the guerrilla group helps the peasantry maintain order”), told a reporter that “we offered them [the peasants] ... some medical and cultural attention as well; we have taught many friends to read and write. We also counsel them, based on our experiences elsewhere, on cultivation and work methods” (Menéndez Rodríguez 1967: 43). In what was probably a greater effort at providing benefits, a spokesman for the Venezuelan Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) said that, “[i]n Lara [State] ... we represent sanitation, education, government. We have opened schools, we cure the sick, we even baptize newly-born Venezuelans. Together with the local people we have formed civil institutions of power which are in fact organs of government” (Domingo 1964: 41–43).

In the Venezuelan *llanos* (cattle plains), a far smaller and less developed wing of the insurgency could nonetheless operate a rough-hewn hospital (Zamora 1974: 37). Even in so fragmentary and short-lived an insurgency as that of Peru in 1965, guerrilla leader Héctor Béjar could say that “[w]e became nurses, advisers, teachers, all sorts of things which helped us to win their confidence.

Then they told us their problems ... [which] boiled down to one: the large estates. And naturally they wanted us to help them solve this problem" (Gott 1973: 460–61). Béjar's commentary also reveals the fundamental limitations of efforts by the "competition" – that is, military civic action – to improve peasants' material security: soldiers-as-social-workers, as such, could never address such central peasant concerns as land ownership, agrarian class relations, and other developmental challenges.

For the period after 1970, rebel armies were certainly far larger, more commonly better equipped, and better able to create something like "liberated zones" in areas where they operated – the flip side of eliminating the "political competition" by driving out incumbent public officials. There were certainly elements of this in some pre-1970 insurgencies, notably in Cuba's Sierra Maestra and in the "peasant republics" of Colombia. Yet, after 1970, in a list that minimally comprises Peru, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, the insurgents *routinely* forced the civilian authorities (especially mayors) to leave the vicinity, or simply assassinated them; both modes were employed in all three nations, albeit with different mixes and regularity. In the Nicaraguan case, the targets were the *jueces de mesta* (rural magistrates), who were widely perceived to be the agents, spies, and informers for the regime of Somoza Debayle (e.g., Arias 1980).

With incumbent officials now removed from positions of authority, it is not surprising to encounter the following Peruvian assessment by Scott Palmer. In the Upper Huallaga Valley, Sendero Luminoso became the *de facto* authority, "exercising police functions and maintaining courts, schools, and health facilities ... [it] increasingly assumed the role of protector of interests of the coca growers against the government's efforts to reduce production and the Colombian coca paste buyers' to maximize their profits" (Palmer 1990: 32). These were the building blocks out of which the later, more full-blown governmental patterns could emerge.

Probably referring to their origin region, Ayacucho Department, Palmer (1986: 137–38) had earlier written: "Given Sendero's approach – providing paramedical, farming, and literacy services, learning Quechua when necessary, and marrying into peasant community families at times – it is not surprising that members often gained the confidence and support of many local residents." Extensive reports from the Salvadoran insurgent zones (noted and cited above) also confirm the rebels' provision of educational and health services to rural populations.

Rebel movements of the earlier period (to a lesser degree) and those of the post-1970 period (far more commonly) could at times directly address the issues of land and class relationships through a localized (if often brief) attack on property relations themselves. They typically chased (selected) landlords out of the regions they controlled (e.g., Wood 2003: 152), or forced them to provide higher wages for rural wage-workers (e.g., for El Salvador, Kinzer 1984). Beyond those fragmentary instances we have Wood's (2003: 166–92)

extensive discussion of the formation of “insurgent [farming] cooperatives” in the area of her Salvadoran researches.

LOSING AUTHORITY: MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ELEMENTS IN THE DECLINE OF REBEL GOVERNANCE

In the analyses that follow, we will consider *only* those cases where some level of legitimate/rational rebel authority has been established, and hence might suffer decline. The case of Charles Taylor’s Liberian movement proves, however, that the term “predatory rebellion” might well characterize an alternative type of relationship between rebels and civilians: governance it might have been, but “legitimate authority” it was not (Reno, [Chapter 13](#), this volume).

Insurgent movements and their nascent rebel counter-states can decline for a number of reasons. First, both Moore and Tilly disputed the prime importance to revolutionary prospects of “winning hearts and minds” over to the cause. Thus, Moore ([1978: 375](#)) could write: “It is the state of the army, of competing armies, not of the working class, that has determined the fate of twentieth-century revolutions.” Tilly ([1978: 114](#)) observed for early modern Europe that, “[i]n general, when a European state temporarily trained its full repressive power on its internal enemies . . . the enemies subsided.” Thus, rebel governance sometimes collapsed in the face of sheer military “conquest” by the government’s armed forces.

Rebel governance could also slowly collapse in on itself if incumbent regimes expanded effective electoral options and competition. Ché warned revolutionaries not to start insurgencies against elected regimes, even if he ignored his own advice by undertaking his Bolivian quest (q.v. the arguments of Loveman and Davies in Guevara [1985](#)). Goodwin and Skocpol ([1989: 495](#)) made the point most pithily: “The ballot box may not always be the ‘coffin of class consciousness,’ to use Dawley’s evocative phrase, but it has proven to be the coffin of revolutionary movements.” That second set of theses has often been applied to the – in some instances, ever more open and competitive – political systems of most nations experiencing major “second-wave” insurgencies after 1970: Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Peru. Nevertheless, persistent insurgencies could sometimes continue even in societies with competitive electoral conditions (Goodwin [2001: 217–53](#)).

In addition, rebel governance and authority relationships could decay when the rebels violated their own obligations as newly installed governors: to protect the populace from both internal and external violence. And they most certainly should *not* turn the weapons of violence upon the population itself. With regard to that first obligation, their failure to protect the locals from regime violence could deeply undermine their authority and their claimed rights to rule (Wickham-Crowley [1987: 492–93](#); see also Allemann [1974: 211](#), on 1960s

Peru; Arenas 1970: 150–52, on the ELN in 1960s Colombia). As one Venezuelan peasant in a FALN-controlled zone poignantly asked the insurgents: “Even if things were to go badly, you wouldn’t leave us, would you?” (Domingo 1964: 543). Despite their reputation for combativeness, even Peru’s Sendero was not above abandoning the locals when government forces arrived in the vicinity (McClintock 1983: 32). The Guatemalan Guerrilla Army of the Poor also found itself unable to protect its highland supporters from the “ferocity” of government counterinsurgency in 1982 (“Guerrillas Change Tack” 1983).

We should distinguish more limited forms of violence and coercion that rebels themselves might inflict upon civilian populations from outright terror. Certainly, rebel governments sought to administer some forms of punitive justice in areas where they had established themselves, but those cases are similar to the ordinary functions of civic justice (see Wood 2003: 156 for such a case, albeit a qualified one). They do not conceptually qualify as regime-inflicted “damage” that violates a social contract (e.g., not when they execute bandits or try and punish rapists). In contrast to such ordinary if punitive actions of governance, the Salvadoran FMLN for a period forcibly recruited citizens into joining the insurgents’ armed forces, a process that they publicly declared as discontinued in 1984 (LeMoyné 1985; for similarly problematic practices by communists in post-World War II Greece, see comments made by Kalyvas, Chapter 6, this volume). Perhaps more damaging yet to their reputation among the rural population was their use of land mines, the victims of which were often rural Salvadorans rather than the government’s armed forces (Branigin 1987a).

Outright terror directed against civilians was occasionally employed by most of these 1960s rebel movements (Wickham-Crowley 1990, 1991: chap. 3), but rose to much higher levels in four nations where major insurgencies operated after 1970: Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru. Now that some of the smoke of political partisanship which prevailed during that era has drifted away, fewer serious analysts are willing simply to dismiss such charges against the rebels (for my own list of references, rather than a detailed discussion, see Wickham-Crowley 1990: 236–37, n. 104, or its reprint as 1991: 103, n. 101). Since most Latin Americanists were on the left, but not themselves Maoists, such charges against Sendero Luminoso were broadly accepted and already especially well documented during the 1980s (e.g., Werlich 1984: 32; Vargas Llosa 1983; Starn 1995).

Such agreement on events in El Salvador has never truly been forthcoming, but enough evidence certainly exists to blur greatly the positive images that the FMLN or at least some of its component groups once enjoyed. Imageries of peasants being “caught in the middle” of two-sided violence did crop up in El Salvador (Chávez 1983: 81), but seemed a far better description of Peru, whose highlands populations in the early 1980s were caught between Sendero and the much-feared *Sinchis* and other government armed forces (Werlich 1984: 82).

In a major book about violence in Guatemala, Stoll (1993) forcefully described the indigenous, highland Guatemalans of the Ixil Triangle as “caught between two armies.” While there is some truth to that imagery, violence committed by the two sides was hardly equivalent (q.v. Wood 2003: 193, n.7).

Rebels’ efforts at maintaining or expanding their standing as “governments” could also be undermined if, instead of bestowing material benefits upon the locals, they regularly, even systematically, pursued policies that resulted directly or indirectly in material or economic damage to peasants. Peru and El Salvador’s insurgencies have provided substantial documentation along these lines. Sendero Luminoso, at various points in its trajectory, damaged the locals’ economic interests in the highlands by insisting upon community-planting quotas in order to promote self-sufficiency, cutting economic ties with nearby cities, and closing down weekly markets. In Lima they also engaged in bomb attacks on its economic infrastructure, at times casting the capital’s entire population into darkness (McClintock 1983: 32; Vargas Llosa 1983: 36; Starn 1995: 410–11). At one juncture they even pressed the locals to cease celebrating traditional feast days ([*Latin America*] *Weekly Report* 1984: 10–11). The Salvadoran FMLN, beyond its policies of planting land mines and targeting local public officials, engaged in major assaults upon the nation’s infrastructure. It blew up dozens of bridges, damaged all the national hydroelectric power stations and major water facilities, carried out over one thousand attacks upon the nation’s electricity-grid towers, and destroyed many official and service vehicles. All these attacks were carried out, and more promised, they argued, because Salvadoran airspace was being violated by U.S. airpower (Branigin 1987b; Clements 1984: 219–20).

COULD WE HAVE PREDICTED WHICH NATIONS WOULD WITNESS STRONG REBEL GOVERNANCE?

If we now put together the assessments collected in Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3, and the qualitative discussions throughout the text, we may begin to ask whether a combination of weak infrastructural central-government powers dovetailing with that same government’s (later) adoption of predatory or even terroristic activities can help us to predict whether rebel governments would be more or less likely to consolidate themselves once thus sought. We can also inquire into the conditions likely to lead to the weakening or collapse of rebel governance in those instances where they did not proceed to seize state power (i.e., only in Cuba and Nicaragua).

Strong Instances of Rebel Governance: Cuba, Nicaragua, and El Salvador

These three nations witnessed the most impressive establishment of rebel governance structures. In the first two cases we witnessed an impressively intense and region-specific alienation from central government before the

insurgencies even began, with the Cuban east (“Oriente”) historically alienated from Havana, and some Nicaraguan regions often holding decades-old loyalties to Sandino himself; the Salvadoran case fits that portrait less well, but one cannot discount the effects of more than four decades of military rule following the *matanza* killings in rural El Salvador in the 1930s. In all three instances governments responded to insurgencies with violent terror campaigns noted for their indiscriminate quality (Cuba), their intensity, or both. The level of terror was truly extraordinary in El Salvador, a process which arguably pushed that nation much further in the direction of alienation from the central government than had been true as of roughly 1980.

In Cuba and Nicaragua, moreover, we witnessed the fewest attempts at democratic reforms and of military civic action or any other government attempts to ameliorate living conditions in rural areas closest to the insurgency, and thus governments would have been hard-pressed to “recuperate” these regional populations. El Salvador’s government evinced – especially in the 1978–1982 interim years – rather more (if very halting, and often reversed) efforts at improving material well-being in rural areas, but soon its other face was that of death squads and more massively indiscriminate killings. That pairing of opposites makes it the unique case that it is, creating a “Pushme-Pullyu” effect on national civilian loyalties and a mixed and ultimately declining level of rebel governance. The more developed levels and regions of rebel governance clearly faded in the later 1980s in the face of ever more competitive national elections, which split the left itself over participation therein. A failed nationwide rebel insurrection followed by international pressures around 1990 soon put an end to rebel governance, as the FMLN revolutionaries transformed themselves into a political party during the 1990s. That very curious Salvadoran mix – including the introduction of ever more competitive and democratic elections during the peak years of the insurgency – distinguishes it from the Cuban and Nicaraguan cases. That mix might be one key explanatory element in the ultimate failure of the Salvadoran insurgency to seize state power, unlike those other two cases (see Wickham-Crowley 1992: chap. 10 for further arguments).

Mixed-Strength Instances of Rebel Governance, 1970s–1990: Guatemala, Colombia, and Peru

Guatemala during the 1970s and early 1980s is actually closer to the Salvadoran case in many respects than to those other cases listed here (Wickham-Crowley 1992: chap. 11), but is placed here because the intensity and scope of rebel governance never matched that found in El Salvador. There, and also in Colombia and Peru during these eras, the best the insurgents achieved were temporary but only relatively safe havens from counterinsurgency, and in areas quite remote from the centers of national governance: Guatemala’s western highlands, especially in El Quiché Department; Colombia’s sparsely populated

eastern and southern jungle interiors, far from the rural coffee-growing and demographic centers once central to the 1960s insurgencies; and some areas of Peru's southern highlands (especially Ayacucho), with Sendero later moving into the valley of the upper Huallaga River. In the end, each of these movements was decisively crippled as a military force by a two-fold strategy. First, each case witnessed one or more highly effective military-intelligence-driven coups: the breaking of the Guatemalan rebels' urban network, the arrest and jailing of Sendero's founder and leader, and multiple major rescue efforts or killings directed against rural-based Colombian rebels. Second, long-term counterinsurgency actions by soldiers also took their eventual toll, and were in each nation accompanied at least in part by some elements of indiscriminate government-inflicted terror which engulfed innocent civilians: episodically in Colombia, more regularly by successive Peruvian governments against Peru's Sendero, and on a massively gruesome scale in Guatemala, especially from the later 1970s to the mid-1980s.

*Moderate but Briefer Instances of Rebel Governance: 1960s
Insurgencies in Venezuela, Guatemala, and Colombia*

Each of these insurgencies, at least in part, arose to imitate the successes of the Cuban revolution (the Colombian case arose partly from the fallout following *La Violencia*, 1946–1965). In none of these cases did the structures of federal governance extend effectively into most of the countryside, especially in Guatemala. But in all three nations, national Communist parties could claim influences in select rural areas ranging from modest (Guatemala), to intense if very localized (Venezuela), to rather widespread (Colombia, again as an outcropping of Communist involvements in peasant-protective efforts during *La Violencia*). Yet *anti*-Communist political parties in both Colombia (Liberals and Conservatives) and Venezuela (Acción Democrática) had influences both more widespread and deeper than did the Left. Perhaps as result, the Guatemalan rebels were far more mobile and less likely to develop (or claim) “liberated zones,” but also harder to suppress with so little infrastructural presence of political authorities in rural Guatemala.

*No Development of Rebel Governance Structures: Peru
and Bolivia in the Mid-1960s*

Attempts to ignite nationwide insurgencies in Peru (1965) and Bolivia (1966–1967, under Ché Guevara) were instead only brief candles. Nothing worthy of the label “rebel governance” was established in either such instance (for details on both, Wickham-Crowley 1992: chap. 8; on Bolivia, Wickham-Crowley 1987).

In Figure 3.1, the details read from left to right, as we try to trace the structural and political conditions that might favor or disfavor the various attempts to build up rebel governance structures from the earliest days of the rebels' insurgent efforts. That figure draws on the entire text presented here,

National Cases at Start: (One or two *s = Strength of Rebel Governance at its Peak in Selected Rebel Zones)	From Table 3.1 : Central Governmental Power: Is It Moderate at Most in Rebel Zone(s)?	From Table 3.2 : Do Para- Governmental Influences Substantially Favor Development of Rebel-Zone Governance?	From Table 3.3 : Does a High Level of Government Predation Enhance Appeal of Rebels' Regional Governance?	From Text: Do Many Civilians Experience Terror or Economic Damage Inflicted by Rebels?	From Text: Polity: Democratic Opening and Fairer Elections or Expansion of Material Benefits?
<p><i>1956–1970 Cases:</i> **Cuba, *Colombia, Guatemala, Peru, *Venezuela, Bolivia</p> <p><i>1970s–1990 Cases:</i> *Colombia, **Nicaragua, **El Salvador, */Peru, */Guatemala</p>	<p><u>Yes: Rebel Opportunity</u></p> <p><i>1956–1970 Cases:</i> **Cuba, *Colombia, Guatemala, partly in Venezuela</p> <p><i>1970s–1990 Cases:</i> All continue</p> <p><u>No: Rebel Opportunities Collapse or Weaken and Cases Drop Out</u></p> <p>No cases</p>	<p><u>Yes: Rebel Opportunity</u></p> <p><i>1956–1970 Cases:</i> **Cuba, *Colombia, Guatemala, partly in Venezuela</p> <p><i>1970s–1990 Cases:</i> All continue (Colombia only in marginal regions).</p> <p><u>No: Rebel Governance Collapses [C] or Weakens and Cases Drop Out</u></p> <p><i>1956–1970: [C]:</i> Peru, Bolivia; partly in Venezuela.</p>	<p><u>Yes: Rebels Stronger</u></p> <p><i>1956–1970 Cases:</i> **Cuba, Guatemala</p> <p><i>1970s–1990 Cases:</i> **Nicaragua, */Peru, **El Salvador, */Guatemala. (Partly so in Colombia.)</p> <p><u>No: Rebel Governance Collapses [C] or Weakens [W]</u></p> <p><i>1956–1970: By 1970, C: Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela. W: Colombia.</i></p>	<p><u>No: Rebels Stronger</u></p> <p><i>1956–1970 Cases:</i> Cuba, Guatemala</p> <p><i>1970s–1990 Cases:</i> **Nicaragua, */? Guatemala</p> <p><u>Yes: Rebels' Degree of Governance Ebbs</u></p> <p><i>1956–1970: 4 Other cases of rebel governance had already collapsed.]</i></p> <p><i>1970s–1990: By 1990, sharply weakened in Peru, El Salvador, Colombia.</i></p>	<p><u>No: Rebels Peak</u></p> <p><i>1956–1970 Cases:</i> **Cuba</p> <p><i>1970s–1990 Cases:</i> **Nicaragua,</p> <p><u>Yes: Rebel Governance Weakens [W] or Collapses [C]</u></p> <p><i>1956–1970: By 1970 C: Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, Guatemala</i></p> <p><u>W: Colombia</u></p> <p><i>1970s–1990: By 1990: W: Colombia. C: Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador.</i></p>

FIGURE 3.1 Forking Pathways Toward or Away from Rebel Governance: Eleven National Case-Instances from [Tables 3.1, 3.2, 3.3](#), and Text

and more focally upon the abbreviated details presented in [Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3](#). Unlike my own earlier efforts to assess the likelihood of “peasant support” for insurgents (e.g., Wickham-Crowley 1992: chaps. 6, 7, 10), this model remains at a purely macro-level of analysis, and looks at the construction – and deconstruction – of rebel governance almost only from the perspective of each nation’s overall socio-political structures, of constraint, and of opportunity (my approach herein is closest to that of Goodwin 2001). From that perspective, I ask how these nation-cases and their changing “landscapes” would have created and/or shut down “openings” for rebels to develop and expand (or limit and contract) rebel governance efforts and institutions.

Beyond those comments, [Figure 3.1](#) is self-explanatory in the context of this chapter as a whole, and presents in semi-tabular form the consistent series of politico-structural advantages “enjoyed” by the Cuban and Nicaraguan (and, in part, Salvadoran) rebel groups in building up governance structures, in contrast to the eight other national cases considered here.

CONCLUSION

The preceding analyses began with my asserting a set of preconditions under which the construction of rebel governance might be (only) possible, in particular drawing attention to either the outright absence or ongoing decay of the authority of incumbent regimes. I then considered how rebels and incumbents might move on to become “dueling authorities,” both contenders at times striving to provide to parts of the (especially rural) populace the benefits of material security, military defense, and internal peace and order that are the hallmarks of Moore’s model of “rational authority.” The initial advantages of governments lie in incumbency itself, which may make it hard for any rebel opposition to break through those longstanding states of commitment (or perhaps political inertia).

The rebels’ advantages derive from particular sets of conditions at the national or regional levels, wherein the incumbents at the center of power fail to fulfill the obligations of governments, especially when they turn the coercive powers of the state upon their very own citizens. Exposed to such regime-incited violence, citizens may be tempted to follow a path like that of the peaceful Russian protestors who were gunned down by Tsarist troops on Bloody Sunday (January 22, 1905); the survivors returned to their homes to smash the images of authority – hence “iconoclasm” – and declare “we have no Tsar any more” (Moore 1978: 362). In sharp contrast, when governments in power stop visiting terror upon their own people, when they expand their efforts at improving the material security of populations, and/or when they offer to their people a true voice and real choices in the selection of their governors, the appeals of rebel counter-states to the politically discontented among

the citizenry are likely to decline sharply, and those political alternatives fade away.

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Performing the Nation-State: Rebel Governance and Symbolic Processes¹

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ABSTRACT

Rebel groups frequently deploy resources as symbolic expressions of power. What purposes do they serve, particularly in regards to the civilian–rebel relationship? Contrary to analyses that treat such actions as merely rhetorical, I argue that symbolic processes can serve both instrumental and normative purposes for an insurgent government. Specifically, symbolic processes reduce the need for a rebellion to use force to ensure compliance. In addition, they may increase civilian identification with the rebel government, producing several distinct benefits. This chapter illustrates these arguments, drawing on cases from around the world.

Insurrection is an art, and like all arts has its own laws.

– Leon Trotsky

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, I visited a graveyard built by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) near the rebel capital in northern Sri Lanka. Spread across several acres, hundreds of concrete tombs marked the final resting places of dead fighters. Poles flying the bright red insurgent flag, emblazoned with the image of a scowling tiger and two AK-47s, fluttered all around. The overall effect was deeply moving as well as disquieting, as all war memorials tend to be.²

¹ For their helpful remarks, I am especially grateful to Elisabeth Wood and Matthew Kocher, two anonymous reviewers, and all other participants of the two rebel governance workshops.

² Similar cemeteries dotted Tiger-controlled territory and were referred to as *Thuyilum Illam*, or “sleeping houses.” They were frequently used as sites for insurgent ceremonies and rallies. Prior to the 1990s, most cadre were cremated, in accordance with the Hindu faith. Though the reasons for this shift are debated, the physicality of burial and its symbolic claiming of land is often suggested as a motive. Following the end of the war in 2009, the Sri Lankan government quickly destroyed



FIGURE 4.1 LTTE Graveyard (Courtesy of Ananthan Sinnadurai)

On one level, the construction of the LTTE memorial can be viewed as an appropriate send off to cadres who had given their lives in pursuit of an independent Tamil homeland; similar to nationalist memorials to war dead found around the world. But such a reading barely scratches the surface of the strategic benefits and political valences embedded in such a display. The insurgency never governed an independent nation-state and the memorial was never simply intended to honor the dead. Indeed, civilian informants I spoke with at the time sardonically noted that burial was rarely the preferred choice for disposing of the dead among the largely Hindu Tamil community. Beyond commemoration, the cemetery as shown in [Figure 4.1](#) served a greater purpose – both in the eyes of insurgent leaders who devoted resources to its construction, and, importantly, to the civilian population living within rebel-controlled territory. But what role did it play?

The relationship between symbolic displays and the consolidation of political authority, or “the introduction of aesthetics into political life” as Benjamin ([1936](#)) put it, has an extensive history in the academic literature

these cemeteries and other monuments built by the Tigers, a testimony to their perceived potency even after the end of the rebellion.

(Deutsch 1963). Yet, few have questioned the role of the symbolic domain in the control of a territory and a population by an insurgent organization. Rebels often devote considerable effort to developing and propagating an extensive array of symbolic processes. While many discount such displays as propagandistic, others recognize the symbolic domain as an important arena within the larger war. Kalyvas (2003: 476), for example, identifies the mechanism of “violence” as bringing together local and national actors, often with disparate agendas, into a cohesive fighting force. But he also asserts that violence alone is insufficient and that rebel groups must engage with the symbolic domain in order to incorporate what are “a bewildering variety of local conflicts” into a single cleavage that defines the broader movement (Kalyvas 2003: 486). Yet while he calls attention to the centrality of symbolic actions, his work, like most others, places violence at the heart of its analysis. In contrast, this chapter focuses on how insurgencies manipulate the symbolic domain. It suggests that examining these behaviors can provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between civilians and rebel groups.³

My argument is that the use of symbolic processes by insurgents is often systematic and can serve both instrumental and normative purposes by entrenching and legitimizing the insurgent political authority. Symbolic processes can influence the contours of the rebel–civilian relationship in two ways. First, they may bolster the legitimacy of an insurgent government by fostering greater identification between the rebel political authority and its targeted constituency. Such identification with the political regime can produce several positive outcomes including, potentially, recruits with higher levels of commitment, and, importantly, a lower risk of defection or denunciations by local residents. Second, symbolic processes that effectively reference the coercive power of the regime may reduce the need for the insurgent government to rely on force to ensure compliance.

What role do symbolic processes play in bolstering the rule of an insurgent political authority? Are there patterns to how insurgents deploy them? And what determines their ability to resonate with civilian constituencies? To answer these questions, this chapter combines observations drawn from fieldwork in rebel-controlled territories in Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, and Sudan with an analysis of the secondary literature. This chapter first examines how political elites utilize symbolic processes to entrench their rule, with an emphasis on the interplay between nationalist symbology and the legitimacy of modern governments. Second, it shows how insurgent organizations mimic aesthetic strategies developed by the modern state in order to bolster their

³ Contrary to earlier work on the subject, I do not suggest that symbolic elements are determinative of battlefield outcomes. See, for example, the work of Kertzer (1988) or Locke Jr. (1995).

rule. Third, the chapter explores how insurgents craft their symbolic repertoires and what determines their reception by civilians, drawing on examples from a variety of recent conflicts.

GOVERNANCE, SYMBOLIC PROCESSES, AND COMPLIANCE

Analyses of the rebel–civilian relationship tend to focus on one of three activities: recruitment, resource extraction, or violence. As a result, scholars have failed to capture the larger set of interactions between an insurgent organization and the population that define the experiences of civilians during war. Recently, scholars have embraced the notion of “governance” to capture this broader relationship. “Rebel governance” refers to the development of institutions and, importantly, informal and formal norms and rules of behavior, by insurgents that regulate civilian social, economic, and political life. Rebel groups that develop a governance capacity are distinctive in that they seek an encompassing relationship with society, as opposed to those that eschew controlling civilian populations. Thus far, most analyses of rebel governance have focused on the provision of public goods. Scholars have sought to enumerate the empirical components of governance – whether security, taxation, or the provision of education and health – while ignoring the role of symbolic processes. However, governance involves not only the formal structures of a rebel civil administration, but also the symbolic processes that governments deploy to give meaning to their actions (Mampilly 2011; Förster, [Chapter 10](#), this volume).

To understand rebel rule over a civilian population, then, it is necessary to expand the definition of governance beyond its instrumental aspects to include the complete set of social norms that define relations between a civilian population and a political authority. In other words, governance not only has remunerative and coercive aspects, but also involves normative behaviors that are crafted through symbolic processes.

Scholars have noted how “performativity” – the repeated enactment of coded normative behaviors to produce a specific subject – is elemental in the construction of state sovereignty by political elites seeking to legitimate their rule.⁴ Similarly, insurgents engage in aesthetic activities to mimic the performance of what I deem *symbolic sovereignty*: the use of symbolic processes to bolster sovereign claims. As resistance is often reflective of the power that it seeks to transform, rebel leaders’ deployment of symbolic processes reflects an understanding of how the modern nation-state ensures compliance with its dictates and generates identification with its governing institutions among its constituents. By mimicking the behavior

⁴ Performativity is distinct from a performance in that the former is reiterative and citational, while the latter is a single action (see Weber 1998: 79 for a full discussion).

of the modern state, rebels seek to discursively construct a political authority imbued with a comparable legitimacy enjoyed by national governments.

Gramsci's influential discussion of the modern state recognizes the decentralized nature of power, emphasizing the ways a political authority can move beyond mere domination, built on coercion, to achieve hegemony. Hegemony, in Gramsci's understanding, refers to, "The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (1994: 214). For Gramsci, political elites cannot rely solely on coercion, but must also work to "marry their myths with popular conceptions and desires," generating consent and thereby increasing compliance with their dictates (Selbin 2010: 57). Governance, in this view, is "an interpretation of life and an affirmation of legitimate values and institutions" that "provides symbolic and ritual confirmation of the possibility of meaningful individual and collective action" (March and Olsen 1983: 292). In short, it is through non-material actions such as discourses and practices of rule that political elites secure their rule, requiring analysts to look beyond the formal structures of government to understand the power of the modern state (Benjamin 1936; Foucault 1982: 220; Rosenau and Czempiel 1992). In other words, governance strategies extend beyond public goods to incorporate the production of political power through the adoption and manipulation of cultural symbols (Kaufman 2001).

In this way, nation-states, which remain the dominant form of political authority, are both a construction of elite political interests as well as a manifestation of the popular will. The deep emotional resonances of nationalism provide a powerful ideological template through which would-be political elites mobilize political action (Githens-Mazer 2008: 42–43). Symbolic processes are central to the production and manipulation of nationalist emotions: they promote solidarity and social cohesion among a diverse population while imbuing it with a sense of moral unity. Through symbolic processes, political elites work to foster a collective project and make apparent an opaque political body. As such, symbolic performances serve as "both an image of unity and a tool to make it occur" (Foret 2009: 314).

Symbolic processes comprise any thing, action, event, or phenomenon that stimulates emotional responses, conditions actions of members, or expresses the character of the organization to various audiences because members of an organization give it meaning (Brown 1994: 862–63).⁵ Individual symbolic processes include discourses, rituals, and objects – that together form a broader symbolic system (Foret 2009: 314). Political symbols are fluid, evolving over time and space, rendering interpretation a field of contestation

⁵ This chapter focuses on non-violent actions, but violence has its own symbolic dimensions as well (Coronil and Skurski 1991).

(a point I will return to later). Symbols do not have meaning separately from projects put forth by political elites. The challenge is to imbue a particular symbolic system with a coherent narrative, or collective frame of reference, that can generate popular support for the political order they seek to propagate. Elites who seek to assert control through symbolic processes must be attuned to the interpretation of symbols by their diverse and often contentious constituencies. Political symbols are most potent when they emerge interactively, directed by elites who draw on spontaneously generated themes and motifs that originate within societies (Lane 1981). Thus, elites select and manipulate symbols to reference existing social conditions and project their political projects to defined constituencies (Foret 2009: 313). As Kaufman (2001: 28) explains, “politics is mostly about manipulating people’s emotions, and symbols provide the tools for such manipulation.”

Symbolic processes can be divided into two general categories – those that refer to the latent coercive and bureaucratic power of the political authority, and those that strengthen identification between the political authority and the civilian population. The first category, known as referential symbols, are “economical ways of referring to the objective elements in objects or situations: the elements identified in the same way by the same people” (Edelman 1971: 6). These include the use of parades and rallies, the costuming of personnel according to distinctive military arrangements, and other symbolic allusions to the military prowess of a government. They also include rituals of governing such as the issuing of official receipts following a payment of government fees. The second category, called condensation symbols, “evoke[s] the emotions associated with the situation,” condensing “into one symbolic event, sign or act of patriotic pride, anxieties, remembrances of past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness” (Ibid.). These include the adoption and dissemination of official flags, anthems, and mottos that reference historical figures or events. Various media, including pamphlets, books, videos, and even websites, diffuse and reinforce these symbols.

The importance of symbols in propagating a political authority hinges on two central concepts relating governments to their publics: compliance and legitimacy. Compliance with the dictates of a political authority results from two categories of action: those that rely on specific incentives, whether threats of violence (coercive) or offers of material goods (remunerative), or those that rely on a shared set of values (normative) (Etzioni 1975: 4–6; Ahmad 1996). In contrast to coercive and remunerative compliance, normative compliance does not define a clear incentive structure. Rather, it implies consent derived from the coincident preferences of the political authority and the governed. Normative compliance is often regarded as the hallmark of hegemony.

Does achieving normative compliance among the governed imply that a particular authority is legitimate? Though they are related, legitimacy goes beyond normative compliance and implies increased identification and support for the political authority. Civilian acquiescence with the demands of government does not equate with the regime possessing legitimacy. Compliance is a one-way action between an authority and a subordinate, while legitimacy involves a more interactive relationship. In other words, while normative compliance may be achieved passively when the preferences of the ruler and ruled align, achieving legitimacy requires a political authority to deploy symbolic processes that provide a collective understanding of the meaning of its actions that resonate with a target constituency (Selbin 2010; Kaufman 2001). Legitimacy arises not merely from coincident preferences between a ruler and the ruled, but as a result of the symbolic processes a regime deploys to give meaning to those preferences.⁶

The discussion thus far presumes that all political authorities have at least the possibility of emerging as legitimate. And for those that do, the rewards can be great. Governments viewed as legitimate benefit from greater loyalty among the population that can help stabilize their rule, collect resources, and improve their survival prospects (Brown 1994: 863; Wedeen 1999; Eriksen 1987). But even regimes that are unlikely to achieve legitimacy deploy symbolic processes. Why? Part of this is aspirational, as all governments may think of themselves as legitimate, regardless of the truth. But there is another practical reason. Differences between coercive and normative compliance are often hard to discern. As Scott (1990: 66–67) explains, symbolic displays can have powerful effects on the psyche of the governed:

They are . . . a means of demonstrating that, like it or not, a given system of domination is stable, effective, and here to stay. Ritual subservience reliably extracted from inferiors signals quite literally that there is no realistic choice other than compliance. When combined with the exemplary punishment of the occasional act of defiance, the effective display of compliance may achieve a kind of *dramatization* of power relations that is not to be confused with ideological hegemony in the sense of active consent . . . The effect of reinforcing power relations in this way may be, behaviorally, nearly indistinguishable from behavior that arises from willing consent.

Once its potency has been experienced, a political authority need not resort to its coercive capacity in order to produce compliance. Instead, it can rely on symbolic assertions of power, thereby economizing the use of violence (Scott 1990: 48–49). As the subordinated population performs according to the demands of the political authority, the symbols of the regime come to have

⁶ Legitimacy is often credited simply to the provision of public goods. But this confuses legitimacy with effectiveness, which, while often overlapping, are not synonymous. A nation-state that provides extensive public goods may not be considered legitimate, while another with deep legitimacy may be ineffectual in providing public goods.

power independently of its coercive tools. In short, political elites deploy symbolic processes with the hope of bridging the distance between coercive and normative compliance. But even when they are unlikely to make such a transition, the use of symbolic processes can have value by reducing their need to rely on coercion.

The symbolic domain is thus a crucial arena of concern for a political authority seeking to ensure compliance among its civilian constituents. Resistance, the antipodal condition to compliance, may emerge as a consequence of a political authority's failure to safeguard and perpetuate its position in relation to its civilian population. Since domination is an exercise of power designed to extract resources from civilians, it may generate forms of resistance that require considerable efforts by the political authority to reinforce, maintain, and adjust its position. Combined with coercion, symbolic processes work "to manifest and reinforce a hierarchical order," thereby undercutting resistance (Scott 1990: 45).

Scholars have long recognized the use of symbols as an elementary aspect of political action: "Since the inception of the nation state, political leaders have created and used national symbols (flags, anthems, mottos, currencies, constitutions, holidays) to direct public attention, integrate citizens, and motivate public action" (Cerulo 1989: 76–77). These are points well understood by political elites operating within both autocratic and democratic arrangements, who spend considerable effort and resources to universally diffuse the symbols of national sovereignty (Wedeen 1999). National anthems are among the first songs a pupil learns in school and are used by governments at official ceremonies – both grandiloquent and trivial – whether solemn commemorations of the death of a head of state or winning a gold medal in international competition. Rulers across nations "attest to and believe in the power of such symbols," using them "as a tool for creating bonds and reinforcing goals among their citizens" (Ibid., 77–78). In addition, symbolic processes justify decisions made by elites, thereby reinforcing internal hierarchies. Symbols also mark space, delineating a perimeter of the state's claims of sovereign control. In these ways, symbolic and empirical dimensions of sovereignty are distinctive, as well as mutually reinforcing processes.

INSURGENT USES OF SYMBOLIC PROCESSES: SYMBOLIC REPERTOIRES AND REGISTERS

Popular support for a political authority is contingent on the behavior of the regime in power; hence, it may be contested by alternate political actors (Wickham-Crowley 1987). "Multiple sovereignty" occurs where one or more actors claiming civilian adherents compete to be the sovereign political authority within a single state shell (Tilly 1978; Vinci 2008: 303). During a

civil war, popular support responds to the behavior of the belligerents; it is rarely determined at the onset of fighting (Kalyvas 2006: 101–03). Unable to claim the loyalty of the entire public, the incumbent government may choose either to persist in its claim to total control or narrow its focus to target remnants of the original population. Challengers to the incumbent power engage in their own aesthetic offensives, seeking to win over followers to their preferred vision of social and political organization. As such, political violence can transform the symbolic realm into an important arena in the contest between multiple claimants to sovereignty.

What can be learned about rebel governance by looking at the use of symbols by the modern nation-state? Rebel groups, like all organizations, are socially constructed systems of shared meaning designed to aggregate a wide variety of individual agendas and perspectives into a single, purposive coalition. Just as governments are social constructions given meaning by both the rulers and the ruled, rebel governance entails a similarly interactive dynamic. Most rebel groups develop complex relations with their subject populations that they sustain through social, political, and aesthetic processes. Rebels often seek to bolster their authority by borrowing ruling practices developed by the nation-state, most directly by setting up governments that mimic the form and practices of the national governments they seek to replace.

Insurgents deploy symbolic processes, including both referential and condensation symbols, to reinforce internal hierarchies, broaden domestic support, promote organizational cohesion, elicit external support, and defeat adversarial (counter-insurgent) messages (Locke 1995 22). Due to their low cost, symbolic processes allow insurgencies to economize their use of material resources in their asymmetric battles with incumbents. Rebels frequently mimic national governments, building mausoleums or holding annual “Heroes’ Day” rallies to commemorate the dead as with the LTTE, printing currency and designing a “national” flag like the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), or borrowing the language of the state in their daily interactions with civilians as did the rebels in Côte d’Ivoire (Förster, Chapter 10, this volume). If insurgents do use symbolic processes strategically, can we understand their actions systematically?

A *symbolic repertoire* consists of the set of symbolic processes available to rebel groups as they seek to influence the behavior of different social and political actors. It is an ensemble form of political communication that functions by linking together the rebel political authority with an intended audience, thereby providing a recognizable blueprint for interaction (Githens-Mazer 2008: 44). In the social movement literature, a repertoire includes the variety of processes given meaning by non-violent strategies of resistance. As Tilly notes, repertoires “provide approximate scenarios – and choices among scenarios – for political interactions” (2003: 46). He continues: “with scenarios available, participants on all sides can generally coordinate their actions more

effectively, anticipate likely consequences of various responses, and construct agreed-upon meanings for contentious episodes.” As with non-violent movements, insurgents similarly deploy symbolic repertoires to provide “templates for interaction, bases for collective memory, and switchpoints for collective struggle” (Ibid.).

For rebel governments, the paradigmatic symbolic model is not the non-violent social movement, but the nation-state. Repertoires of symbolic action drawn from the nation-state have a number of advantages for would-be insurgent rulers. Most prominently, as civilians are socialized by their prior interactions with the incumbent government, reproducing practices developed by nation-states references a mode of governance with which most civilians are already familiar:

Imageries are constantly re-created through performance ... Many are embedded in countless everyday practices. At roadblocks, words are uttered in the language of the state. At ceremonies, speeches are delivered in the same rhetoric of official language as before. From the village level through the small subdivisions to events at the headquarters of the rebellion, the same re-enactment of statehood seems to penetrate the new political order. (Förster 2012: 19–20)

For example, flags within rebel-controlled territory serve similar purposes as they do for national governments: delimiting the conditions of political domination (Foret 2009: 314). When rebels take control of a village or city, they signal the emergence of new political authority by raising their flag and propagating other aspects of their symbolic repertoire. Rebel parades and rallies also serve as symbols of political domination. Such rituals effectively dramatize the latent coercive power of the political authority without directly displaying its coercive capacity.

Rebel rulers and their civilian subjects engage in a set of performative acts – cued by symbolic markers borrowed from the nation-state – that reinforce a specific form of authority relationship between the government and the governed. A symbolic repertoire promulgates a pattern of shared meaning between the insurgent government and its subject population meant to condition the latter to behave according to the expectations of the rebel authority. Put another way, alongside violence, insurgent organizations exercise power through symbolic processes that promote shared frames of reference in order to reinforce patterns of activity that preserve their dominance and promote their political agenda (Brown 1994: 863; Selbin 2010: 24). In this way, symbolic repertoires are essential for *socializing* civilian populations that rebels engage with, increasing identification between the organization and its various constituencies. Successfully implementing a collective frame of reference can also constrain the behavior of competitors to the organization by making support for the rebels appear natural (Kalyvas 2006: 125). In essence, deploying a symbolic repertoire is an attempt by a rebel government to performatively legitimate its sovereign claim. Failing to do so can undermine the authority of the insurgent government,

rendering it vulnerable to denunciations or even defections by residents within the area of control.

Most insurgents exercise dominance without hegemony – or, put differently, the initial rebel claim to authority is predicated primarily on its coercive power (Guha 1997). While a state government claims the right to rule through its presumed contiguity with a nation, a rebel government, even one representing a nationalist claim, cannot take its affiliation with a specific population for granted. Its rebellion, by definition, renders that claim constantly contestable. As a result, rebels do not attempt to legitimize their rule solely by providing services, but must also engage in a symbolic offensive to give meaning to their actions. As such, symbolic repertoires combined with the provision of public goods contribute to the broader Gramscian ambition of generating hegemony.

In this way, symbolic repertoires play their greatest role in fostering the movement from coercion to consent. In order to go beyond coercion and gain legitimacy, a rebel authority cannot simply mimic a pre-existing template, but must ensure that its actions resonate with a targeted audience, typically by deploying effective condensation symbols. Unlike states, which rely on massive and repetitive inundation of symbolic actions to generate civilian identification with their sovereign prerogative, insurgents operate in a far more heterogeneous social environment riven with internal power struggles and external challengers. As a result, rebel deployment of symbolic repertoires must be attuned to a variety of audiences and contexts in order to be effective.

Understanding how rebels deploy symbolic repertoires requires an awareness of two related concerns: the *source* of the process and the *audience* toward whom it is targeted. Combined, the two constitute a *symbolic register*, the timbre at which a particular symbolic repertoire is calibrated. Successfully calibrating a symbolic repertoire can help foster a collective identity that bolsters the allegiance of civilians to the political authority, while failing to do so can embolden challengers. Condensation symbols are especially important in this regard, as their meaning is necessarily derived from the psychological needs of the civilian audience (Edelman 1971: 7). By grounding various generic rhetorical positions – “independence” or “reform,” for example – within a particular social and historical context, condensation symbols provide form to insurgent aspirations. As Hunt notes in her study of the symbolic dimensions of the French Revolution, “By making a political position manifest, they made adherence, opposition and indifference possible. In this way they constituted a field of political struggle” (1984: 53). Referential symbols, meanwhile, play an essential role in demonstrating the latent coercive power of the rebel regime. In the [next section](#), I explore what determines whether a symbolic repertoire will resonate with civilians, or be dismissed as propaganda.

AUDIENCES

To calibrate its message, an insurgent government must consider how it will relate to different audiences.⁷ Rebel leaders must always take into account the social context. As context varies, so will the interpretation of any message. The same message may have diametrically opposed interpretations for different audiences – threatening or reassuring, for example. Thus, leaders must make strategic decisions in framing their messages. The challenge for insurgents is to put forth coherent messages that reinforce their political authority without alienating their core constituencies. Though it is challenging to craft individualized messages to multiple audiences, successful insurgent rulers often demonstrate considerable dexterity in doing so. The key is to send a consistent message to each distinct audience category. Unclear or contradictory messages may undercut civilian support, leaving the group open to challenges by the incumbent or other armed actors. As Kriger (1992: 157) notes in her study of Zimbabwe, “Inconsistent guerrilla appeals complicated winning popular support and confused even those who may have wished to be responsive.”

Insurgent leaders primarily deploy symbolic processes to generate support from an internal core constituency. Symbolic repertoires directed toward the core constituency often rely on condensation symbols intended to stimulate pride, honor, or outrage. By effectively deploying a symbolic repertoire, insurgent leaders seek to define a new collectivity as the basis for insurgent action, fostering greater individual identification with and attachment to the insurgent cause among the core constituency (Kertzer 1988: 181). The goal is to bring together the disparate agendas at the local level with the central cleavage advanced by insurgent leaders: “the reliance on the same central symbols and messages may ultimately integrate and fuse the multitude of local cleavages into the master cleavage” (Kalyvas 2003: 487).

Failing to do so leaves an insurgent organization open to challenges to its rule. Counter-insurgent campaigns often work to create divisions between the leaders and their constituents. A successful symbolic campaign can mitigate divisive counter-insurgent strategies by providing an internal constituency a rationale with which to understand their participation in and support for the rebellion (Githens-Mazer 2008: 43–44). In addition, symbolic repertoires provide a collective frame of reference for the core constituency in their interactions with the rebel bureaucracy, as well as providing a tentative roadmap of the future social order that the insurgency

⁷ Insurgents also direct symbolic displays toward the incumbent state and its internal supporters, but the dynamics of such displays are qualitatively different than the compliance or legitimacy discussed here. Such displays are designed to create an appearance of unity between the rebel leadership and the subordinate population, giving the impression a discrete rebel organization leads a popular movement. Successfully fusing the core constituency with the insurgency – at least in the minds of the incumbent state and its own allied constituency – can increase the strength the insurgency possesses and the perceived threat it poses.

seeks to implement. They also serve as a visible manifestation of the insurgent claim to speak on behalf of the core constituency, whether or not such claims are warranted.

Cadre and potential recruits compose a second internal audience for targeted symbolic appeals. The blurring of lines between combatants and non-combatants characteristic of internal warfare makes them an especially relevant audience. Such identification may motivate civilians to perform a diverse array of roles, including front line soldiers, mundane positions within the insurgent bureaucracy or manning supply lines. In addition, symbolic processes that glorify the insurgent agenda may ameliorate anxieties present within potential recruits who have misgivings about the great risks of participation and low probabilities of success. By stirring emotions of outrage or pride, condensation symbols also play an important role in the socialization of cadre, producing greater discipline among troops and better relations between cadre and civilians.

Insurgent leaders must also be wary of how the messages they send are perceived by potential opponents residing within territory they control. These groups include both those that the insurgent leaders hope to mobilize and those unlikely to join. Groups marginalized by a rebel political authority may not only refuse to cooperate with insurgent rule, but could emerge as violent challengers to its sovereign claim. As with autocratic governments, symbolic processes targeting oppositional voices usually rely on referential symbols – such as military costuming or parades – that make apparent the latent coercive power of the rebel regime. Using violence against civilians is costly for insurgents, both materially and reputationally. Rebel leaders economize the use of violence by cowing potentially oppositional constituents into compliance. Such aesthetic displays of might also delineate a perimeter of control, signaling to potential challengers the scope of the insurgent claim to a specific territory and population.

Two additional audiences not resident within the insurgent area of control constitute secondary constituencies for rebel symbolic overtures. First are those members of the core constituency living outside of rebel control – either a diasporic population or those living within incumbent-controlled areas. Generating strong feelings of identification and attachment with the rebel government is important as such individuals can play an important role in shoring up governance capacity – whether serving as ad hoc ambassadors, lending technical expertise, running organizations that funnel humanitarian resources, or raising funds for the broader struggle. Second, insurgent organizations frequently craft symbolic messages to transnational actors including activist networks, aid organizations, religious institutions, international agencies, and foreign governments that may provide direct material and legal support to insurgents deemed to represent legitimate causes (Bob 2006; DeWaal 1997; Branch and Mampilly 2005). Embracing symbols that present a rebel political authority as sovereign reinforce its legitimacy as a

political actor to both audiences (Weber 1998: 93; Coggins, [Chapter 5](#), this volume).

Insurgent leaders are often criticized for masking their true intentions behind symbolic and rhetorical constructions. However, since understanding the audience category is necessary to decipher the meaning of any communicative action, such criticism is often superficial (Edelman: 1971: 11). Indeed, the advantage of having a repertoire of symbolic actions available is precisely that it allows insurgents to cultivate different audiences with distinct messages. The task for analysts is not simply to dismiss insurgent symbolic constructions, but rather to determine the intended audience through a close reading of its symbolic repertoire.

The challenge of using symbols to relate successfully to various audiences is brought into stark relief when comparing the symbolic repertoires of two related insurgencies in the eastern Kivu provinces of Congo (DRC). While the leaders of the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD) (1998–2003) failed to build successful relations with civilians, the *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP) (2006–2009) overcame its narrow ethnic identification as the army of the Congolese Tutsi population. Both insurgencies sought to frame their struggles in national terms, but were perceived as fighting on behalf of the Congolese Tutsi population. While Congolese Tutsi did dominate the top brass of the CNDP, the RCD actually had substantial representation from other ethnic communities within its higher ranks (Stearns 2008). Yet, the RCD's governance efforts were stymied by the continued perception that it was a Tutsi organization, despite efforts by the leadership to parade its indigenous roots (Mampilly 2011). The RCD's failure to deploy a resonant symbolic repertoire was spectacularly demonstrated by the vigorous challenge to its rule posed by the *Mai Mai*, a variety of indigenous militias that challenged the insurgency's control on nativist grounds, often by deploying symbolic processes that reinforced their claims to autochthony (Tull 2004; Jackson 2006). The RCD's failure to develop an effective symbolic repertoire eventually led even its core constituency to ostracize it (Mampilly 2011).

In contrast, the CNDP was far more successful in generating compliance with its rule among its diverse ethnic constituents, even though its leaders were largely Tutsi and its rank and file drawn from the Rwandophone community. By vigorously utilizing its symbolic repertoire to proclaim a nationalist message, the CNDP under Laurent Nkunda was able to engender a greater degree of identification with its rule compared to its predecessor, leading to higher degrees of popular support (Stearns 2008). This was not a pre-ordained outcome as it shared many common goals and even personnel with the RCD.⁸ At the outset of fighting in 2006, Nkunda was widely perceived as a Congolese Tutsi leader

⁸ Nkunda himself got his start by serving as a major in the RCD. Other top CNDP leaders similarly had substantive histories within the RCD.

fighting for his community. However, he changed course after facing challenges to his rule from non-Tutsi local elites and militias. As a result, the CNDP became more attuned to the grievances of indigenous groups marginalized by the RCD.

Nkunda, a savvy populist, recalibrated his symbolic repertoire in order to foist a broader frame of reference upon the civilian population. He embraced potent symbols of Congolese nationalism in his public rhetoric that were reflected in the CNDP's evolving aesthetic offensive. Initially, Nkunda had focused on a narrow constituency, claiming he was fighting to prevent a "planned genocide" against the Congolese Tutsi as well as for the repatriation of his "ndugu" (relations or co-ethnics) in exile (IRIN 2004). By 2007, he had shifted dramatically, stating bluntly that, "I am not fighting for the Tutsi" (Wetshi 2007). Nkunda found a surprising model in Mobutu Sese Seko, the former president, drawing from his attempt to craft a distinct Zairean identity (*Zairois*): "I have always told people that we should follow Mobutu's example of how to 'manage' the country's ethnic groups" (Ibid.). By 2008, he completely rejected the notion that he was fighting on behalf of an ethnic community altogether, repositioning the CNDP as a nationalist movement (BBC 2008).

The evolution in the CNDP's ideological position was clearly reflected in its shifting symbolic repertoire. Most dramatically, the rebellion adopted a flag that was little more than a re-colored version of the former Zairean flag. In addition, an anthem proclaiming the rebellion's nationalist goals was produced, often providing the backdrop for rallies and parades as the insurgency moved into new territories (McCrummen 2008). The effective recalibration of its symbolic repertoire increased identification between the rebellion and its various constituents, as the steady growth in support from non-Rwandophone Congolese demonstrated. Challengers who had once effectively framed its predecessor, the RCD, as an illegitimate foreign creation were largely silenced. Nkunda eventually even emerged as a rival to President Joseph Kabila (before being defanged by his Rwandan patrons).

SOURCES

To understand the imputed meaning of any particular symbolic repertoire – its symbolic register – we must examine the various sources insurgent governments draw on when engaging in symbolic politics. Well-calibrated repertoires do not spring forth fully formed by the rebel command; rather, they emerge interactively through the constant interplay between communal sources and rebel initiative. Insurgents must rework existing symbols that resonate with their audiences' collective memories or emotions. As Connerton explains, "images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order. It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory" (1989: 3). However, historical sources are never transmitted directly.

Instead, they are refracted through the political agenda of insurgent leaders. In this way, insurgents play with the “imageries of statehood that spectators had in mind, trying to use them as an index of their own position in the emerging power game” (Förster 2012: 16).

Every rebel organization develops its own distinctive political culture, defined as “the values, norms, practices, beliefs, and collective identity of insurgents.” Political culture is not a static enterprise; rather, it evolves in tandem with “the experiences of the conflict itself, namely, previous rebellious actions, repression, and the ongoing interpretation of events by the participants themselves” (Wood 2003: 19). The political culture of a rebellion influences the selection, deployment, and meaning of symbols in its repertoire – in other words, how it chooses to represent itself publically (el Hourri and Saber 2010: 71). The goal of the leadership is to construct an image of the rebellion that can push back against portrayals by the incumbent or other challengers effectively.

Insurgents draw symbolic processes from three sources: first, local themes and motifs embedded within the memories of a specific community; second, recognized or latent nationalist symbols; and third, transnational ideological formations. These sources generally map onto one of three types of strategic agendas – ethno-nationalist, national reformist, or transnational. But insurgent leaders frequently vacillate between them, drawing on two related characteristics of political symbols: multivocality and ambiguity.

“Multivocality,” the variety of meanings that can be attached to the same symbol, gives insurgents the flexibility to compete with the incumbent over the meaning of national symbols (Locke 1995: 25). As Edelman (1971: 11) explains, “Political symbols bring out in concentrated form those particular meanings and emotions which the members of a group create and reinforce in each other. There is nothing about any symbol that requires it stand for only one thing.” However, as the incumbent often has far greater resources available for its symbolic offensive, insurgents may choose to hedge their bets by deploying multiple messages. Hence, “ambiguity,” or the lack of a precise meaning imputed to a symbolic repertoire, is a crucial, if delicate, strategic necessity. Ambiguity includes cases in which the insurgents draw on multiple sources as well as those in which they target multiple audiences with distinct messages. Each specific constituency should see in the symbol what rebel leaders intend (el Hourri and Saber 2010: 76). The risk of ambiguous political communication is that the core audience may not understand the discrete message it is being sent and come to feel ostracized by the insurgency’s overtures to others.

For example, southern Sudanese informants frequently claimed that SPLA leaders sent covert signals regarding the secessionist goals of the movement despite its public rhetoric of national reform. They pointed to the development of distinctive symbolic appeals such as the adoption of a new flag or the development of an original currency that could be interpreted both as a



FIGURE 4.2 Bank of New Sudan notes (Source: Personal collection of Peter Symes)

reference to a reformed Sudan as well as an aesthetic manifestation of an emerging nation. Such ambiguity was essential for the rebellion as it sought to generate support among a core constituency of southerners while simultaneously cultivating supporters in the rest of the country. Prepared in 2002, “New Sudan Pounds” demonstrate both the ambiguity and multivocality of SPLA symbolic processes. Bearing the insignia of the nonexistent “Bank of New Sudan” and signed by a high-ranking figure within the rebellion, the notes depicted scenes that represented Sudan’s distinctive African heritage, such as the Nubian figure on the five-pound note, a clear nod to the secessionist agenda (see [Figure 4.2](#)). Yet, the currency also sought to co-opt Sudan’s Arabic heritage,

printing one side of the notes in Arabic script in order to challenge the incumbent's interpretation of the war (Symes 2011). By representing the Arabic script as integral to its political culture, the rebellion rejected Khartoum's narrative of the war as being between Arabs and non-Arabs. Posters prominently depicting the entire array of bills were a regular feature in many rebel administrative offices during my visits in 2004 and 2005, even though the currency was never adopted for general usage.

Ethno-nationalist leaders commonly draw from local cultural themes to unify their core constituencies and distinguish them from those of their neighbors. Condensation symbols that evoke myths of shared history, heroic figures, or common beliefs can produce both cognitive and emotional effects within a core constituency (Kaufman 2001: 29). Insurgent leaders often use a "hidden transcript": coded words and actions designed to speak to a targeted constituency, without alarming or alienating other audiences that may be paying attention (Scott 1990: 103). These references are intended to motivate collective action among members of a core constituency by facilitating "individuals to locate and contextualise their own personal experiences within the broader collective" (Githens-Mazer 2008: 44). They also provide a patterned cognitive structure that makes it possible for individuals to anticipate future developments within their society (Eriksen 1987: 261). The effectiveness of localizing symbolic repertoires rests on the degree to which particular symbols are embedded within a specific collective consciousness and resonate with members of that community.

In pursuing a strategic agenda of secession, LTTE leaders drew heavily on local cultural references engrained within the Tamil population to shore up their governance efforts (Roberts 2009). Names of governance structures were drawn from pre-existing terms from the earlier, independent Tamil kingdom in Sri Lanka. Thus, the civil administration was referred to as *Atasialthurai* and headed by a *Porupalar* (person responsible). The legal system was adapted from the Tamil cultural norms known as *Thesavalamai* that regulated inheritance, marriage, and other civil practices (Mampilly 2011). The insurgency inundated areas under its control with militaristic images, songs, festivals, and other symbolic displays drawn from the folk religious practices of rural Tamils, despite the LTTE's officially secular stance (Roberts 2009: 85–89). Massive billboards of Prabhakaran superimposed against a backdrop of the imagined Tamil homeland invested the rebel leader with the "aura of a deity," conflating the secular goal of secession with the command's Edenic aspirations (De Mel 2001: 221).

The aggressive and dramatic symbolic repertoire adopted by the rebellion accomplished multiple goals for the insurgency. Within the core constituency, it nurtured the belief that Tamils could challenge the power of the Sri Lankan state, because it adopted many of that state's rituals and forms (De Mel 2001: 223). Tamil informants frequently referred to the insurgency's restoration of a sense of dignity and equality after years of living as second-class citizens. Even

critics such as the late Dharmaretnam Sivaram agreed that the insurgency played an important psychological role in restoring Tamil dignity (interview, December 2004). By forcefully claiming the mantle as the sole representative of the Tamil cause, the LTTE's symbolic repertoire had the intended effect of fusing the Tamil population with the insurgent organization to both internal and external audiences, even though many Tamils had suffered at the hands of the rebellion. The massive use of militarized symbols within rebel territory also carried a warning for potential challengers.

Insurgent organizations that seek power nationally also draw on local sources, but risk the possibility that groups will interpret localized references differently (Connerton 1989: 3). The risk in using local references to define who is part of the struggle is that this approach also defines who is not, reducing the insurgent's potential base of support. Nevertheless, insurgencies that seek power in the center often draw on pre-existing cultural tropes, recognizing the challenge of overcoming the incumbent advantage within the symbolic realm. Some insurgencies exhume and empower entirely new national symbols altogether. In a 2011 case, Libyan rebels resurrected the image of the local anti-colonial leader Omar Mukhtar, who had been assassinated by the Italians in 1931 (McDonnell 2011). Pasting his image onto the prior "Kingdom of Libya" flag, the National Transitional Council plastered his visage throughout insurgent-controlled towns in an effort to provide a central rallying figure around which the varying strands of the anti-Gaddafi forces could unite.

The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) provides an unexpected, but telling example of the multivocality and contestability of national symbols. Though grounded in Maoist revolutionary doctrine, the Brahmin leaders of the organizations – Baburam Bhattarai and Prachanda – sought to legitimate their leadership by identifying with the country's royal heritage, particularly the Hindu Kingdom's leadership by warrior-kings. Prince Gyanendra, the incumbent who ascended to the throne as a result of the massacre of the royal family, faced questions about his legitimacy by the Nepali population (Lecomte-Tilouine 2003: 13). Prachanda exploited this weakness by visually situating his leadership within the legacy of Prithvi Narayan, the founder of the Shah dynasty that united Nepal in the mid-eighteenth century. The Maoists sought to appropriate this legacy through displays that depicted the insurgency's leaders as the true inheritors of the royal legacy, as Figure 4.3 demonstrates.

Insurgencies also draw on transnational sources to connect their strategic objectives with broader global struggles, particularly those that advance a specific ideological or religious agenda. Symbolic repertoires translate these themes for local audiences and can be particularly useful for groups seeking to overcome internal ethnic differences. Rebels professing a communist agenda commonly draw on transnational symbols to magnify the significance of their struggles. For example, the CPN-M and the Communist Party of Peru, better

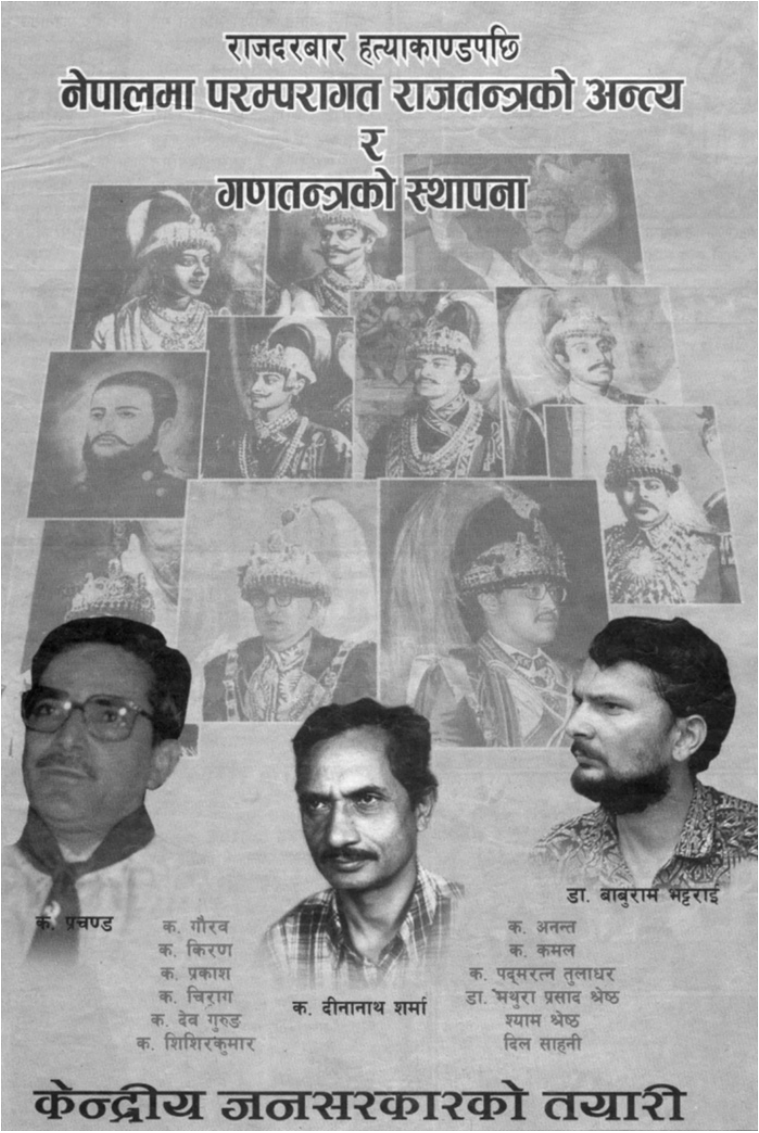


FIGURE 4.3 CPN-M leaders as inheritors of the Shah dynasty (Source: Lecomte-Tilouine 2003)

known as Sendero Luminoso, both adopted bright flags embellished with a simple hammer and sickle during their protracted struggles. The CPN-M kept this symbol of its fidelity to Maoism even after the Chinese leadership repeatedly rebuffed its overtures. Religions similarly provide a unifying



FIGURE 4.4 Taliban Flag

force for insurgents as they can bridge deeply felt local beliefs and practices with national and international faiths. Rebels have drawn on Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist themes – for example, the Stern Gang (British-controlled Palestine), the Irish Republican Army (Northern Ireland), the CPN-M (Nepal) and LTTE (Sri Lanka), and the Chushi Gangdruk (Chinese-controlled Tibet).

More recently, Hezbollah (Lebanon), Groupe Islamique Armé (Algeria), Abu Sayyaf (Philippines), and Al Shabaab (Somalia) have drawn on Islamic symbols to consolidate their rule. Incorporating Koranic references allows insurgents to project a veneer of legitimacy onto their governments by positioning themselves as upholding Islamic regulations. By integrally linking the honor of the faith with the success of the insurgency, Islamist militants delegitimize opposition by labeling challengers enemies of Islam itself. Islam also provides an ideology that can bind together different ethnic groups behind a single cause (Mamdani 2009: 138). For example, in Pakistan, the Taliban insurgency was able to downplay its Pashtun origins and foster a multi-ethnic movement by stressing its Islamic credentials.⁹ The early Taliban flag elegantly represented its strategic use of symbols. Over a simple white background, it displays the *shahada* (the Muslim declaration of belief) in stark black calligraphy as depicted in figure 4.4. Instead of simply appealing to Pashtuns, the flag calls all Muslims to unite.

The benefit for an insurgency that successfully transnationalizes its objective is access to resources from co-believers abroad, or even state support from sympathetic regimes. However, this strategy can be risky. For example, if they become too closely associated with the Al Qaeda network, they are likely to draw the ire of the United States. Al Shabaab came to be viewed as an Al Qaeda affiliate due to their use of Islamist symbolism, despite its origins in the Union of

⁹ The Taliban may have learned from earlier governmental precedents. The Pakistani dictator Zia-ul-Haq used Islam to temper ethnic tensions that threatened to tear apart the country in the late 1970s (Ahmad 1996).

Islamic Courts, a local insurgency with few transnational ties (interview with a U.S. counterterror official, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The symbolic dimension of rebel governance allows us to consider the breadth of the relationship between an insurgent political authority and the civilian population under its control. Symbolic repertoires are an essential aspect of how insurgent governments position themselves vis-à-vis a particular civilian population. Symbolic processes that effectively signal the latent coercive power of the insurgent regime reduce the need for violence to ensure compliance and inhibit defections, while those aiming to legitimize the insurgent political authority in the eyes of a particular constituency can produce a wide variety of material benefits, including better recruits and other types of support, if calibrated at the appropriate register. In this way, symbolic and empirical aspects of governance are mutually reinforcing. While rebels almost never become juridical sovereigns without winning their civil wars, attempting sovereign behaviors, in both the empirical and symbolic sense, influences – and even drives – rebel development of civilian governance.

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Rebel Diplomacy: Theorizing Violent Non-State Actors' Strategic Use of Talk

Bridget L. Coggins

ABSTRACT

The practice of rebel diplomacy is essential for violent non-state actors on the verge of new statehood or seeking legitimacy for a new regime. But effective diplomacy can serve a number of critical purposes during wartime as well. In the short term, external ties may provide material resources, training, or otherwise martial support to alter the course of fighting on the ground. Over the longer term, establishing bilateral relations with third parties, concluding trade agreements, or being allowed to participate in cease-fire or settlement negotiations can lock in strategic advantages that are difficult to overturn. Rebels face significant barriers to utilizing diplomacy, however. Some are inherent to the nature of the international system, some are erected by the embattled governing regime, and still others are endemic to rebel organizations themselves. This chapter introduces the important – and so far neglected – topic of rebel diplomacy in wartime. I argue that we can only hope to understand contemporary civil war by better understanding the interplay between violent and non-violent tactics.

INTRODUCTION

Studies of civil war prioritize violence and the physical control of people and territory. But rebels from Sri Lanka to Chechnya to Somaliland have often found that effective domestic authority is not tantamount to statehood, just as those in Bosnia, South Sudan, and Liberia have learned that external legitimacy can be won without exercising much effective control at all. The correlation between battlefield and political outcomes is imperfect because the international states system is a high-status social group whose new members are importantly determined by existing states (Bull 1977; Buzan 2004; Wendt 2004; Coggins 2011). This incentivizes revolutionary and secessionist rebels, all

aspiring members, to establish external ties and invest in diplomatic capacity in addition to achieving a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. However, even rebels strongly disinclined to provide governance and public goods – those who might be content to perpetuate war as an end in itself – may find diplomatic engagement valuable (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Reno 2001; Chapter 13, this volume). Non-violent contact with outsiders can provide numerous short-term benefits, including material support, training, and legal and political advocacy. Therefore, in order to fully understand the phenomenon of rebel governance, we ought to examine not only how rebels govern those under their control (Mampilly 2011; Risse 2012; Staniland 2012), but also how they pursue what we might call the externally oriented face of governance (Skocpol 1979: 32), procuring legitimacy and goods through foreign engagement and the strategic use of talk.

In the chapter that follows, I introduce *rebel diplomacy*,¹ an important but underappreciated wartime tactic. I begin by describing the limited-potential role that formal, interstate diplomacy affords to rebels. Next, I explain rebels' motives for utilizing diplomacy and detail the instrumental purposes that it serves during wartime. Most significantly, rebel diplomacy is integral to a guerrilla strategy, making it difficult for embattled state leaders to distinguish true negotiating partners from those employing talk as “war by other means” against them. I deduce that the wartime structural context precludes most mutually beneficial, bilateral negotiations between rebels and their former governments. However, rebels should still be capable of utilizing diplomacy with outsiders. This rebel diplomacy occasionally approximates the practice of formal interstate relations, but more often yields distinct practices tailored to rebels' wartime circumstances. I close by examining rebel diplomacy's potential significance for the larger study of rebel governance in civil war.

Because this is the first academic discussion of rebel diplomacy, the topic will not be covered comprehensively. Instead, I hope to demonstrate that rebels often dedicate significant time and attention to non-violent, diplomatic engagement and that the scope, direction, and timing of their efforts can help us to better understand the dynamics of contemporary civil war. I will also generate initial expectations about the conditions under which rebels will be more or less likely to attempt to utilize diplomacy as a tool.

FORMAL INTERSTATE DIPLOMACY

Whether to mitigate uncertainty or insecurity, to signal intentions or resolve, or to create or maintain successful cooperation, strategic communication is crucial

¹ The term is a direct translation of *zàofǎn wàijiāo* (造反外交), borrowed from the policy practiced by the People's Republic of China during the period when it was without a seat at the United Nations and the nationalist KMT in Taiwan remained widely recognized as the legitimate government of China.

to international relations. This communication occurs via three principal modes: the use of force, the use of money, and the use of talk. Diplomacy is the strategic use of talk. According to its most basic understanding, diplomacy occurs when state leaders utilize talk with one another to pursue their goals. For Berridge, diplomacy is “communication between officials [or other agents of the state] designed to promote foreign policy either by formal agreement or tacit adjustment” (2002: 1). Citing Ernest Satow, Nicolson defines it as “the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states” (1963: 24). Others suggest an even more expansive characterization of the practice, subsuming money (economic diplomacy) and most force (coercive diplomacy) under a single heading. Emblematically, Freeman defines it as that which “seeks advantage for the state by measures short of war” (2006: 72).

As these scholars make explicit, the practice of diplomacy is traditionally reserved for states. Though anarchic in one sense, the deep structure of the international system is orderly, undergirded by a set of fundamental rules about which actors may legitimately participate in international forums, make laws, make war, and trade, and under what circumstances.² The system’s current prevailing organization is state-centric. This means that states – and by extension state leaders – are the primary actors endowed with rights and obligations in international politics and law, analogous to the rights and responsibilities of the individual person within the domestic sphere (OAS 1933; Portmann 2010).

Normal diplomatic practice is predicated upon the shared character of its members. In their ideal-typical form, all states possess internal control and authority and external juridical equality. Together these twin principles form the normative institution (or regime) known as “sovereignty.” Internal sovereignty divides the world’s people and territory into discrete, mutually recognized, self-governing polities, while juridical equality evinces a communal agreement that, whatever their differences in material capability, state leaders will treat one another as equals under the law. No state has dominion over the others and each state’s internal affairs are exclusively its own. Each government makes its own choices. Under normal circumstances, interstate diplomacy works smoothly because everyone knows who is empowered to negotiate and make legally binding decisions and can depend on their ability to make good on their commitments.³ The members’ legitimate representatives are indisputable.

² H.L.A. Hart (1961) dubs many of these “rules about rules” secondary rules. Also see: Bull (1977); Franck (1990).

³ Though they cannot always depend upon their will to make good on them. Nor, it should be noted, do the ideal circumstances described prevail at all times or places for all states. Many states have distinct imbalances between their internal and external sovereignty. At the extremes, Somalia under the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) had fleeting internal sovereignty but significant external sovereignty, whereas the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria had durable internal authority in 1996, but no external sovereignty.

Confirming that states are the principal diplomatic actors does not imply that others are insignificant. The Holy See is not a state (according to most definitions), but the Vatican exerts a strong influence in historically Catholic countries and among Catholics worldwide and is routinely granted diplomatic status. It also participates in humanitarian actions and serves as a wartime mediator. For example, the Vatican sent an envoy to aid negotiations between Peru and Ecuador during their 1995 border dispute. Individuals also regularly serve as arbiters, negotiators, or advisors in their personal capacity and not in the service of any particular government or state. Former American president Jimmy Carter and South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu are characteristic. Both are prominent public figures and former politicians personally committed to resolving pressing geopolitical problems such as the recent conflict in Darfur in Sudan (2007). President Carter also helped to broker the Geneva Accords between Israelis and Palestinians (2002–2003) and more recently secured the release of an American prisoner in North Korea (2010). Both missions were carried out in his capacity as a private citizen. Finally, so-called low politics abound with instances of lobbies, corporations, and other non-state actors' participation in diplomatic affairs, particularly in trade and humanitarian affairs.

Yet when non-state actors use talk strategically – and not as the agents of a state – it is not considered “diplomacy.” Diplomacy is not simply the strategic use of talk, but rather the strategic use of talk *by states*. Consequently, most acts in the set of formal diplomatic practices are simply not available to non-state actors. They cannot generally make treaties, trade agreements, or alliances that have the force of international law. Nor are investments in, or trade agreements with, non-states or rebels afforded legal protections.⁴ Further, non-state actors are not granted access to international forums or extended the courtesies of regular diplomatic intercourse, nor do their representatives or missions receive immunity or the various other privileges outlined within the Vienna Conventions.⁵ Ultimately, when non-state actors *do* participate in formal diplomacy, they do so at the pleasure of states and their status relative to rightful diplomats is decidedly lesser.⁶ In short, states have a monopoly on the legitimate of exercise of formal diplomacy.

⁴ For example, an agreement between a rebel government and a foreign business seeking to extract natural resources is very much tied to the fortunes of the rebellion. Should the rebels fail in their attempt to capture the state or win independence, the agreement is null and void and likely retroactively illegal, since it effectively provides material support for the violent overthrow of an existing government.

⁵ Although it had long been customary practice, the first formal attempt to provide special legal protections to diplomats occurred at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Today the international standards regarding diplomats, diplomatic missions, and consulates are codified in the United Nations Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, adopted in 1961, and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, adopted in 1963.

⁶ It is also the exclusive purview of states to grant actors international legal personality (Portmann 2010: 80–85).

REBELS' FORMAL DIPLOMATIC STATUS

Although rebels routinely attempt to participate in formal diplomacy, and indeed often demand it, actors that challenge the authority of existing states do not sit well within its practice. There are exceptional circumstances within the laws of war that compel rebels' participation in diplomacy, but they are limited and rarely realized in practice. Powerful rebels that meet the legal requisites of statehood might have a legitimate legal claim to diplomatic status, but even that cannot be realized without substantial external support. Contemporary rebel organizations have virtually no formal diplomatic status beyond their role as combatants.⁷

Around the time of the American Civil War, third party states began to extend some rebel groups' status as *belligerents* when they could not avoid becoming involved in what were ostensibly internal conflicts.⁸ The designation was useful because conflicts occasionally became so intense that they resembled interstate wars rather than civil wars and outsiders needed guidelines for managing the rebel attacks, embargoes, and other wartime transgressions that they experienced.⁹ Belligerency was assigned once the rebels controlled a significant portion of the state's territory, had erected an administration within it, and had begun to observe the laws of war (Lootsteen 2000: 109). From then on, third parties treated the rebel group as if it was a state at war. For example, captured rebel combatants were not considered common criminals as they would have been in smaller-scale insurrections, but instead were treated as proper combatants with rights. Assigning belligerency also raised the expectation among outsiders that the home state would henceforth observe the laws of war vis-à-vis the rebels.

Most rebel groups remained too weak or disorganized to acquire special status as belligerents, and while, at that time, state leaders did not believe that belligerency was a special or privileged status, it fell out of favor as outside states' entanglements in civil war declined and opinions about the actual

⁷ That is, in international law; rebels may (but are unlikely to) have legal status domestically. Typically, once the extra-legal use of force has been employed, domestic laws will not protect the rebels.

⁸ Legally distinctions are drawn between rebellions, insurgencies, and belligerency. On a scale from least to most severe, rebellions are small and entirely internal while belligerencies spill over across borders and affect the international community. Insurgencies are somewhere in the middle. For the purposes of this study, I will use the terms interchangeably. The civil conflicts referred to in this study breach the traditional threshold for civil war established by the Correlates of War: over 1,000 battle deaths.

⁹ According to Hall, the rebel organization "[resembled] a state too nearly for it to be possible to treat individuals belonging to such a population as criminals; it would be inhuman for the enemy to execute his prisoners; it would still be more inhuman for foreign states to capture and hang the crews of warships as pirates; humanity [required] that the members of such a community be treated as belligerents" (Hall, cited in Walker 1937).

neutrality of third party neutrality changed.¹⁰ By the twentieth century, assigning belligerency had fallen out of use entirely. Although some would like to resurrect its practice, the last time that it was seriously considered, and in that case not ultimately granted, was during the Spanish Civil War (Gomulkiewicz 1988).

Following World War II, the Geneva Conventions (1949) again extended some limited legal-diplomatic status and protections to civil war combatants. Despite the fact that most International Humanitarian Law (IHL)¹¹ is dedicated to the conduct of international war, Common Article 3 and its second Additional Protocol apply explicitly to civil conflict. Common Article 3 sets minimum wartime provisions for parties to the treaty and all other participants in non-international wars. It requires humane treatment for civilians and all those injured, surrendered, or otherwise unable to participate in combat. Further, it forbids the use of torture and degrading treatment, hostage taking, extrajudicial killing, and withholding medical attention. Regarding status, the Additional Protocol (Article 96) says that a violent non-state civil war participant may unilaterally declare its assent to the Geneva Conventions. By doing so, it becomes a conflict-specific party to the treaty, and both it and its home government are henceforth bound to humanitarian law.

IHL is both more expansive and more restrictive when it comes to rebel diplomacy. While the outmoded practice of belligerency clearly offered greater diplomatic privileges to the strongest, most proven rebels, current law offers limited status to any rebels that are willing to submit to humanitarian provisions. Rebels may not be able to directly engage in formal diplomacy with the state authorities that they challenge, or with other governments, but they may contract with the international community as a whole to moderate or regulate the state's conduct in war.

Still, what is theoretically possible under the law is rarely realized in practice. Governments are unlikely to recognize the legitimacy of humanitarian claims made by those who they deem to be their own treasonous citizens, and they are similarly unlikely to abide by the laws of war in combat against them.¹² Embattled state leaders contend that their internal conflicts are not subject to the scrutiny of international law; they are matters of their own sovereign prerogatives. Moreover, third parties are hesitant to insist upon rebels' participation in formal diplomacy – even limited humanitarian consultations – because they want to shield their own internal affairs from

¹⁰ Two important trends were: (1) the decrease in maritime acts of war that entangled third parties, and (2) the belief that by assigning belligerency and maintaining neutrality, governments were effectively elevating the status of the rebels; not choosing sides *was* taking sides.

¹¹ Two primary bodies of laws – The Geneva Conventions concerning humanitarian law, and The Hague Conventions concerning the laws of war – comprise international humanitarian law.

¹² There is the possibility that, even if the government does not agree to the laws of war, the regime might face remedial charges before the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague.

similar foreign meddling. On the other side, rebels are highly unlikely to commit to abide by the laws of war or seek humanitarian protections to begin with because they are usually contrary to their *modus operandi*. Tactics that are explicitly forbidden within the laws of war – such as sabotage, terrorism, and obscuring one’s identity as a combatant – are often deemed critical to the conduct of guerrilla wars against formally organized militaries. Insurgents are loath to exchange that strategic advantage for the limited and remedial protections of humanitarian law. Only when rebels pursue a conventional military strategy would the potential benefits of humanitarian law become more attractive.¹³

The only other wartime circumstance that might be said to legally compel rebels’ participation in formal diplomacy is an unratified rebel victory – that is, when a rebel group has decisively defeated its home state in war and has secured functional independence, but the home state refuses to concede. Recent examples of this might include: Somaliland, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁴ According to the dominant, declaratory theory of recognition, an actor becomes a state once it has secured a defined territory, a permanent population, established an independent government, and demonstrates the ability to participate in international affairs (OAS 1933; Grant 1999). According to this interpretation, external recognition and legitimacy does not play a causal role in establishing an actor’s statehood, it simply functions as a declaration of an achieved fact. Following that logic, actors that meet the criteria for statehood ought to automatically be considered rightful members of the international community.¹⁵ Moreover, the acts of new states are deemed retroactively legal, so contracts and alliances made by the rebels during the conflict should become legally binding.

Yet a catch-22 of sorts exists between the prevailing legal interpretation and practice. International courts have generally denied their jurisdiction where an unrecognized *de facto* state or rebel government is concerned and domestic courts have typically deferred to the political executive’s judgment. So rebels cannot exploit their rights through the courts. Furthermore, unrecognized regimes are not permitted membership in international governmental institutions such as the UN and WTO, nor are they afforded status in foreign capitals, so rebels cannot exercise their statehood in those political venues

¹³ One international non-governmental advocacy group, Geneva Call, has been created to attempt to garner greater rebel compliance with certain standards of international humanitarian law concerning child soldiering, land mines, and sexual and gender-based violence (www.genevacall.org). However, compliance with these standards does not typically alter the insurgent/guerrilla character, and therefore formal illegality, of most rebellions.

¹⁴ Though Russia’s involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Armenia’s involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh may repudiate their independence from outside powers.

¹⁵ That is, any actor that did not achieve that condition by unlawful means.

either.¹⁶ In sum, de facto rebel governments may have the legal authority to participate in diplomacy in principle, but they cannot meaningfully avail themselves of the legal or political privileges accorded to states without first receiving widespread recognition from their peers.¹⁷

TWO LOGICS OF REBEL DIPLOMACY

Why do rebels use, or attempt to use, diplomacy? Rebels are often cast as wantonly violent, greedy, and criminal (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Mueller 2004). Implicit to these portrayals is a belief that productive negotiations with rebels cannot occur. Instead, these groups only understand force and must be thoroughly defeated to end civil wars. Violence and non-violence, despite their portrayal as such in much of the international security literature, are not pure strategies for non-state actors.¹⁸ Rebels seem to use diplomacy, or talk, in much the same way that state leaders do. Which is to say, rebels almost always mix violent and non-violent tactics, if not simultaneously, then across time. Rebel violence is employed in a limited and strategic way in combination with other modes of communication (Kalyvas 2006).¹⁹

Because civil wars are typically fought with the explicit goal of joining the community of states, perhaps it is not surprising that rebel organizations would adopt state-like practices. Seen in this light, rebels are engaged in a form of strategic social construction; they are normative entrepreneurs attempting to persuade the international community to extend them the bundle of privileges and obligations accorded to its rightful members (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Rebels are advocating a change in the content of the composition of the community to whom the normative institutions apply, rather than a change in the substance of the norms. A suitable analog might be the extension of voting rights to women or African Americans in the United States – white male property owners received suffrage first and others followed. Rebels’

¹⁶ In a small number of cases, as with the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) in what is now Namibia and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), rebel organizations have received international recognition as the legitimate representatives of a people within the UN, but that status depended on other states’ acceptance and their status relative to state members remained decidedly unequal. Tellingly, though the UN had revoked South Africa’s mandate for South West Africa in 1966, Namibia did not receive UN membership until decades later in 1990. Though both situations allowed the unprecedented participation of rebel organizations in peace negotiations and the UN, they are considered *sui generis* by most jurists and do not indicate a trend toward openness to rebel diplomacy.

¹⁷ The most striking example of this paradox today is Somaliland, a de facto independent state that was created in northwestern Somalia in the wake of the collapse of the Siad Barre regime and the Somali state. Functionally independent since around 1995, Somaliland is not recognized by any other state and therefore receives none of the benefits formal status conveys.

¹⁸ For example, see the ongoing debate on the relative success of violent and non-violent campaigns, as discussed in Chenoweth and Stephan (2011).

¹⁹ That rebels use violence strategically should not, however, be taken to imply that they use it optimally.

diplomatic efforts are not only meant to mimic or perform statehood externally though; they often serve as a means to provide real tangible benefits to the rebels during war as well (Mampilly 2011). When rebels engage in strategic communication with foreign governments or agents, or with an occupying regime they deem foreign, they might be said to practice rebel diplomacy.

If we take for granted that the motives behind rebels' use of talk are strategic, and that a rough analogy to formal interstate diplomacy might be appropriate, Harold Nicolson's analysis of diplomatic strategies provides a useful lens on rebel diplomacy's potential logic. Referring to state leaders, he identifies two distinct approaches to the practice: that of *the warrior* and that of *the shopkeeper*. The warrior sees diplomacy as zero-sum, or as war by other means. When warriors use talk, their strategy is to secure their own goals at the expense of the other states and state leaders involved. On one end of the warrior spectrum, diplomats use talk in order to get what they want regardless of the other parties involved. At its other extreme, diplomacy might be fully integrated as a tactic of war fighting. He explains:

It is not only the means of the warrior school that are predatory. The methods by which they give effect to those policies are conceived and managed from the military rather than the civilian point of view. Negotiation under such a system resembles a military campaign . . . and the means which such negotiators employ are more akin to military tactics than to the give and take of civilian intercourse. (1963: 25)

Civil wars are replete with instances that suggest a warrior approach. For example, the Sri Lankan Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was well known for using negotiations with the government as a stalling tactic to re-arm, retrench, and recruit more soldiers. Similarly, Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has been accused of using ceasefires to re-arm against the Ugandan government and to relocate and seek refuge in nearby states. The warrior approach is similarly apparent in governments' approaches to diplomacy with rebels. When Uruguay's Tupamaros suspended violence in favor of participation in the political process, the army retrenched and seized the opportunity to quash them (Deonandan et al. 2007: 72–73). And in Colombia, after President Cesar Gaviria reached peace agreements with five rebel groups in the early 1990s, the government exploited the demobilizations to its own advantage. In an aggressive public relations campaign, the administration lauded members of the demobilized groups as "good rebels" concerned with the people's best interests, as opposed to "bad rebels" such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) that would not surrender their arms (Ibid.: 90). The Khartoum government seems to have employed a similar strategy in negotiations over Darfur, Sudan, dividing the opposition and thereby increasing its military advantage in the region (Johnston 2007). Returning again to Nicholson, "It is obvious that under such a system conciliation, confidence and fair dealing are not very apparent" (1963: 26).

There is less unequivocal evidence of rebels pursuing a warrior diplomatic strategy with third parties that are not directly involved in war fighting. This is most likely because third party states can opt out of diplomacy with rebel groups that prove to undermine their interests. However, during the Cold War both rebel groups and embattled governments successfully exploited external ideological sympathies in order to acquire resources and political support for their causes, and oftentimes played up the extent to which ideological convictions motivated their conflict or would shape their new regimes if they were victorious. This perhaps provides evidence of the warrior approach, in that the actors strategically misrepresented their interests during negotiations in order to secure backing from third parties; the agreements struck were one-sided, rather than mutually beneficial.

The second approach to diplomacy that Nicholson identifies is the “shopkeeper” strategy. In contrast to the warrior diplomat, a shopkeeper sees negotiation as an attempt by mutual accommodation to reach a durable settlement or agreement that leaves both parties better off. A shopkeeper believes that,

there is probably some middle point between the two negotiators which, if discovered, should reconcile their conflicting differences. And that to find this middle point, all that is required is a frank discussion, the placing of cards upon the table, and the usual processes of human reason, confidence and fair dealing. (1963: 26)

Notable, unequivocal examples of the shopkeeper approach are scarcer than the warrior approach between the parties to civil wars, even when negotiations do occur. Shopkeeper diplomacy should be apparent when actors come to the negotiating table prepared to compromise. And in civil war the most important and obvious evidence of compromise is when the parties reach a settlement agreement that they all prefer to continued violence. Though there are numerous examples of civil war participants arriving at formal, negotiated settlements to their conflicts, because these negotiated settlements regularly break down, and the conflicts relapse into war, it is difficult to trust that the diplomatic strategies were truly aimed at mutual compromise.

Moreover, serious impediments to rebel diplomats’ successful exploitation of a shopkeeper approach exist, further limiting the pool of potential examples. First, when rebels choose to pursue the shopkeeper strategy, their transition from war fighting to transparency and mutual adjustment with their government can be difficult. Rebel leaders may have trouble convincing even their own ranks of their intentions due to a deeply held warrior mentality. For instance, Deonandan et al. (2007: 53) recount that, “It took several years for the bulk of ... the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) to accept that the peace talks with the Guatemalan government were not a tactical ploy but a serious effort to end years of internal war.”

Governments might also be legitimately concerned about rebels' inability to make good on their commitments due to the potential for dissension and splintering within their ranks. Many insurgencies fracture due to differences in ideology, strategy, and internal power struggles. Therefore, governments may reject shopkeeper rebels if they do not have widespread support from their base, disbelieving their ability to make good on their commitments, or simply because they do not trust them to follow through. Finally, there is a widely acknowledged commitment problem in civil war. Rebels usually cannot trust that the government will not exploit them or destroy their organization if they compromise and disarm, so they may negotiate in good faith, but ultimately not be able to follow through (Licklider 1995; Walter 1997, 2002). Some argue that the post-Cold War increase in "draws" in civil wars may increase the likelihood of producing mutually beneficial negotiations between rebels and governments. They believe that, if the combatants become convinced that they cannot achieve their desired ends using a warrior approach, shopkeeper diplomacy and mutual adjustment may be seen as more viable options. Unfortunately, recent cases of stalemated wars in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Serbia do not yet offer much hope. For all of these reasons, shopkeeper diplomacy is probably more plentiful in rebels' interactions with third party states and other external actors.

Rebels and third parties do not have an established, or entrenched, pattern of zero-sum interactions, so the parties are more likely to see opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships. Foreign states and businesses may establish relationships with rebels in order to secure access to resources such as oil, timber, diamonds, or other valuable minerals within rebel territory. In these instances everyone benefits from the economic diplomacy: the rebels secure financing and the outsiders secure profits or tax revenues based upon those profits from the extracted goods. Higher-order shopkeeper diplomacy can also be seen in negotiations over diplomatic recognition. Secessionist and revolutionary rebels seek grants of recognition from third party states and those states often seek preferential treatment or other benefits in return (Coggins 2011). In 2009, Georgia's breakaway enclave Abkhazia received diplomatic recognition from the island state of Nauru in exchange for the negotiated sum of \$50 million dollars, working out to \$4,500 dollars per inhabitant (*New York Times*, December 15, 2009). Regardless of the specifics, the parties' approach to those negotiations shows that each side believes they have something to gain from the interaction.

Nicholson's two approaches to diplomacy help to elucidate how rebels might use talk to forward their agendas. We expect the shopkeeper approach will more frequently characterize rebels' diplomatic approach with outsiders, whereas the warrior approach will tend to characterize their negotiations with the government. However, beyond broad patterns of the two approaches in

practice, there is often also a larger, macro-strategy underlying rebel diplomacy – namely, guerrilla war. Governments are not only suspicious that rebels’ participation in negotiations belies a good faith effort at compromise and conflict resolution. Because most rebel organizations pursue a guerrilla strategy, their governments are also wary of the deleterious effects of their engagement with outsiders, and, as a result, they are likely to erect additional barriers to rebel diplomacy for fear of its potential negative influence on their prosecution of the war.

GUERRILLA WAR AND DIPLOMACY

Not all civil wars are irregular or guerrilla wars; a small minority is conventional or becomes conventional over time.²⁰ But the vast majority of contemporary civil wars do see a guerrilla strategy employed on the part of the rebels. A guerrilla strategy is typical for the weaker side in an asymmetric conflict.²¹ In order to succeed against a more powerful rival, rebels rely upon a tactical toolset that exploits the weaknesses of conventional militaries. The strategy includes a combination of hit-and-run attacks, sabotage, assassination, terrorism, and intermittent conventional tactics, in an attempt to outlast an occupying authority. Guerrillas are flexible and secretive, have specialized knowledge about the area where they are fighting, and – if all goes according to plan – are more popular and sympathetic than the government they challenge.²² As a war-winning strategy, the rebels do not expect to defeat the state’s forces on the battlefield *per se*.²³ Instead, they hope to raise the costs of continued occupation so much that the government withdraws or concedes.

During wartime, rebels do not initially capture and hold territory as a conventional force might; they rely on the covert support of the population. In popular insurgencies, the people and the rebels are one and the same. Farmers work the fields during the day and go to fight in the hills at night. Because they are fighting on their own land, or at least within their own communities, the rebels’ familiarity gives them a strategic advantage. And because formal militaries are slow to adapt, are generally less knowledgeable about the area,

²⁰ For example, the Spanish civil war was conventional. Similarly, the Ethiopia-Eritrean war became more conventional over time, and the wars between the Northern Khartoum government and the Southern Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), and the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE were also more conventional than irregular at different points in time.

²¹ Though professional militaries sometimes adopt guerrilla tactics in the guise of commando units.

²² A small percentage of rebel wars take on a limited and criminal character rather than a popular one. Charles Taylor’s insurgency in Liberia is one example, as perhaps were some fronts in the wars of Yugoslavia’s dissolution (Mueller 2004).

²³ Among theorists of insurgency and guerrilla war, there is a difference of opinion over whether the strategy can win a war or whether it is more useful as a step on the way to more conventional war against the government. Guevara argues that conventional war must follow guerrilla war for a movement to succeed; it is not a war-winning strategy by itself.

and are unable to distinguish civilians from combatants, they often have a difficult time defeating the rebels. Confronted with a difficult insurgency, governments often err on the side of indiscriminant repression and violence against the local population in an effort to subdue the rebels. This often has the opposite of the intended effect, steeling the local community's antipathy for the government and winning converts or neutrality for the rebels. It may also tarnish the government's reputation within the wider international community if the government's tactics include war crimes or gross violations of human rights. In sum, the vast power asymmetries between governments and rebels on paper belie the arduous struggle states face during guerrilla war. Effective counterinsurgency requires a deft touch and meaningfully hinges upon governmental and military legitimacy – both at home and abroad.

Diplomacy is an essential tool within the guerrilla arsenal. Militarily, guerrilla war entails a number of linked objectives for a rebel organization. According to a recent insurgency guide produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), these objectives include:

1. Limiting government provision of and enhancing insurgent provision of public goods.
2. Securing the support or neutrality of critical segments of the population.
3. Isolating the government from international diplomatic and material support while increasing engagement and support for the insurgency.
4. Increased legitimacy (domestic and international) for the insurgency at the expense of the government's legitimacy.
5. Destroy the leaders' and cadres' confidence, resulting in their abdication or withdrawal.
6. Reduce or neutralize the government's coercive power while strengthening the capabilities of the insurgency (2009: 2).²⁴

Rebels may use informal diplomacy to pursue many of these goals. Indeed some, such as #3, are principally concerned with external audiences and the potential benefits gained through diplomatic engagement. Few of the objectives can be achieved exclusively by force. Creating political parties, relief funds, and pseudo embassies abroad potentially enhances the rebels' provision of public goods (#1) and may lead to increased legitimacy among civilians (#4). Using media outlets and personal contacts to spread the insurgents' ideology, propagandize, and inform may win the favor or neutrality of key constituencies (#2). Finally, diplomatic envoys and lobbyists can serve to influence third party states' policies (#3 and #4).²⁵ It is plain to see that guerrilla war is not simply the

²⁴ Although many scholarly and professional military examinations of the guerrilla strategy and insurgency exist, this version is representative and articulates the state of the art on the subject.

²⁵ The [next section](#) provides more details regarding rebel diplomacy in practice.

strategic use of violence, but also the strategic use of talk, pursuing “war by other means.”

Not only do governments reject most diplomacy with their own rebels, the nature of guerrilla war suggests that governments should also attempt to thwart rebels’ diplomatic engagement with outsiders because they are intrinsic to the rebels’ war-fighting objectives. Even seemingly benign diplomatic engagement with outsiders works counter to the interests and objectives of the embattled government.

Still, governments only have limited control over most aspects of rebel diplomacy since they are but one of the target audiences. State leaders certainly attempt to limit the extent to which rebels can exploit diplomacy abroad – sometimes threatening violence or cutting ties with outsiders who choose to engage them – but may not be able stop rebel diplomacy entirely. Against a government’s preference to shield the war from external interference, rebels often successfully internationalize the conflict and governments end up waging defensive diplomatic campaigns to counter that of their rebels.

THE PRACTICE OF REBEL DIPLOMACY

Barred from formal diplomacy and facing various obstacles to engagement and productive negotiations, rebels find various ways to use talk strategically. In order to explore the various ways in which rebels do so, diplomacy can be usefully organized according to the audiences that rebels engage: individuals, international organizations, and third party states.

Rebels communicate with individuals directly and indirectly, inside and outside of the territory they claim. Public diplomacy or propaganda directed toward citizens tends to be indirect and one-sided, making use of media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet. Governments censor and otherwise limit the production and dissemination of rebel information, but there are limits to state control. Insurgents can maintain communication with outside audiences from areas where the home state has little to no authority. Particularly when broadcast from neighboring states, the rebels’ messages may reach potential supporters in the home state or other physically remote audiences. The FLN, for example, operated the *Voice of Algeria* from just outside Algeria’s colonial borders. Its broadcasts became so popular that Frantz Fanon remarked, “[T]he purchase of a radio in Algeria has meant, not the adoption of a modern technique for getting news, but the obtaining of access to the only means of communication with the Revolution” (quoted in Connelly 2002: 28).

Some media are also more easily controlled than others, explaining the rising popularity of rebel diplomacy via Internet. Whereas the home state can close a sympathetic newspaper within the capital, the same publication is significantly more difficult to gag online. Websites, blogs, and other online content have

grown ubiquitous in present-day civil conflicts and governments have often taken extreme measures to curtail them.²⁶ Notably, in July 2009, when violent civil unrest erupted in Western China's Xinjiang autonomous region, the government shut down the entire area's Internet service for ten months (Lichtenstein 2010). There was no other way for Beijing to effectively control access to online content and communication.

Rebels' engagement with civilians can also be direct. Insurgents may spread information informally through personal contacts and social organizations such as churches, schools, and community centers. Although the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) lacked strong backing from outside states, it cultivated a network of Eritreans living abroad that sent money and "[mobilized the] sympathetic European and American left and liberal political groupings" in favor of independence (Pool 1998: 33). As significant as civilian support within rebel-controlled territory is, the support of civilians outside of rebel territory can be equally important. Members of foreign diasporas can be more radical or sympathetic to the rebels than those within the country – they are often wealthier, have freedoms of political expression that are restricted during states of emergency and wartime, and do not have to personally bear the violence or political tumult that they promote. Emblematically, Irish-Americans were major financiers and political supporters of the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) campaign, and Somali-Americans have considerable political and economic influence on multiple fronts of the various civil conflicts in Somalia.²⁷ As Wickham-Crowley describes (1992; Chapter 3, this volume), some rebels are so successful in cultivating foreign relationships that they may constitute their primary source of funds.

More formally, rebels may dedicate their resources to creating political wings, humanitarian organizations, and/or quasi-diplomatic corps. These organizations tend to be established by longer-lived groups with broader popular support. Political wings may deny direct ties to the rebels; nevertheless, they represent their political views and might even take part in the formal political process when possible. Some relatively recent examples include: the United People's Front (UPF) in Nepal, the Union Patriótica (UP) in Colombia, the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) in India, and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in Sudan.

Rebel humanitarian organizations often take the form of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or relief funds and their engagement crosses audiences to

²⁶ The most notorious example is the Zapatistas' use of the web in its campaign against the Mexican government (Watson 1995). Other rebel groups on the Internet have included Laskar Jihad, the Taliban, Hamas, and various rebels in Aceh (Liu 2001). Chechen rebels' use of the Internet is detailed by Petit (2003), and Elison describes that of the Zapatistas and Kosovo Albanians (2000).

²⁷ There are many additional examples, including North American Tamils' support for the LTTE, European Kurds' support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and Somalis support for the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) just across the border in Ethiopia.

include civilians, international organizations, and governments. These organizations oversee the provision of medical and food aid to refugees, displaced people, and those within rebel-controlled territory; raise funds to mobilize relief; and distribute international aid to civilians within warzones. Just two organizations among the many are the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) in Ethiopia and the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) in Eritrea. Because of the nature of rebel war, these organizations can be quite controversial. Even when they are ostensibly apolitical, the provision of food, water, and medicine can be a boon to the rebels. First, the insurgents do not typically supply the aid themselves, but often receive the credit on the ground. Second, contact with the displaced can be used for recruitment, information gathering, and cover. Third, an effective relief organization serves as positive propaganda for the rebels internationally, demonstrating genuine concern for the civilians harmed by the war. Finally, resources that the rebels might otherwise have expended on winning popular support can be diverted to the military campaign; guns need not be sacrificed for butter.

The individuals that form rebel diplomatic corps are typically recruited from abroad. They can be numerous, professional, and well organized, or very small with personal allegiances to the leadership (Clapham 1998: 10). The diplomatic delegation of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) had “some forty-five Algerian representatives in twenty countries” only one month after it was formed (Connelly 2002: 194–95). Similarly, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey instituted special training camps to create a cadre of future leaders and diplomats culled from its European Diaspora, eventually establishing “cultural clubs, political offices and publishing ventures, spread out over half a dozen countries” (Marcus 2007: 229–30). On the other end of the spectrum, some rebel leaders simply cultivate a small number of personal envoys without creating any larger organizational apparatus (Clapham 1998: 10). Functionally, rebel diplomats spread the ideology and message of the rebels and act as contact points for foreign media, businesses, and other organizations, fulfilling consular as well as diplomatic functions. Most concretely, these institutions might provide public goods for their constituents abroad, including legal advice, political advocacy, arbitration, and other assistance. It is also not unusual for rebels to hire professional lobbyists in influential foreign states to act as proxies to publicize their cause where and when they themselves cannot do so. To cite two examples disclosed in the United States under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), Advantage Associates, Inc. was hired by the breakaway Republic of Chechnya in the late 1990s to generate support for its independence and to acquire much-needed food aid, and in 1992, UNITA hired the Free Angola Information Service to send news and economic updates to the American press and public officials.

Diplomatic contact with international organizations varies widely depending upon the nature of the organization and the rebels’ desired level of status within

it. Many international governmental organizations (IGOs) will not permit rebel participation as their ranks are reserved exclusively for states. Others, such as the United Nations, do make some provisions for the participation of non-governmental actors (for example through the Indigenous Peoples Working Group, Permanent Observer Missions, and Civil Society Organizations). However, it should be noted that non-states' participation within the UN depends upon a number of stipulations and is restricted to particular venues.²⁸ In the alternative, rebels may be allowed to participate in international organizations on an ad hoc basis in order to provide testimony, meet with official diplomats, or negotiate the terms of agreements regarding cease fires, peacekeepers, or on other humanitarian issues. The United Nations intervened in twenty-two civil conflicts in the second half of the twentieth century, and nearly all of its efforts involved some sort of diplomatic engagement with non-state combatants (Reagan et al. 2009). These diplomatic contacts can prove very important and may even change the character of the conflict. In East Timor, international engagement became so extensive that some suggested the UN had created its own kingdom there (Chopra 2000). But with the UN's significant support, in 2002 it emerged as an independent state.

Finally, rebels attempt to use diplomacy in their interactions with individual states. Rebels' diplomatic engagement with third party states takes many forms. Most frequently, diplomatic intervention in civil wars is for the purpose of mediation (Reagan et al. 2009). When home states and rebels cannot manage to negotiate directly, third parties may act as a go-between, serve as guarantors, or participate in multilateral forums or contact groups on the conflict. In the alternative, diplomatic contact between states and rebels might be bilateral, taking the form of unofficial, track II diplomacy or approaching the ceremony and status of a traditional, track I relationship. If the rebels convince outside states of their cause, they may provide the rebels with resources, training, or other wartime support. Their contacts may even persuade the states to formally accept the rebels as legitimate members of the international community. Rebels may also use diplomacy to establish trade in natural resources;²⁹ to cultivate illicit trade in drugs and weapons; to offer alliances or strategic opportunities within rebel-held territory;³⁰ or to win the political favor of officials within foreign capitals.

²⁸ Oftentimes these prerequisites include disavowing the use of force or disarming. This effectively rules out rebel participation because rebels use extra-legal violence in order to pursue their goals. Organizations with political wings have better luck overcoming these barriers to participation.

²⁹ Charles Taylor's use of international ties to exploit Liberia's natural resource wealth is emblematic.

³⁰ For example, the recent strategic partnership arranged between Moscow and Abkhazia, a breakaway region in Georgia, which is installing Russian surface-to-air missile systems there. Or, alternatively, the state might provide training and sponsorship of the rebels, as Libya did for Charles Taylor's NPFL.

CONCLUSION

This chapter posited that rebel diplomacy is a fundamental, but overlooked tactic of contemporary civil wars and rebel governance. Not only do rebel organizations attempt to utilize diplomacy to achieve long-term goals of statehood and legitimacy, external engagement is elemental to the strategy of guerrilla war and serves a variety of instrumental, short-term purposes. Although rebels' participation in formal diplomacy is proscribed and embattled governments attempt to limit rebels' opportunities to interact with outsiders, rebel organizations often dedicate significant time and attention to the externally oriented face of governance.

Various important implications flow from this first pass at rebel diplomacy. First, if rebels use diplomacy strategically in a manner similar to states, we may be better equipped to understand the dynamics of talk, or lack thereof, between rebels and governments. Specifically, by understanding the role that rebel diplomacy plays within a guerrilla strategy, we can begin to model and evaluate the interplay between violent and non-violent tactics in civil war. Civil-war-fighting is not only manifest during violent campaigns, but during diplomatic exchanges as well. This also helps to explain why governments may seem irrationally opposed to rebels' benign engagement with outsiders: it may hurt the war effort.

Second, because rebel diplomacy has been neglected, it is an unobserved variable in most models of civil war. Further research on whether and how rebels choose to use diplomacy is warranted. Preliminarily, Clapham (1996) suggests that the extent to which rebels rely on external support is learned from their experiences with governance. If the government with which the rebels are most familiar depended on extensive external legitimacy and support and did not seek or rely upon popular support at home, then it may be likely that the rebels will arrive at a similar balance. Similar work exploring variance in rebel diplomacy or endogenizing diplomacy into civil war should yield meaningful insights.

Finally, it is apparent that rebels' use of and successful exploitation of foreign diplomacy has important effects on rebel governance. Contracts with international businesses and donations and political support from the diaspora increase rebels' capacity to pursue violence, but also increase their ability to provide public goods. Then again, perhaps a rebel group that relies primarily on foreign diplomacy for support would not feel the need to cultivate legitimacy by providing governance and positive political goods to civilians at home.

Rebels may also accept the members of IGOs and NGOs into the territories that they control in order to cultivate positive relationships with them and publicize the quality of their governance to the outside world. Mampilly (2011) suggests that rebels will use these diplomatic envoys' presence to showcase positive aspects of their governance. But he notes that they may

also neglect areas that would reflect poorly on them and not invite outsiders to travel there. Förster ([Chapter 10](#), this volume) also describes how the United Nations arranged an informal moratorium on rebel violence in Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire.

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Rebel Governance During the Greek Civil War, 1942–1949

Stathis N. Kalyvas

ABSTRACT

I take advantage of political and geographic variation to explore the underlying dynamics of rebel governance during the Greek Civil War. Two key findings emerge from this analysis. First, the political identity of rebel groups appears to have had a clear impact on the form of governance implemented. Communist rebels set up expansive institutions of rule that stressed mass mobilization and were heavily bureaucratized. In contrast, non-communist rebels relied instead on traditional local structures. Whereas communist rebels sought to incorporate local groups and communities into a centralized system, non-communist rebels were content to just collaborate with them. Second, when holding the type of rebel group constant, I find that the temporal and spatial variation in levels of territorial control affected both the depth and character of rebel governance. The more extensive the geographical scope of control exercised by a rebel group, the fuller the expression of its political identity on the institutions of rebel rule. Conversely, limited and tenuous territorial control correlates with more openly coercive practices.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the main features of rebel governance during the Greek Civil War. The “Greek Civil War” is an aggregate historical phenomenon spread over different phases that assumed a variety of forms (ranging from a resistance war against occupying forces to full-fledged civil war between domestic factions), entailed the participation of a several armed actors (covering the full political spectrum, from conservative to communist), and raged across different geographic, ecological, and demographic landscapes. This variation allows comparisons that provide useful leverage regarding the question of rebel governance.

More specifically, I proceed with two comparisons. First, I compare two rebel groups – a communist and a non-communist group – that were both active during the occupation of Greece in 1941–1944. Second, I compare the communist rebels that fought during the foreign occupation in 1941–1944 with the communist rebels that fought against the Greek government in 1946–1949.

Two key findings emerge from these comparisons. First, the political identity of rebel groups displays a clear association with the form and depth of governance implemented by them. By political identity, I refer to the group's ideology, its political practice, and its organizational resources. The political identity of the Communist Party of Greece (*Kommounistiko Komma Elladas* or KKE), which created and led the National Liberation Front (*Ethiko Apeleftherotiko Metopo* or EAM), and its armed wing, the National Popular Liberation Army (*Ethnikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos* or ELAS), combined Marxist–Leninist ideology, a political practice oriented toward mass mobilization, and an organization composed of highly motivated and disciplined cadres. This political identity corresponds to a wide-ranging, highly interventionist, and bureaucratic type of governance in areas it controlled, based on a constant and extensive mobilization of the peasant population. In contrast, the political identity of the National Republican Greek League (*Ethikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Sindesmos* or EDES) combined a conservative ideology, a political practice that valued clientelist practices and traditional forms of local governance, and an organization that was established primarily on kin-based networks. This political identity corresponds to a traditional and limited type of governance, expressed as a form of indirect rule.

In short, communist practice and ideology typically called for an interventionist form of governance along with mass mobilization. Furthermore, many communist parties have been able to deploy disciplined, hard-working, and highly committed mid-ranking cadres who are essential in the creation, operation, and upkeep of expansive local governance structures. In contrast, non-communist rebels often lack this type of hierarchical, bureaucratic organization and must rely instead on pre-existing structures and traditional kin-based networks. Despite their ideological differences, both EAM and EDES fought against foreign occupation and deployed a nationalist and patriotic discourse; however, because nationalism was common to both groups, it fails to explain the differences in the governance structures deployed by them.

Second, I find that the temporal and spatial variation in levels of territorial control also affected the character of rebel governance. More specifically, holding rebel-group identity constant, the more extensive the geographic scope and the more comprehensive the level of control exercised by it, the fuller will be the expression of its political identity on its ruling institutions. Whereas the Communist Party put in place an extensive set of governance institutions during the first period of the civil war (1943–1944), its ability to

replicate this achievement was much more limited during the second period (1946–1949) because its territorial control was much more limited and tenuous. This variation also allows us to make sense of the higher level of coercion exercised by the communists during the second period, including a well-documented reliance on mass abductions as a method of recruitment. Put otherwise, whereas political identity is reflected in the institutions of rebel governance, the military dynamics of the conflict, via the mechanism of territorial control, define the extent to which these features are fully realized or not. For the Greek Civil War, this hypothesis can be assessed by examining changes in the two phases of the communist insurgency, as there was no equivalent to non-communist rebels, such as EDES, in the final phase of the war.

The chapter is organized as follows. The [following section](#) provides a brief overview of the Greek Civil War. The [third section](#) compares the organization of governance between rebel organizations with different political identities. The [fourth section](#) contrasts the governance exercised by a single rebel organization during a period when it has substantial territorial control with another when its control is more uncertain. The [conclusion](#) summarizes the explanation and suggests further research.

OVERVIEW OF THE GREEK CIVIL WAR

The Greek Civil War can be divided into four distinct phases (the two propositions discussed in this chapter concern the first and fourth periods only). The first phase took place in the midst of the Axis occupation of Greece (by German, Italian, and Bulgarian forces), pitting EAM and ELAS, created and led by the Communist Party of Greece, against, on the one hand, non-communist resistance groups, including EDES, and on the other hand, Greek militias collaborating with the occupation forces. This phase ended with the German withdrawal in September–November 1944 and the bloody defeat of the collaborationist militias.

The second phase took place in December 1944 and January 1945, when the KKE attacked the British-backed “National Unity” government (where the communists themselves were initially represented), which resulted in a muscular British intervention and a subsequent communist defeat. During the third phase, in 1945–1946, various attempts to institutionalize the new political system failed. Leftist supporters were persecuted by right-wing militias with more or less tacit support of the gendarmerie and local state authorities. The fourth and final phase began in February 1946, with the KKE decision to step up its fledgling guerrilla activities, and became irreversible in March of the same year when communist guerrillas launched various attacks against gendarmerie outposts in the countryside. The ensuing war lasted for four years, took place primarily in northern Greece, and ended with a total communist defeat in 1949.

The proximate cause of the Greek Civil War lies in Greece's triple German–Italian–Bulgarian occupation. Hence, any account of the Greek Civil War must include a brief description of the Occupation and the Resistance. In October 1940 Italy invaded Greece. Surprisingly, Greek forces held off the invasion and forced Italy to retreat beyond Greek borders. In March 1941 British expeditionary forces arrived in Greece, and on April 6, Germany invaded Greece. The Greek defenses collapsed quickly and the German armies entered Athens. King George II and the Greek government fled to Crete, which they had to abandon after the Germans conquered the island. They eventually ended up in Egypt, where they remained throughout the occupation.

The occupiers' presence was thin on the ground, particularly in Greece's mountainous hinterland. Given the collapse of Greek state authorities, this thin presence effectively amounted to a vacuum of power that took the form of widespread banditry and a general collapse of order. Descriptions of life in the mountains during 1941 and 1942 are rife with incidents of cattle-thieving and banditry (Kalyvas 2006). In addition, a terrible famine hit Greece during the winter of 1941–1942 (Hionidou 2006). Indifferent to the well-being of the population, German forces had seized all public and private stocks of food, apparel, medical supplies, military material, means of transport, and fuel. At the same time, the British fleet blockaded Greece. Population loss from increased deaths and reduced births in 1941–1942 amounted to approximately 300,000 (Mazower 1993: 41). The famine was deadliest in food-deficit locales, particularly in Athens and the islands, but many mountain villages suffered as well.

In spite of the grievances caused by the defeat, the famine, and the humiliation that many Greeks felt at being occupied by the Italians – an enemy Greece had defeated on the battlefield – at first armed resistance failed to emerge. Indeed, compared with neighboring Yugoslavia, the resistance movement in Greece was slow to develop. A few isolated actions by rogue communist bands in Eastern Macedonia triggered collective German reprisals and massive Bulgarian repression, causing the cessation of all early resistance activity. In 1942, however, this began to change. Once the course of the war shifted in 1943, resistance against the occupation spread like wildfire.

Early forms of resistance took two distinct forms. On the one hand, several clandestine urban sabotage networks emerged. Most were engaged in sheltering British soldiers that had been stranded in Greece and getting them out of the country. They also specialized in intelligence collection in close coordination with the British Special Operations Executive (SOE). A few chose the path of spectacular actions, the most notable of which was the bombing of the Athens headquarters of ESPO, a Greek Nazi organization, in February 1942. Generally, urban networks were small in size, bourgeois in membership, and pro-British in their orientation. They saw resistance as a self-contained activity

with no direct political aims. They were also vulnerable to penetration and dismantlement and suffered repeated blows from the Germans.

On the other hand, several bands of guerrilla fighters emerged in the mountainous hinterland, especially in central and northern Greece. They can be divided into three basic types. Some drew on indigenous skills of pastoralism, traditions of "social banditry," or the experience of guerrilla warfare in Asia Minor during the 1920s and were based on local networks of extended families. Some, formed by local army officers, were based on links between (demobilized) officers and conscripts. Finally, some were formed by local communists, who left the country's urban centers and returned to their provincial hometowns and villages, where they drew on both political but also personal and family networks.

The first type of groups, highly localized and fragmented, did not last long. They were either eliminated or incorporated by the more organized groups of the second and third type. EDES was the most successful group among the second type. It was formed by Napoleon Zervas and active mainly in the northwest region of Epirus. Lastly, the most successful communist group was formed by various communist cadres, and most famously by Thanasis Klaras, better known by his military alias Aris Velouchiotis. He was instrumental in setting up the most successful ELAS unit in central Greece, thus contributing to the development of the armed wing of the pro-communist resistance organization EAM, established in Athens in 1941, by the Communist Party. His success pushed the communists decisively and successfully in the direction of rural guerrilla warfare, a type of political activity in which they had limited experience up to then.

Although EAM was an umbrella organization that included a number of small leftist parties, it remained under tight communist control. Given the limited popularity of the Communist Party among the Greek smallholding peasantry, EAM put forward a nationalist and patriotic message that proved to be a successful way of gaining political traction in the countryside. While the nationalist discourse of resistance gave EAM a privileged point of entry in rural Greece, KKE's rugged organization, rooted in a nationwide network of highly motivated cadres with considerable experience in clandestine political activity, coupled with its willingness to act ruthlessly against competitors by co-opting or eliminating them, allowed it to establish itself as the prominent political and military force, first in the mountains of central Greece and soon after in the entire Greek territory. In spite of EAM's emphasis on a nationalist discourse and the playing down of communist policies, the Communist Party's preference for centralization and mass mobilization found its expression in the form of governance it implemented in the areas it controlled. The key point is that while nationalism was a successful rhetorical device, communist practice and ideology explains its ability to set up extensive, centralized institutions of local governance in the areas it controlled.

By the spring of 1943, the echo of the German defeats in the Eastern Front became clearly audible in Greece. Coupled with persistent rumors of an Allied landing in Greece, it led to a generalized perception that the occupation was coming to an imminent end. From that point on, political power in Greece, with an eye on who would rule after the war, overshadowed the fight against the occupation as the main concern of most resistance organizations.

In this context, the elimination of political rivals turned into a priority. In the spring and fall of 1943, ELAS attacked rival guerrilla groups and succeeded in destroying almost all of them. By the end of that year, ELAS emerged as the largest and most powerful guerrilla army in Greece. By leveraging the financial and military assistance it had received from the British throughout 1942–1943 and by taking advantage of the Italian capitulation in the autumn of 1943, ELAS was able to cement its domination.

EDES, which had survived only because of British support, proved no match for ELAS. By concentrating primarily in Western Greece, where Zervas could rely on his own personal network, EDES conceded the first-mover advantage to EAM in the rest of the country. EDES was able to spread through the cooptation of local groups via pre-existing kin networks rather than the activity of local cadres. In October 1943, a mini civil war broke out between ELAS and EDES; it was brought to an end in February 1944 with the Plaka armistice, brokered by the British and signed on February 29, 1944. EDES survived, largely due to British assistance and support, but at the cost of becoming a minor regional actor, operating exclusively in the northwestern region of Epirus. When the communists launched their attack against their Greek opponents and the British in Athens, in December 1944, they also attacked EDES in Epirus and destroyed it. Following the communist defeat in Athens, Zervas relied on the EDES network to build a new political party, but with limited success.

By the end of the occupation, EAM effectively ruled close to 70 percent of Greece, while the occupation forces were confined to the main cities, coastal areas and plains, and a few points of strategic interest. In order to contain what seemed an unstoppable movement, the collaborator government and the German authorities set up a Greek militia that became known as the “Security Battalions” (Kalyvas 2008). The spring and summer of 1944 were a time of violent strife across Greece, as this militia clashed with ELAS. The highest price was paid by civilians who were killed and abused by both sides. Hundreds of villages were destroyed and the country became deeply polarized.

As soon as the Germans began withdrawing from Greece in September 1944, ELAS attacked the collaborationist militias and executed thousands of militiamen (Kalyvas 2000). With the Germans gone, the demobilization of resistance groups turned into a highly contentious issue, ultimately triggering a collision between KKE and the National Unity government led by George Papandreou and backed by the British. On December 3, in an atmosphere of

heightened polarization, the communists organized a massive demonstration in Athens which was fired upon by the police. Around the same time, ELAS troops infiltrated Athens and attacked police stations and army garrisons. Many thousands of Athenian civilians were taken as hostages and a few thousands were executed by OPLA (Organization for the Protection of the People's Struggle), EAM's notorious death squads. While a few of the hostages were accused of collaboration with the Germans, most had simply been denounced as hostile to the KKE (Gerolymatos 2004).

Eventually, the British flew in thousands of troops and defeated the communist uprising. With its position weakened, EAM was forced to sign the Varkiza Agreement on February 15, 1945, which provided for the demobilization of ELAS. Though this agreement outlined a peaceful end to fighting and normalized politics, it was ultimately violated by all sides. The government allowed the persecution of leftist supporters, while the communists did not surrender their best weapons.

In 1945–1946, hundreds of right-wing paramilitary bands emerged throughout the country, harassing supporters of the left. In response, the communists organized new guerrilla bands known as “self-defense.” At the same time, several thousands of communist cadres were evacuated to Yugoslavia and began to form the basis of a new communist army.

In 1946, the charismatic communist leader Nikos Zahariadis, who had spent the occupation in the Dachau concentration camp, opted for a course of collision with the government. The communists boycotted the March parliamentary elections which resulted in a landslide for the conservative Peoples' Party. The communist guerrilla bands launched scattered attacks against government forces, while a rigged plebiscite restoring the monarchy signaled the country's rightward turn. In December the KKE, officially abandoning its earlier commitment to parliamentary politics, established the Democratic Army of Greece (*Dimokratikos Stratos Elladas*, or DSE) and opted for waging a full-scale insurgency against the government and its supporters. The communists failed to conquer an urban center that could be used as their capital. As a result, their claim for international recognition proved stillborn.

Compared to ELAS, DSE had access to a much smaller proportion of the country's territory. It was able to root itself primarily in mountainous areas bordering on Greece's northern neighbors and relied instead on rear bases and safe havens in Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria that it used as supply and attack staging grounds. The limited territorial capacity of the DSE is evidenced by the fact that it was unable to occupy any town, no matter how small. In December 1947, it failed to take over the mountainous town of Konitsa (population in 1940: 2,313) located near the Albanian border, where it had intended to install a provisional government of “liberated Greece.” As a result of this failure, its provisional government failed to gain any foreign recognition, including from the European communist states. In contrast, the Greek

government was able to control most of the country, and, where its reach was limited, it adopted a policy of mass population displacement, moving thousands of peasants from their mountain villages to the outskirts of towns. As a result, the communists lost access to the population and faced an acute recruitment problem. They tried to solve it by resorting to abductions and forcible recruitment of women and children. The fighting continued throughout 1949, with both sides experiencing victories and defeats. The Tito–Stalin fallout turned out to be a key determinant of the final outcome. The KKE sided with Stalin and, by doing so, lost its access to Yugoslav territory and a key supply route.

By August 1949, almost all the remaining 17,000 DSE troops were pinned on the northern frontier and under attack by a government force of roughly 100,000 troops. Many of the DSE troops were killed. The rest, including Zahariadis, retreated into Albania. In September the last large DSE formations fled into Bulgaria, and in October of that year Zahariadis announced an end to the war. At the close of the conflict roughly 140,000 communist fighters, supporters, and villagers living in KKE-controlled villages escaped into the countries of the Soviet bloc (Close 1995: 219). The majority remained there until the Greek transition to democracy that took place in 1974.

POLITICAL IDENTITY AND REBEL GOVERNANCE

A comparison of EAM and EDES during the Occupation (1942–1944) supports the argument that rebel political identity influences the organizational style it adopts for governing civilians. EAM relied on a highly effective pyramidal and centralized organization that was based on political cells in every village. Mass mobilization and political education/indoctrination of the peasantry quickly followed (Hart 1996). In contrast, EDES was based primarily on traditional local networks in Zervas' home region. Zervas' access to an important regional network of local notables allowed him to tap into the existing loyalties of villagers without having to set up a new and separate organization; he just co-opted local notables and refrained from intervening too much in the way local governance was already set up.

The process through which EAM's structure of governance was established varied across the country depending on whether the rebels exercised full or incomplete territorial control over specific areas. In the specific Greek context, that initially meant whether the presence of occupation troops was either sparse or nonexistent. After the capitulation of the Italians in September 1943, most villages in the Greek countryside were left to fend for themselves. About 70 percent of the country, mountainous and difficult to access in the first place, was abandoned. Into this vacuum of order stepped the communists. A key dimension was the ability of ELAS to effectively suppress the wave of criminality caused by the collapse of the

Greek state (primarily cattle-thieving, but also robberies), thereby becoming the supplier of public order in areas with no or limited state presence.

Most accounts converge in stating that whether the new structures of rebel governance were set up by communist cadres or by ELAS military units, all villagers initially welcomed them. They appreciated the restoration of a degree of material security, and responded positively to the patriotic/nationalist message of EAM, whose officials downplayed their communist leanings. The leaders of the EAM designed the organizational pattern of these governmental structures on the basis of their notions of revolutionary practice, but presented them as a necessary part of the resistance struggle against foreign occupation. Indeed, EAM cadres presented their movement as a worthy successor of the heroes of the Greek War of Independence in the nineteenth century.

Unlike the rural areas it fully controlled (known as “Free Greece”) EAM set up clandestine structures of governance in the urban areas occupied by the Germans. In some working-class neighborhoods of Athens, Piraeus, and Salonika the communists were able to operate almost openly, but in others they fought daily skirmishes against collaborationist militias. Given these constraints, the institutions of rebel governance were not as free to grow as in the rural countryside.

In what follows, I focus on the governance structure implemented in areas fully controlled by EAM. Three key points about the central features of EAM governance are worth stressing: its comprehensive nature, its unified character across Greece, and the variation around this unified character as a function of territorial control.

First, despite local variations, the basic model implemented by EAM was consistent across the country. Hence, Stavrianos (1952: 80) is correct in using the term “EAM Administration” in one of the first analyses of its character. A committee was set up in each village that came under EAM control to coordinate all aspects of local governance. This committee was usually composed of local personalities, often including the local teacher and priest, and was more extensive in its reach than pre-existing structures of local administration, since it had to fill in for the absence of the national state.

The responsibilities of that committee and a variety of subcommittees coordinated by it¹ included taxation, food collection to support the rebel army, movement control (e.g., issuing permits for village to village travel), indoctrination and popular mobilization, recruitment into ELAS (either of volunteers or through a local draft), security and crime prevention, justice (through local “popular courts”), education and the political socialization of

¹ These subcommittees were local branches of nationwide organizations, including EA (*Ethniki Allilengyi*, or National Solidarity, a relief organization); EPON (*Eniaia Panelladiki Organosi Neon*, or United Panhellenic Organization of Youth); and ETA (*Epimelitia tou Andarti*, or Guerrilla Logistics).

children and adolescents, entertainment, and enforcement of social norms, including sexual relations, marriage, and divorce. The creation and operation of locally staffed “popular courts” became common in many rebel-held areas (Tyrovouzis 1991; Zepos 1986; Bekios 1979). Meetings of all kinds became an almost daily occurrence as the entire population was mobilized, including young children who joined an organization called “Little Eagles.” Indoctrination sessions led by traveling communist cadres became commonplace. Although they did not stress openly communist themes, they emphasized the theme of people’s rule (“laokratia”), a political term pointing to a new political regime to be implemented in Greece following the end of the occupation.

At the same time, EAM instituted a set of progressive measures, such as female participation in elections, absent in prewar Greek politics, and empowerment of young people through their extensive participation in the committee structure and other activities. In many but not all villages, a clandestine KKE committee was instituted parallel to the EAM committee to monitor and control the latter (Kalyvas 2000). Regional conferences and meetings were regularly organized, leading to the election of regional officers and eventually national representatives to a national governing authority called the All-Greek Committee of National Liberation (PEEA).

By “the summer of 1944,” Stavrianos (1952: 84) concludes, “EAM had built a complete state apparatus within Free Greece. It had a powerful army, an effective administrative and judicial organization, and a National Council representing all the sections of the country.” A British officer liaising Greek Resistance with the British Forces (and not a friend of EAM), wrote after the occupation that:

The benefits of civilisation and culture trickled into the mountains for the first time. Schools, local government, law-courts and public utilities, which the war had ended, worked again. Theatres, factories, parliamentary assemblies began for the first time. . . . EAM/ELAS set the pace in the creation of something that Governments of Greece had neglected: an organised state in the Greek mountains. (Woodhouse 1948: 147)

Again, the activities of these committees varied locally, but their central thrust was quite uniform across the country.

Some authors have pointed to local participation in this governance structure, to describe it primarily as a bottom-up form governance – in other words, an instance of “self-government.” For example, Stavrianos (1952: 80) states that:

After liberating about two-thirds of Greece, EAM-ELAS set up a kind of administration which is likely to influence future Greek politics profoundly. The chief characteristics were local self-government and inexpensive, quick, self-administered justice. In many ways this administration was primitive. But through the principle of “self-government and people’s justice” it corrected defects of the prewar government and gave the peasants

a way to manage their own affairs and settle their disputes among themselves without costly proceedings.

While it is correct to underline the local and grass-roots character of this type of governance, it is also important to recognize the tight control that was exercised by the Communist Party and its ability to use it for its own political ends (Kalyvas 2000).² In other words, the communists were successful in deploying a type of governance that tied local participation to a highly centralized and bureaucratic structure.

Indeed, the head of the local committee, known as “Ipeftinos” (the “responsible one” or the “man in charge” – for it was always a man) was usually appointed either by a communist cadre or an ELAS military leader – and he was accountable to these authorities. Furthermore, all these local village committees were connected and centralized through a dense network of regional organizations that created a chain of command through which decisions taken centrally could reach the most isolated village (Kalyvas 2000; Stavrianos 1952: 71). In many villages in all regions, EAM organizations were shadowed by parallel clandestine Communist Party structures that typically met in advance of EAM meetings to determine the outcome to be reached. In other words, there were two parallel structures of administration, one public and the other clandestine, with the real locus of power in the latter.

The discipline and tight organizational structure of the Communist Party were important factors in this specific form of governance, as evidenced by both its general uniformity across Greece and its striking similarity to other pro-communist resistance or national liberation movements both in Europe (e.g., Tito’s partisans in Yugoslavia) and Asia (e.g., the Vietnamese communists). “The network of cadres was so efficiently woven and deployed that when, in the summer of 1942, the first guerrillas bands under the name of ELAS appeared in the mountains, they multiplied quickly” (Woodhouse 1948: 61). According to Stavrianos (1952: 64–65): “[The communists] were equipped to build such a movement as they alone already had an underground organization from the Metaxas [dictatorship] days.” Nevertheless, it remains unclear exactly how the blueprint for this sort of governance structure was disseminated.

In theory, participation in the institutions set up by the rebels was voluntary. In practice, however, non-participation was viewed with suspicion and was frequently punished, often ruthlessly. At the same time, many villagers were eager to participate, since these institutions offered an opportunity to gain

² In fact, Stavrianos (1953: 71) did not miss it: “The secretary of the general EAM [village] committee was known as the Ipeftinos, or responsible one. His duties were to check the identification papers of travelers or newcomers to the village, furnish mules and guides when needed by ELAS, and provide recommendations for local villagers who wished to join ELAS. It was through the Ipeftinos that the Communists controlled the EAM mechanism.”

political advantage against local rivals. As a result, they were often captured by local factions who used their newfound (and very extensive) power to marginalize their local rivals (Aschenbrenner 1987). As for the empowerment of women and young people, it was a double-edged sword. Although it attracted new constituencies to the cause of the Communist Party, it also caused a considerable deal of resentment among the traditionalist population of the Greek mountain countryside. These rifts remained under relative control as long as EAM was firmly in power. Indeed, EAM did not hesitate to punish anyone who was caught acting against its regime. However, once its power was challenged, these rifts deepened and exploded into more violence.

At the same time, the communists were judicious enough to refrain from imposing measures that would have been disruptive of the basic structures of everyday life in a society that was, after all, composed of small-scale, property-owning farmers rather than propertyless industrial and agricultural workers or even sharecroppers. For example, no collectivization of land was introduced and religion was never repressed. Indeed, it was not rare for local priests to be EAM supporters, as the Greek Orthodox Church did not have the ideology or structure to act as an autonomous political actor.

EAM promoted a highly patriotic and nationalistic discourse that identified its action with that of the heroes of the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. The communist message was de-emphasized, at least until the end of the occupation period. One political issue that EAM did bring to the fore was the future of the monarchy. Insofar as the cleavage between Republicans and Royalists was the defining political cleavage of interwar Greek politics, pushing for the Republic had the potential of alienating royalist Greeks. At the same time, this issue was partly overshadowed by new cleavages activated by the civil war.

The effectiveness of EAM's governance structure is seen as being remarkable by most authors. Stavrianos (1952: 72) concludes that it was "literally a state within a state. In fact, toward the end of the occupation period, it was a state in its own right, governing the two-thirds of Greece which it had freed." These governance structures were smoothly transformed into quasi-official state rule following the withdrawal of the German forces. Between roughly September 1944 and March 1945, the Communist Party of Greece governed the entire territory of Greece with the exception of Athens, setting up what in fact was a full-fledged "People's republic" (Marantzidis 2010). Its rule came to an end after the defeat of the communists in the Athens uprising in February 1944. The stillborn communist state was dismantled and its most prominent supporters were arrested, persecuted, or had to flee.

Contrasting the practices of EAM with those of the non-communist EDES rebel group is enlightening. EDES made some timid attempts to deploy some structures of governance and mass mobilization in the much more limited territory it controlled during the same period. For instance, it also set up local

committees to run villages, sometimes referred to as “Committees of Popular Struggle.” It published a variety of local newspapers and undertook a sustained welfare effort that included hospitals and schools (Ioannou undated: 34). Indeed, the style of these structures was often reminiscent of those deployed by EAM, suggesting that EDES may have felt it necessary to imitate its much more successful rival (Tzoukas 2003: 104). However, unlike EAM, EDES relied ultimately on local and kin networks to govern villages under its control. Unable or unwilling to impose highly centralized control, EDES’ mass mobilization structures remained mostly empty vessels. Its governance institutions never achieved the depth and coverage of those developed by EAM. Where local committees were actually set up, they were little more than fronts for pre-existing local government officials, who were often connected and accountable to regional strongmen rather than a bureaucratic organization (Tzoukas 2003: 213). Unlike EAM, these structures were not an attempt to mobilize the population into a novel political structure, even less of serving the goal of radical political transformation. For example, women and children were not mobilized as they were in EAM-controlled territories. Furthermore, these local structures did not coalesce into broader regional structures with regularly held meetings and deliberations. Overall, the interventionist, comprehensive, and bureaucratic character of EAM rule was absent. In marked contrast to EAM, EDES allowed its local governance structures to operate informally and with considerable autonomy.

A former EDES member who wrote extensively about its governance structures argues that their relative weakness was due to the fact that EDES came under attack by the much stronger EAM and did not have the opportunity to invest the necessary effort (Ioannou undated: 39–40). However, this is a rather implausible explanation. C. M. Woodhouse, a British officer who interacted extensively with EDES, points to the personality of its leader, Napoleon Zervas: “His energies were almost wholly devoted to organizing his army, which was built up by his personality rather than by the corporative skill in administration which characterised ELAS; it consequently remained smaller and needed more work from its commander” (1948: 72).

In sum, the difference between the two rebel groups reflects their different political identities. EDES was a traditional organization based on local family networks and inspired by traditional norms of allegiance. It had a traditionalist, non-revolutionary ideology and lacked the kind of trained and motivated political cadres that were necessary for mass mobilization. It also “lacked the nationwide organizational structure given the EAM by the Communists” (Stavrianos 1952: 67). All of these traits contributed to its unwillingness and inability to develop extensive and bureaucratic institutions. By contrast, EAM was a tightly disciplined revolutionary party led primarily by urban and provincial intellectuals. To use Staniland’s (2014) terms, EAM was a “vanguard” organization that used its control over the Greek peasantry to evolve into an integrated organization, whereas EDES approximates the

parochial organization type. The comparison between EAM and EDES points to the fact that in the absence of a revolutionary outlook, nationalism is likely to give rise to limited rather than extensive and comprehensive structures of rebel governance.

TERRITORIAL CONTROL AND REBEL GOVERNANCE

The degree and extent of control over territory (and the population that inhabits it) is likely to influence the character of rebel governance. As the military situation changes over time and space, the same rebels may govern civilians differently. In the Greek Civil War, the communists' organizational profile remained the same as their military fortunes declined, but rebel governance became both more superficial and more coercive and interventionist. In the final phase of the war (1946–1949) their grip on territory was more limited and more uncertain than it had been during the first phase (1942–1944).

The defeat of the communists in December 1945–January 1946 had led to the dismantling of the communist administration, so painstakingly built during the occupation years. Many of the individuals who had staffed it were persecuted. Many more switched sides and joined the various pro-government parties.

In 1946, the Communist Party launched a new insurgency. This time the Communist Party did not hide behind a broad nationalist agenda and a vaguely leftist political front, but presented itself openly. This difference was reflected in the local governance structures they set up, because they no longer required a parallel, shadow communist structure.

On the surface, the form of local administration the new communist insurgency set up did not differ much from that of the EAM (Tsiou 2009). Similar village committees were formed and there was a similar emphasis on mass mobilization at the local level, albeit with tighter organizational and ideological controls. This superficial similarity, however, hid important differences. For all its grip on the population, the civilian administration put in place had access to fewer resources yet was forced to make more onerous demands on a population that was already exhausted by a decade of war and destruction. From the communists' perspective, the main difference between the two periods under examination is related to their problems with recruitment. They were now facing a much more aggressive enemy that aimed to control the entire territory of the country as opposed to areas of strategic interest only, as had been the case during the occupation period. Thanks to the massive assistance it received under the Truman doctrine, but also enjoying a legitimacy that had eluded the foreign occupiers, the Greek government had the capacity to conduct a large-scale military campaign against the communists. It also did not resort to tactics of indiscriminate violence that had generated popular sympathy for the rebels during the occupation. At the same time, the

communists had access to considerable military assistance from Greece's northern neighbors (Marantzidis 2010), in contrast to their reliance on captured weapons and the rather meager British assistance they had received earlier. However, they also had access to a much smaller population. As part of its counterinsurgency strategy, the Greek government moved thousands of peasants away from their mountainous villages and toward the cities and refugee camps located around provincial cities. By "emptying" several mountainous areas, the government succeeded in minimizing the population basis of the insurgents, undercutting their ability to rule over large populations. As a result, rebel governance during the final phase of the civil war was much more limited, in both territorial and population terms, compared to the 1943–1944 period.

This problem was compounded by the fact that their urban supporters did not join the insurgency in the mountains, either because they could not or because they felt that this renewed insurgency was doomed. As a result, the communists found it increasingly necessary to rely on coercive recruitment practices, vis-à-vis both the population they ruled on a more or less permanent basis and the population they did not. Increasingly, they were forced to undertake raids that resulted in mass kidnapping and forcible recruitment. Their ranks swelled with forcibly recruited women and adolescents.

Predictably, these practices made them less popular and forced them into a spiral of coercive rule that peaked after their controversial decision to separate children from their families in the villages they controlled and move them to countries in the Soviet bloc. Whether it was because they cared about their safety, as they claimed, or to use them as hostages and future soldiers, as their rivals claimed, this radical measure indicates the extent to which they were able to dominate the communities they ruled. Likewise, following their defeat in the decisive battles of 1949, the communists decided to displace the entire population of many of the villages they controlled by sending them to Albania, and from there to various Eastern European states and the Soviet Union. In effect, they created a diaspora whose existence came to an end only after the 1974 transition to democracy, when the majority was able to return to Greece.

It is difficult to assess the population's reaction to these different types of rebel governance. Much of the evidence comes from written testimonials that tend to be self-serving and biased. The interviews I conducted in the context of my research on the violence of the Greek Civil War (Kalyvas 2006) suggest that the institutions of local justice in particular are remembered fondly when three conditions were satisfied: first, if they were minimally coercive; second, if the "judges" were local individuals who enjoyed high social capital through their knowledge of the byzantine interpersonal local conflicts, and could thus reach acceptable Solomonic judgments; and third, if there were no instances of rebel intervention in the proceedings. These conditions were satisfied more often

TABLE 6.1 *The Effects of Political Identity and Territorial Control on Rebel Governance*

	Political Identity	Organizational Resources	Territorial Control	Governance Structure
EDES (1942–1944)	Nationalist	Local networks	Broad and secure	Decentralized; no mass mobilization
EAM (1942–1944)	Nationalist & Communist	Communist Party	Broad and secure	Bureaucratic; mass mobilization
KKE/DSE (1946–1949)	Communist	Communist Party	Limited and insecure	Bureaucratic; coercive

during the first phase when the EAM enjoyed greater military security. In contrast, when local factions with specific agendas or young people with little knowledge hijacked these local courts or when the rebels took an interventionist stance, the process became coercive and generated memories colored by revulsion and disgust.

In short, a comparison of rebel governance between the two periods under consideration confirms the importance of the factors highlighted so far. The rebel's political identity was constant during the two periods and so was the form of administrative institutions they set up, despite some differences in the prominence of communist discourse and symbols. In contrast, the military dynamics of the conflict had become different, presenting a much more intense challenge to the communists and leaving them with much more limited territory. These differences help account for the much more pronounced interventionist and coercive nature of rebel rule by the communists during the final period. [Table 6.1](#) summarizes the effects of the two variables highlighted in this article (political identity and territorial control) on the form and substance of rebel governance in Greece.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Greek case suggests that the political identity of an insurgent organization – that is, its operational ideology, political practice, and organizational resources – along with the geographic scope of its territorial control are important determinants both of the structures rebels create to govern civilians and of how they use them. Greek communist insurgents adopted characteristics of rebel governance that differed significantly from those introduced by their more traditional non-communist counterparts. The impact of political identity is mediated by the geographic scope of their territorial control. When the communist insurgents were less militarily secure

and occupied less territory, they became more coercive in their treatment of civilians and less able to deploy extensive institutions.

During the early and late phases of the civil war, the EAM and their communist successors were motivated by similar aspirations. Their approach to civilian governance has many similarities with other socialist revolutionary insurgencies. These parallels include dimensions such as the creation of an extensive state-like apparatus at the local level manned by disciplined and motivated cadres, the key role played by a political party, and the emphasis on practices of indoctrination, mass mobilization, and intervention in peoples' everyday lives. These traits contrast with those deployed by traditional or conservative rebel groups that rely more heavily on pre-existing authority networks. Non-communist insurgents took over the local governments they found and often deferred to the local leaders who controlled them. They did not make a great effort to introduce an expansive bureaucracy, scheduled assemblies, or party officers. They made no effort to mobilize groups that had not participated earlier. In short, they worked within the established social order rather than trying to replace it.

Variation in organizational style was crosscut by depth of territorial control. To a large extent, this was a consequence of military dynamics. Even though their organizational style remained constant, the communists were less coercive, particularly in recruitment, when they held larger territories securely in the first phase of the war than when they held smaller areas with fewer troops later on. Although only changes in the communist organization have been traced over time in this chapter, the logic would seem to apply equally to more status-quo-oriented rebels.

Several possibilities present themselves for future research. First, both propositions argued here need confirmation through testing on additional cases. Second, the Greek communists presented rebel governance to villagers primarily through a nationalist idiom in the first phase of the civil war and replaced it with a more openly communist one in the final phase. This does not appear to have affected the structures themselves. They remained similar in terms of their basic characteristics during both periods. Although the marriage of nationalism and communism became quite common during the Cold War (think of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front), the exact links between the two vary. Thus, it would be useful to tease out the effect of nationalism as opposed to communist ideology on the choice of structures of rebel governance. Third, it would be valuable to test the relationship between "socialist revolutionary" rebel governance and successful rebellion. The characteristics exhibited by the communists in Greece are strikingly similar to other insurgencies based broadly on Marxism-Leninism. It is fair to argue that their similarities suggest a "socialist revolutionary" ideal-type of rebel governance. In fact, during and after the period of decolonization, nationalist rebels were often inspired by Marxist-Leninist practices; they adopted technologies of rebellion and structures of rebel governance that resonated

with those promoted by their Marxist–Leninist counterparts, while diverging from those used by traditional nationalists. Following this model seems to have provided important solutions to many problems faced by rebels. Why were some nationalist movements better able to imitate this model compared to others? How was the Marxist–Leninist model adapted, and which variations proved to be most effective? These questions suggest an important area for further work.

Overall, the type of governance deployed by the Greek communist rebels appears to be especially common in civil wars that were fought as irregular wars. The ideal type seems to be part and parcel of an organizational innovation that allowed rebel groups to turn traditional guerrilla warfare into a “robust insurgency.” It became a modern and highly effective type of asymmetric warfare that is closely associated with the historical period of the Cold War but has declined significantly following its end (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). Seen from this perspective, it would be worth exploring how Islamist insurgents, the most prominent revolutionary rebels of the post-Cold War era, are tackling the issue of governance.

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Comparing Rebel Rule Through Revolution and Naturalization: Ideologies of Governance in Naxalite and Naga India

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ABSTRACT

Rebel groups vary in their organization of civilian governance. How insurgents understand the nature of their rebellion and their relation to the population living in territory in which they act guides their development of governance functions. Rebel doctrine varies according to whether rebels presume they share a pre-existing identity with particular civilians and whether they want to transform civilians or realize values civilians already hold. Comparison of two Indian rebel groups shows how divergent initial premises affect governance practice. The NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) (IM) started with the idea of a natural polity, a state that would realize Naga ethnic identification. The Naxalite CPI (Maoist) began with the principle of a revolutionary polity, the establishment of a state that would eventually achieve universal social justice ideals. These divergent principles led both Naga and Naxalite administrations to different administrative choices about whom they extended protection, justice, and social services and whom they taxed. Both rebel groups applied their basic doctrines in administering local residents, but the problems of governing during civil war modified some of their choices. In particular, their belief that revolution would occur in stages allowed the Naxalites a surprising degree of pragmatism that included some accommodation with Indian state officials.

INTRODUCTION

Rebel groups vary greatly in the way they organize governance. They may have similar types of governance activities, such as protection, taxation, justice, and

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social service provision, but their governance ideology affects how they develop them. Although related to insurgent political culture (Wood 2003; Mampilly 2011), governance ideology centers more narrowly on how rebel groups understand the nature of their rebellion, their relations to the territory they operate in and to the civilians present in it. For example, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN (IM)) based its rule on naturalization, while the Communist Party of India (Maoist) (CPI (Maoist)) regarded governance as a function of revolution.

The NSCN (IM) viewed itself as the natural polity in the Naga areas and considered the Naga population as their natural citizens. This denotes the conception of the Naga rebel group that there was a pre-existing group of people – the Naga – who were considered to be adherents to the rebel group’s cause, and for which independence would mean the key to the full realization of the group’s potential. Its governance efforts aimed to naturalize rebel rule. The Maoist revolutionaries had neither a natural polity nor a fixed territory they controlled. Their governance functioned as part of the revolution and developed through the revolution itself. The secessionist agenda of the Naga rebel group reflected its premise of a separately governed Naga state and population. In contrast, the Maoist governance ideology of the Naxalites expected to include all civilians eventually.

The [first section](#) of this chapter introduces the two cases and gives an overview of their basic administrative organization. The second part presents the governance ideologies of the two rebel groups. The remaining sections show how these governance ideologies influence the specific governance practices carrying out the administrative functions of protection, justice, taxation, and service delivery.

THE CASES: FORMATION AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION OF THE CPI (MAOIST) AND NSCN (IM)

Maoism has inspired revolutionaries in India since the Telangana Rebellion (1947–1952) in Andhra Pradesh (Sundarayya 2006). Naxalites, the generic name for Maoist insurgents in India, is derived from the village Naxalbari in West Bengal, where a peasant rebellion broke out in 1968 under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar. The movement petered out after he died in police custody in 1972 (Banerjee 1984). But in the 1980s, different Maoist movements rekindled. The most important were the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) People’s War, better known as the People’s War Group (PWG), and the Maoist Communist Centre (India) (MCCI) that grew out of the Dakshin Desh party founded in 1969. These two parties merged in 2004 to form the CPI (Maoist). Ganapathi, the erstwhile general secretary of the PWG, became the leader of the CPI (Maoist). He may have commanded 10,000 armed cadres, and maybe double that number in local defense squads or *Sanghams*.

The Naxalites were active in a “red corridor” from Andhra Pradesh in the south to Bihar in the north, comprising 156 districts in 13 states. The Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh equated them with terrorism, calling them India’s most important internal security problem (M. Singh 2006). In June 2009 the group was proscribed as a terrorist organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Although this chapter focuses on the CPI (Maoist), it also considers relevant rebel governance activities of the PWG and MCCI.

For as long as they have existed, various Naxalite groups have tried to set up alternative governance structures. A “policy program” for governance written by the PWG and adopted by the CPI (Maoist) was released in 2004 (CPI (ML) PW 2004). It outlined the ideal for the Naxalite *Janathana Sarkar* (People’s Government). Initially meant to streamline the Janathana Sarkar in the “liberated zone” of Dandakaranya in Chhattisgarh, it also intended to help their formation in other areas. “The *Janathana Sarkar* shall bear the fundamental task of organizing and expanding the new state power, run the revolutionary war and mobilize the masses in the war.” It presented a tiered system of government with village, area, district, and special zone Janathana Sarkars. At every level, every three years, seven to eleven members plus a president and vice-president were to be elected to form a Government Committee. This committee consisted of eight departments: finance, defense, agriculture, justice, education–culture, health, forest production, and public relations. It was supposed to meet once a month (village) or every two months (area), with higher-level meetings every four or six months. The Standing Committee, consisting of the president, vice-president, finance, and defense departments, was to run the government on a daily basis.

The Naga areas where the NSCN (IM) was active are located in the far northeast of India, near the border with Burma. Separatist struggle was first initiated by the Naga National Council (NNC), under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo in the 1950s. In 1962, as a measure to control the movement, the Indian government created the state of Nagaland, albeit with the help of moderates in the underground movement. In 1975, the Government of India (GoI) and some leaders of the NNC signed the Shillong Accord rejecting secession. Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chishi Swu – at the time, general secretary and foreign minister of the NNC, respectively – denounced this accord.

Disenchanted with the NNC and Phizo, Muivah, Isak Swu, and S.S. Khaplang formed the NSCN in 1980 to continue the struggle for complete independence. In 1988 this group split, with Muivah and Isak Swu forming the NSCN (Isak-Muivah), and Khaplang the NSCN (Khaplang).² All Naga

² Nagaland was changed to Nagalim, to denote the importance of the inclusion of all Naga inhabited areas.

armed groups were proscribed in 1991, initiating an explosion of conflict-related casualties. Finally in 1997, a cease-fire agreement was signed between the NSCN (IM) and the GoI, with the NSCN (K) following in 2001.³

Peace talks with the NSCN (IM) continued, although with few concrete results apart from a marked drop in casualties. The main stumbling blocks concerned Naga sovereignty and the integration of all Naga inhabited areas, including parts of Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh. Internal divisions among the Naga hampered these negotiations. In November 2007 a new faction called the NSCN (Unification) split off, taking members from both the IM and the K group. Another bout of internecine fighting resulted, producing the most casualties since the cease-fire in 1997. In 2008 an inconclusive reconciliation effort under the leadership of the Baptist Church attempted to stop the internecine fighting and bring all Naga rebel factions under one umbrella.

After the creation of the “Federal Government of Nagaland” (FGN) by the NCC in 1956, the Naga underground had tried to maintain an administrative wing and a civilian government. NSCN (IM) governance resembled these earlier rebel governments in Naga areas. The group considered itself the inheritor of the Naga nationalism. After the start of cease-fire talks, the Government of the People’s Republic of Nagalim (GPRN), the government structure of the NSCN (IM), under the *Yaruiow* (presidency) of Isak Swu, became more visible. The “standing structure,” based upon the *Yezhabo* (1968 amended Constitution) of the FGN, included a *Tatar Hoho* (Parliament), and different *Kiloners* (Ministers) under the leadership of an *Ato* (Prime) *Kiloner*: Muivah himself (Vashum 2005: 159–74).

This standing structure has been reshuffled twice in the last ten years, in an effort to create accountability. The names of the ninety-four members of the standing structure were made public through the official website of the NSCN (IM). The official seat of the GPRN was the Central Headquarters, Hebron, in the main designated camp of the NSCN (IM). As part of the cease-fire agreement between the NSCN (IM) and the GoI, Indian security forces were only allowed into a one kilometer perimeter around the camp. The post-cease-fire period since 1997 opened new opportunities for rebel governance.

REBEL GOVERNANCE IDEOLOGY: RULE THROUGH NATURALIZATION VERSUS REVOLUTION

Differences in the ideologies of governance between the NSCN (IM) and CPI (Maoist) start from two crucial elements: their relation to the population in their territory, and their basic doctrine as a nationalist/secessionist movement as opposed to a revolutionary Marxist/Maoist

³ For an easily accessible work on the Naga conflict, see Franke (2009).

organization. They vary first, over whether they presumed a pre-existing shared identity between group and civilians, and second, whether they intended to transform civilians over whom they rule or simply realize values inherent among them.

Like other ethnicity-based rebellions, the NSCN (IM) claimed a complete overlap of identification between the rebel group and the population and thus supposed a latent polity assured of loyal subjects. According to A.S. Shimray, “[i]t is a truism in Nagaland that every Naga household has a share in contributing at least one or two members in the Naga political movement at one time or another” (2005: 225). Ninghor Raikham, an NSCN (IM) spokesperson, observes that “all the Nagas look forward to the same New Nagalim: the liberated Nagalim” (email conversation, 11 May 2010). Ethnic identification seemed so obvious that it was regarded as “natural.” As Kevin Toolis explained in discussing the participation of young men and families with the IRA, it was “something that was so obvious it was inexplicable” (quoted in Kalyvas 2006: 125). In that sense, the presence and governance activities of Naga rebel groups were beyond question. As is clear from the already mentioned factional divisions, the Naga polity was far from united politically. Yet the governance efforts by the NSCN (IM) were premised and conditioned on the conception of a natural polity of Naga, however fragmentary in reality.

By comparison, leaders of the CPI (Maoist) assumed no close identity between rebels and civilians, nor a pre-existing polity containing loyal citizens. Although there were classes deemed “natural” allies to the revolution – in the current phase, the tribals⁴ – they needed to be convinced. Political training was necessary to bind the people to the movement. Moreover, the leadership of the movement was often neither local nor tribal – many of the rebel leaders in Chhattisgarh state came from Andhra Pradesh. In contrast, no nationalist training was deemed necessary by the NSCN (IM), as the population from the outset was considered fully convinced of the nationalist cause and the role of armed struggle. For the NSCN (IM) the relation with “citizens” was presupposed, while for the Naxalites recognition of common interests would occur in a later phase of the revolutionary struggle.

The NSNC (IM)’s governance strategy was based on rule through naturalization. According to Migdal, “naturalization means that people consider the state to be as natural as the landscape around them; they cannot imagine their lives without it” (2001: 137). Like many other ethnicity-based rebel groups, naturalization meant that the NSCN (IM) built specific governance practices on what its leaders considered a

⁴ “Tribal” is a specific legal category in India. The scheduled tribes are considered the original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, although far from a uniform category. In this case they consist of often poor inhabitants of the central Indian hills and forests.

pre-existing Naga polity in a specific territory (see Tambiah 1997).⁵ They tried to consolidate the naturalization process through material and symbolic actions.

The NSCN (IM) considered itself the platform for Naga aspirations. It built its governance ideology on a combination of three registers that expressed the meaning of this naturalized state and allowed it to cater to different interests. These three registers were rebel statehood, legal bureaucracy, and village republics. Expressing naturalization through these three registers provided the NSCN (IM) with strong symbols for legitimizing rebel rule.

The first register might seem tautologous, yet it was an essential building block for their governance ideology of naturalized statehood. They aligned themselves with a long history of rebel governance in Naga areas beginning before Indian independence. The NSCN (IM)'s governance structure was not an innovation; rather, it continued a 50-year-old tradition of Naga rebel governance structures. The basic structure, with a Yaruiew, Kilonsers, and a Tater Hoho dated back to the 1954 People's Sovereign Republic of Free Nagaland and the 1956 Federal Government of Nagaland set up by the original Naga rebel leaders.⁶

The second register – the NSCN (IM)'s portrayal of itself as a legal-bureaucratic state – was facilitated by the cease-fire agreement in 1997 and the establishment of the main designated camp of Hebron as the seat of the Naga government. Its strategy in negotiating the cease-fire strengthened its portrayal as the Naga ruling authority and enabled it to streamline its governance efforts and procedures. Pressure for a greater measure of accountability from civil society organizations strengthened this presentation.

The third register – the portrayal of every Naga village as a village republic with certain independent institutions – had already become a popular portrayal in the Naga areas before the advent of British rule. “From time immemorial, Nagas maintained in their villages a type of self-government which could be called a little republic or a city state ... This self-governing system worked excellently and people enjoyed peace and justice ... The basis of the Naga system is the village organisation” (NSCN 1980).

Thus, the NSCN (IM) inscribed itself in a tradition that the Naga areas were never part of any state before the British. The departure of the British meant a return to the pre-colonial system of rule: “Before the British government conquered our country in 1879–80, we were living in a state of intermittent

⁵ Naturalization in a state context, as Migdal discusses it, goes further than what we see in the Naga case, where it was an ongoing process. Nevertheless, naturalization is never fixed and is always in the making, for both rebel polities and states.

⁶ The FGN continued to exist, although it was marginalized together with its armed wing (the NNC) after the Shillong accord, which was seen as a sell-out by certain members of the Naga Nationalist Movement. Their reaction led to the creation of the NSCN.

warfare with the Assamese of the Assam valley to the North and West of our country and Manipuris to the South. They never conquered us, nor were we ever subjected to their rule” (Naga Memorandum to the Simon Commission 1929, reproduced in Vashum 2005: 175).

The village republic register also gave space to diverging interests among different Naga groups and recognized the difficulties in creating one uniform Naga polity. Finally, by allowing a certain degree of self-governance at the local and regional levels, the GPRN was not forced to govern every aspect of life in the Naga areas and possibly overstretch its capabilities.

The Naxalite strategy of governance did not depend on naturalizing its rule. CPI (Maoist) leaders entertained no expectation that they would be given legitimacy at the outset of the armed struggle. Instead, they anticipated that their authority would be voluntarily accepted later. They regarded the development of governance activities as a specific function of their overall revolutionary doctrine:

[B]y establishing people’s democratic political power in a specific area and implementing in practice the tasks of agrarian revolution . . . it is possible to enhance and expedite the revolutionary high tide throughout the country, and through this, a basis can be laid for the building up of new base areas, and the gradual consolidation and expansion of the people’s army and base areas. (CPI (Maoist) 2004: 57)

The implication in their conception of rule is that governance will change as the revolution moves from guerrilla zones to guerrilla base areas to liberated areas. Full-fledged governance only becomes possible after a liberated area has been established. Without access to symbolic registers with *prima facie* validity similar to those of the Naga rebels, Maoist doctrine could only acquire its legitimizing value through praxis. Rebel governance must be developed through the revolution:

[The] process of consolidation and along with it the weakening of the grip of the landlords, on the economic social and political life of the village, and the establishment of the firm leadership of the proletariat over the broad masses in the village, will take place only through the course of intensification of revolutionary class struggle in that village and the basis will be laid for forming the Revolutionary People’s Committees. (CPI (Maoist) 2004: 62)

Although government should in theory serve the “poor peasants,” Maoism allows for some accommodation with “middle” and “rich peasants” in the early stages. The leaders of the CPI (Maoist) understood that their options were limited. The CPI (Maoist) leaders’ choices for organizing government can be traced to their resolutions of the tension between the register of a Maoist ideal of equitable and democratic governance in a socialist state and the limitations imposed by the *realpolitik* of everyday revolution.

The NSCN (IM) had to resolve equivalent tensions in responding to daily issues as it asserted its authority. The concrete choices each made as they

approached similar administrative issues involving civilians demonstrate dissimilarities in their ideologies. The following sections show how the doctrinal outlooks of the two rebel groups led to different choices in their handling of protection, taxation, justice, and social services.

PROTECTION

Any rebel group interested in maintaining legitimate relations with the population must offer protection. Without protection, at least against counterinsurgency forces, civilians have little incentive to cooperate with rebels to build stable governance structures. Yet these rebel groups' governance ideology greatly affected the shape of these protection mechanisms. For the NSCN (IM) protection was straightforward – aimed at their natural polity. Their protection mechanisms were most visible and salient at the borders of the “Naga ancestral domain,” where their polity met other non-Naga affiliated groups. In these areas, as expected, they did not extend protection to non-Naga populations.

The Naxalites' doctrine did not permit such an exclusionary policy. Protection mechanisms for the whole population had a clear meaning for the revolution. Yet, they not only had to protect the population, they also needed to provide better safety for the day-to-day running of the rebel outfit. Protection mechanisms set up at the basic village level were used as political tools to recruit cadres. Furthermore, the revolution presented different situations as it extended to different areas. In brokering access to new areas, the Maoists took an expedient approach to protection, sometimes working with village elites rather than the poor (Shah 2006). This tension between a pragmatic approach toward working with different classes as the revolution developed and the universal role protection played in revolutionary doctrine appeared in most Naxalite governance efforts.

As mentioned, for the NSNC (IM), deciding on the target group for protection was straightforward. The pre-supposition of a “Naga nation” made all those who were ethnically Naga eligible for protection. The NSCN (IM) also excluded others on the basis of ethnicity. As only part of Nagalim (what the rebel group considered to be the “Naga ancestral domain”) lies within Nagaland state, protection of Naga “citizens” differed for those inside the state and those outside.

Inside Nagaland, three adversaries – the Indian armed forces, “traitors,” and other “rebel” Naga factions – were entitled to limited protective measures. Due to the cease-fire agreement, Indian armed forces did not need much protection. The traitors, those who worked with the Indian state to disrupt NSCN (IM) operations, were more of a threat to the rebel group than to the population. But as the rebel group and the people were considered one, this threat was often presented as one to the Naga nation as a whole. Protection against other “rebel”

Naga armed groups has become more important in recent years, when casualties have been mostly from internecine clashes between the NSCN (IM), (K), and (U). In areas where these groups were active, civilians had to secure protection from one of them. Since the NSCN (IM) was able to provide better protection, it was able to expand its territory.

Outside the Nagaland state, but within Nagalim, protection was more complicated. In addition to Indian soldiers, traitors, and other Naga factions, the NSCN (IM) tried to protect Naga against the governments of nearby states into which Nagalim extended as well as antagonistic non-Naga rebel groups. Naga subjects were sometimes considered a threat by the majority population of one of these neighboring states or threatened themselves by non-Naga rebel groups who also claimed homelands.⁷

For example, in one of my fieldwork sites in the disputed Assam–Nagaland border area, the Naga underground was successful in protecting Naga access to land without formal land titles in an area that officially belonged to Assam. As their land was officially designated as forest and under dispute, land titles were not available for Naga farmers. Although Assamese farmers were struggling for land rights (Saikia 2008), Naga respondents felt the underground groups adequately protected them. NSCN (IM) also prevented rival armed groups, such as the Assamese United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), from threatening or taxing these Naga villagers.

Many Naga considered the rebel group better able to organize protection than the state, thus supporting the NSCN (IM)'s claims of being the natural Naga state. Assamese government officials, including land revenue officers and forest officers, no longer entered the area to tax or fine the Naga for their encroachment in former forest land. Officials who ventured in needed a large police escort, to prevent NSCN (IM) attacks. In all cases, NSCN (IM) protection was limited to those defined as part of the Naga nation.

The NSCN (IM) also attempted to protect Naga against rival Naga rebels. In Tirap district in Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, people switched allegiance to the NSCN (IM) as it was better able to protect them from attacks by the rival Khaplang group. The Arunachal state was considered unable to offer any protection (Dai 2007). Dai also shows that local politicians who switched sides used the NSCN (IM) for protection against retaliation from the Khaplang group.

In Naxalite areas, on the other hand, protection was more expansive and had at least the potential to be inclusive. The Naxalites took a piecemeal approach to the development of viable protection mechanisms. Protection started from “the issues of their day-to-day problems” (CPI (Maoist) 2004: 59). They were effective in protecting civilians from the interference of unwanted state agents (Shah 2007). The CPI (Maoist) was successful in largely suppressing

⁷ Given the contested nature of these areas, I cannot provide an estimate of the number of Naga living in these areas. Which ethnic groups form part of the Naga in these border areas is a highly debated issue.

the activities of the forest, revenue, and police departments. Ajay Sahni, a sometimes virulent opponent of the Naxalites, admitted that “No government official would dare to travel unescorted in this entire region [north Telangana and Dandakaranya]; and in the Naxalite affected areas, police parties ordinarily only enter with a minimum strength of a company” (2000). The rebel group gained popularity by protecting villagers’ illegal encroachment on forestland as part of their land redistribution schemes.

Yet, the everyday running of the revolution sometimes demanded compromise. Although the party officially claimed to focus on the poorest classes, in practice they also often worked with village elites (Shah 2006; 2009). Class distinctions were ignored in offering protection during the initial phase of the struggle: “the first people to benefit from the Party’s campaign against the Forest Department were the Mukhiyas (village chiefs) . . . They used their manpower and their resources to grab as much land as they could” (Comrade Venu, quoted in Roy 2010: 15). According to Sonu, a high-ranking member of the CPI (Maoist) in Dandekaranya, “the people hesitated to say anything against them. They did not know much about us and probably feared that they would face the brunt of the chief’s revenge if the party left them on their own” (quoted in Navlakha 2010: 19).

The Naxalites graded the degree of protection they offered from the intermittent presence of rebel armed squads for basic protection up to an elaborate hierarchical system in liberated zones, with village defense squads at lower levels, a secondary force of local guerrilla squads, and the PLGA (People’s Liberation Guerilla Army) at the apex. By contrast to widespread participation in armed groups in Nagaland, the Naxalites recruited selectively. In their base areas in Dantewara, they used the local level of Janathana Sarkar, the Revolutionary People’s Committees (RPCs), as a basis for recruitment. Participation in the local people’s militia or Sangham was a first step toward becoming a member of the PLGA (CPI (Maoist) 2004, 102). After 2005, the RPCs in the base areas took responsibility for the maintenance of the PLGA and the people’s militia (Navlakha 2010: 28). Responsibility for everyday defense was transferred to the local level to intensify the struggle by maintaining larger units of operation and including more members of the public in revolutionary activities.

JUSTICE

In general, trial and punishment during conflict has two targets: crime specific to the conflict, and everyday crime. The former refers to the struggle against informers, spies, and traitors – threats to the rebel group’s authority and activities. Both rebel groups punished individuals who threatened them or who they defined as adversaries. For example, the Naxalites identified class enemies, such as landlords, and the NSCN (IM) targeted rival tax collectors. This type of justice is similar in both cases as it pertains to specific categories of

traitors. The Naxalites often conducted public trials to convict traitors, while the NSCN (IM) often simply announced the execution of anti-national elements through the press. In both cases, civilians had a limited role in trials and executions.

The two rebel groups differed in their selection of cases and treatment of everyday or normal crimes. The NSCN (IM) predominantly dealt with high-profile cases, while the CPI (Maoist) presided over people's courts that judged a variety of cases. Although both wanted to provide a clear alternative to the often unresponsive Indian state courts, the Naga groups left most cases to local village courts and tribal associations. Here, too, in its governance ideology, the GPRN regarded itself as the apex above traditional village-level justice mechanisms, building on pre-existing structures of local government as a basis for the naturalization of its authority and rule. These high level cases were then treated in a formal state-like fashion, most visible in the use of symbolic legal language of the state to present their judgments. In contrast, the CPI (Maoist) wanted to provide a forum for dispute settlement in their base areas, while retaining existing judicial "forums to solve the disputes among the people in the adivasi [tribal] society" (CPI (ML) PW 2004). As mentioned before, this piecemeal approach to governance characterized their pragmatic approach.

The Naxalites prided themselves on bringing fair and nondiscriminatory judicial process to the regions they controlled. Their leader, Ganapathi, defended Naxalite revolutionary courts as an antidote to class-based justice in regular courts:

When it is a universally known fact that nine out of ten cases do not get justice through the so-called courts of law, why should you find fault with people when they themselves punish the culprits as in the Jan Adalats held under the leadership of our Party? The very fact that out of the 57 people taken away by the Jan militia led by our PLGA from the concentration camp and 44 of them were let off after due investigation of their deeds speaks to the fairness of the Jan Adalats (People's Courts), unlike the so-called courts of law that let off the real culprits and throw the innocents for long years into jails. (2006: 15)

People in Bihar went to the Naxalites to get instant and fair justice in civil, criminal, and family cases (Nedumpara 2004).

Naxalite justice demonstrated the tension between conducting fair and general trials to provide solutions to everyday problems while still considering class differences in trying cases and awarding penalties, as suggested by the formulation that "[t]he people's courts will work as per the new principles of justice, class line and mass line" (CPI (ML) PW 2004). Gautam Navlakha (2010: 28) cites an interesting case involving the murder of three traders. The family first registered the case with the state police, but after disappointment with its lack of progress, they went to the RPC. Several suspects were produced and a *Jan Adalat* was held. Although the family of the

traders wanted the death penalty, the Jan Adalat negotiated an agreement of payment of Rs. 80,000 (US\$1,760) to families of the victims. Reflecting its Maoist ideology, the Jan Adalat required rich peasants to pay double the amount required of poor ones.

The NSCN (IM) tried to impose their judicial system in Nagaland. Ninghor Raikham, one of the rebel groups's spokesmen, even claims that: "[in] general, Naga people do not go to Indian courts. The Republic of Nagalim has got its own justice system. All the cases are tried by the court of the GPRN" (email conversation, May 11, 2010). The more important or high-profile cases were settled by an apex court in Hebron, the NSCN (IM)'s main designated camp (Talukdar 2007). The GPRN's Ministry of Information and Publishing (MIP) gave regular updates on these cases. As the Indian state (Hansen 2001), the NSCN (IM) uses these cases symbolically to highlight its capabilities as a rational bureaucracy. These cases were not only meant to underscore the NSCN (IM)'s authority over a large part of the population, but also to show that the rebel group was as sophisticated as the Indian state and more efficient in solving certain types of crimes.

Two recent cases illustrate these points. On March 25, 2009, a twenty-five-year-old girl was gang-raped by four to six assailants in her parent's house in Dimapur. The gruesomeness of the crime and its occurrence in Nagaland's economic capital created much public interest. On May 26 the NSCN (IM) announced that two of the rapists had been arrested. Almost two months later they released a court judgment. After summing up the identity of the accused and their crimes,

[The] People's Revolutionary court of the NSCN/GPRN having its jurisdictional authority and power to dispense justice [. . . declares that n]o form of justice can justify or mollify such an act of crime. Hence, in the best wisdom of justice the PRC of GPRN hereby pronounces the culprits to be judged by the law of the people . . . and hereby awarded capital punishment to the aforementioned two arrested accused persons on 17th July 2009 (MIP/GPRN 2009).

After an anonymous tip, their bodies "with bullet marks on their heads" were found on the Kohima-Wokha highway on July 18, 2009 (*Times of India* 2009). Two other suspects are still held by the Indian state police, under public pressure to deny bail and to award severe, if not equivalent, punishment as the NSCN (IM) had meted out. The case served to skew public opinion toward the rebels because they proved more efficient than the police.

In another highly symbolic case a few months earlier, an NSCN (IM) Lieutenant, Colonel Hopeson Ningshen, killed a Manipuri Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) and two of his aides. At first, the NSCN (IM) denied having any responsibility for the murder. But its officials conducted an investigation that led to the Court Martial of Ningshen, under NSCN (IM) law: "[A]s per 'Naga Army Act' of Rules and Regulation (NAARR) 22002 Lt. Colonel

Hopeson Ningshen bearing Army No. ST-28014 ... has been convicted as guilty of abduction, illegal detention and ultimate murder ... under Article 70 Clause 3, Sub Clause V Article 76 Clause ii of NAARR" (GPRN 2009). In the symbolic language of "stateness," Ningshen was stripped of all decorations and dishonorably discharged from service. Invoking ameliorating circumstances, the court sentenced him to seven years imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 50,000 (US\$1,035), "in default of which he shall undergo simple imprisonment for another one year and six months."

TAXATION

Taxation and extortion are two sides of the same coin. The creation of accountability and predictability are crucial in establishing legitimate forms of taxation in place of random and unpredictable extortion. Both rebel groups were aware of the thin line between taxation and extortion and wanted to present their fundraising as legitimate. Yet starting from different ideologies of governance, they framed taxation differently. For the NSCN (IM) taxation was a normal governance function. Since they were the state in the Naga areas, everyone should pay taxes as a universal obligation of a citizen. Routinization of taxation practices was an important element to normalize rule.

For the Maoists, taxation was necessary to sustain the revolutionary struggle. Yet, tax collection was often conducted in contexts where the goal of the revolution was not obvious and civilians might see Naxalite taxation as just another form of corruption. Consequently, the Maoists wanted to be responsive to demands from civilians, target taxation specifically, and show that at least part of the funds directly benefited local residents. Here, too, the Maoists took a pragmatic approach toward engaging different classes in taxation. Gopalji, the spokesperson of the CPI (Maoist) in Jharkhand, explains it as follows:

[it] is not corruption. This is taxation. In the areas of our struggle, we are the authority that is serving the people. We therefore tax those who are amassing wealth through major development programs and their contractorship in order to use this wealth for the service of our masses We have rules and norms around how we tax people. For instance, large schemes and operations are taxed more than smaller ones. We don't tax the building of schools, hospitals, small tanks, tube wells etc. We also have rules and norms around how we use the fund collected. So we are not simply collecting money for private gain: that would be corruption. We are collecting money for the service of our toiling masses. (Shah 2010)

The Maoists also circulated a list with tax rates for different occupational groups in an effort to prevent excessive taxation by local cadres (Dash 2007).

Naturalization provides a logical rationale to justify the universal obligation that all citizens must pay taxes. Ninghor Raikham, an NSCN (IM) spokesperson, expressed the duty imposed by the ethnic link between

the rebel organization and the people when he observed that “tax payment is a sign of honor and respect to the concerned authority. It is not only a collection of money.” Civil society actors considered “sustaining the freedom struggle” a sufficient rationale for supporting NSCN (IM) taxation (interviews with civil society actors). Although NSCN (IM) taxation was regularly lamented, compliance was widespread, further indicating shared support for the Naga struggle for independence. The NSCN (IM) was proud of its extensive taxation network and considered it a sign of their authority over the Naga populace:

We tax each and every item available in the market within Naga areas, every commercial item imported into Naga areas, and every item exported. We collect house tax from individual households; the employees of various government departments pay employee tax. Likewise, the army ration tax is collected by each unit of the army from the areas under its jurisdiction. People pay loyalty tax to the GPRN for its smooth running and for sustaining the freedom struggle. (Talukdar 2007)

Routinization of governance practices is an important element in the normalization of any kind of rule (Migdal 2001: 254–55). Rebel taxation was generally considered a routine practice in Naga areas. For example, the *Sumi Hobo*, an apex organization of the Sema, a Naga subtribe, protested against the taxation rate and taxation by multiple rebel groups, but not against the principle of taxation by rebels. The NSCN (IM) issued tax receipts and tried to curb non-official taxation: “For every cash payment or receipt there is a cash memo or receipt. It is illegal without receipt. People do not pay if there is no receipt. Collecting money without receipt may be regarded as extortion. Extortion is punishable” (email conversation with Ninghor Raikham, May 11, 2010). By using receipts the NSCN (IM) also tried to create a sense of accountability for its taxation activities.

The instrumentalization of taxation as shared sacrifice was more difficult for the Naxalites, who lacked a clear-cut natural polity, to accomplish. They were aware that indiscriminate taxation might harm their cause in the long run and could lead to defection of civilians. Consequently, they chose to target specific groups for taxation. In contrast to the NSCN (IM), who used the funds almost exclusively to support the own organization (“the freedom struggle”), they used the revenues they raised to provide more services.

The most important sources of taxes for the CPI (Maoist) were the Beedi leaf contractors, who used Beedi leaf collected by tribals to make country cigarettes: “Extortion from these contractors is the single largest source of income for the Naxalites” (Ramana 2008). Some reports put the figure in tens of millions of rupees in one district of Andhra Pradesh. In return, contractors with good Naxalite contacts obtained the best government contracts, as the Naxalite presence scared potential competitors (Suykens 2010). Although the Naxalites criticized contractors as prime exploiters, they allied with them to raise funds for the revolutionary struggle.

While a large part of the collected funds went to sustain the armed struggle, the Naxalites redistributed funds to provide social services among civilians in their base areas. For example, a local RPC budget indicated careful accounting of receipts:

On the income side it showed Rs. 10 lakh [1 lakh = 100,000] and one thousand. This was made up of Rs. 360,000 tax on contractors, Rs. 500,000 allotted by *Jantam Sarkar* and Rs 250,000 collected through workdays or *shram daan* by the area households. On the expenditure side the budget showed that they spent Rs 506,935 towards defence, Rs 140,250 for agriculture, Rs 100,000 for health, Rs 10,000 for education, Rs 60,000 for trade and Rs 5,000 for public relations. (Navlakha 2010, 27)

SERVICES

The provision of services, such as education, healthcare, and the development of roads and irrigation systems, is a more complicated form of governance because their successful implementation requires a long-term rebel administration with a stable presence (Wickham-Crowley 1987; Mampilly 2011). Because they engage in civil war, rebel groups have ambivalent relations with these public goods. For example, rebels sometimes destroy infrastructure to prevent rapid deployment of state troops or schools they consider strongholds of the state.

Both the CPI (Maoist) and the NSCN (IM) frequently accepted Indian states' social services in areas where they were active. However, their reasons differed. Once again, the NSCN (IM) used natural allies to bypass setting up their own services, while the Naxalites saw the development of services as part of the development of stages of the revolution. They were masters in using state services to advance their agenda. In one sense their behavior was opportunistic, but it was also a strategic calculation to use available resources.

The Naxalites considered that many services would only be possible in later, more developed stages of the revolution. "As far as our developmental schemes are concerned: unless you seize the power centrally, it is not possible to implement pro-people policies thoroughly" (Shah 2010). Consequently, wherever possible, state institutions were allowed to continue. To garner support, the Naxalites tried to influence the implementation of state development programs. Ganapathi, the leader of the CPI (Maoists), did not see any contradiction between fighting the state and using its resources (Sreedharan 2000).

Several Naxalite supporters I interviewed also felt that the resources of the state were too important to ignore or let go to waste (see also Sundar 2007). One Naxalite maintained that they "put pressure on the government officials to implement their own programs" (interview, May 2007). Prakash Singh, a former chief of police and paramilitary, formulates it succinctly: "The poorer

sections ... found that what the politicians had been talking about and the government promising year after year could be translated into a reality only with the intervention of the Naxalites” (P. Singh 2006: 134). Naxalites gained support with a small investment when they could take credit for inducing the state to implement pro-poor policies.

The allocation of state development money and programs also provided the Naxalites with access to potential supporters. As in most of India, development projects were sanctioned through local networks of power brokers. In effect, the Naxalites became brokers for government contracts, for example, in rural Jharkhand (Shah 2006). Access to contractor’s jobs was highly prized in the local market for the opportunity to siphon funds, but that also meant the Naxalites catered to existing elites.⁸

In liberated areas almost completely under their control, the CPI (Maoist) tried to introduce a variety of services. As mentioned above, part of the taxes is meant to flow back to the population:

[I]n places where we have formed RPCs [Revolutionary People’s Committees], we have tried to develop pro-people economic policies. For instance, we are promoting the formation of cooperatives in agriculture and other related occupations. Secondly we are trying to develop methods of cultivation in the backward areas – we are digging up canals, wells and tanks – mostly through shramdan (voluntary labour). And we are opening schools and hospitals. We are giving medicines at subsidized rates. These things we are doing where we have formed RPCs. But all these things are in rudimentary form. (Shah 2010)

The CPI (Maoist) invested in agriculture by organizing irrigation, including building and maintaining large tanks. Experiments with collective farming took place with efforts to redistribute the produce of these farms on “class lines” (Navlakha 2010: 29). Other services were more difficult to organize. Shivrath, the President of the RPC that Gautam Navlakha visited, admitted that education was limited with only a party cadre, rather than a trained full-time teacher, available (Navlakha 2010: 28).

Like the Naxalites, the NSCN (IM) often did not challenge the state’s social services. In part this was the result of their scant capacity to organize them. However, the GPRN had other reasons not to interfere with these state functions, particularly in Nagaland state. Widespread support for the Naga cause among the population – whether one supported the rebel way of doing things or not – included many administrators in the official state government. The rebel group had good working relations with state officials in charge of these services, especially at the local level. Consequently, it did not consider the state’s welfare functions a challenge to its authority or to the idea of Naga nationalism. In contrast to the CPI (Maoist) which used its tax receipts to

⁸ Later contractors avoided development contracts involving Naxalites, due to increased prospects of repression (Shah 2009).

provide services, the NSCN (IM) used the funds they collected almost exclusively to support their own organization.

The mostly Baptist Christian churches were an important second player in this sector. In line with their policy of “Christian Socialism” and the slogan “Nagalim for Christ,” the NSCN (IM) had productive working relations with the church, which allowed the Christian organizations to organize hospitals and schools and to run many charities in Naga areas.

CONCLUSION

While many rebel groups organize governance, their approaches differ greatly. Ideology – how the rebel group understands its rebellion and its relation to its territory and population – affects how governance is implemented on the ground. Rebel governance differs significantly between insurgents who embrace a secessionist agenda demanding a clear-cut territory and polity and rebels who adopt a revolutionary program aiming to take over and transform a state. Governance among revolutionary rebels may also depend on the stage they feel the revolution has reached and pragmatic considerations of raising necessary funds and maintaining civilian support.

Comparing the governance efforts of the secessionist NSCN (IM) and the Maoist CPI (Maoist) provides evidence for these propositions. Examination of crucial governance functions, protection, justice, taxation, and service delivery demonstrates that Naga and Naxalite rebels had divergent approaches to governance. Their differences stemmed from the nature of their rebellions and the consequences of their respective visions for the population and territory they wanted to govern. This variation influenced the forms of rebel governance each group adopted. While the NSCN (IM) started from the premise of a separate Naga state and polity, the Maoists operated with a vision of an egalitarian socialist society that would require a revolution. Because they understood that the revolution could only be achieved in stages, they adopted a surprisingly pragmatic approach that allowed for some cooperation with Indian state officials.

For the Maoists, this meant a dynamic interplay between a high-minded concern with the core values of equality and a classless society, and the practical doctrine, also embedded in Maoist thought, allowing flexibility and adaptability as a core value in warfare. The CPI (Maoist) rebel governance included protection measures to insulate poorer civilian classes against exploitation by state and private forces, yet the practical doctrine of revolution demanded coalitions with other classes. Instituting class-based justice went hand-in-hand with the ad hoc judgments in cases involving different sections of the population. Taxation, while aimed at creaming-off the income of traders and contractors, also gave these traders access to resources and markets. The provision of services and infrastructure often used existing Indian government structures, but directed them toward the Maoist agenda.

For the NSCN (IM), governance efforts started from the premise of a natural polity based on Naga ethnicity, rather than revolutionary praxis, with the NSCN (IM) as its ruler. Their decisions for rebel governance reflected this conception. To accomplish them, the rebels tapped into different registers – prior Naga rebel governance, independent Naga “village republics,” and legal-bureaucratic notions of the modern state.

Protection was based “naturally” on the delineation of the Naga polity, distinguishing between insiders and outsiders and the necessity to defend Naga interests at the borders of Nagalim. Justice was mostly “decentralized” to “village republics,” while symbolic action in high-profile cases attempted to strengthen the rational-bureaucratic image of the NSCN (IM). Taxation structures were routinized, supporting the naturalization of rule. Specific measures for accountability were intended to strengthen the image of bureaucratic rationality. Service provision was unproblematic because it was designed only for members of the unitary Naga nation. But, similar to the Naxalites, services were mostly outside NSCN (IM) purview.

However, for both cases, I have only sketched the contours of rebel governance in this chapter. More research would demonstrate the local adaptations to the rebel governance practices of both groups. As I have shown elsewhere (Suykens 2010), everyday relations between rebels and state representatives are highly complex, involving many different variations of engagement and disengagement, both violent and non-violent. Focusing on spatial variation in governance activities of both groups would help sort out these relationships. Operationalizing the different local Indian state-rebel relations and their impact on rebel (and state) governance would provide another fruitful avenue. This research would help us better understand how populations in conflict zones can benefit from different types of rule, by rebels and/or by others.

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Myths Set in Motion: The Moral Economy of Mai Mai Governance

Kasper Hoffmann

ABSTRACT

Rebels may set myths into motion when they govern civilians. Rebels who want to overturn the socio-political order often incorporate its values, beliefs, representations, and practices into their governance of civilians. In doing so they govern through some of the myths underpinning that order. Many of these operate on an unreflective level among both rebels and local residents. Deploying these enables rebels to cultivate legitimacy among civilians whose support they solicit. But the novelty of rule by rebels is that it recasts existing values and beliefs into new political narratives that shape rebel governance profoundly. Drawing on a mixture of nationalist, pre-colonial, and Christian values and beliefs, General Padiri's Mai Mai militia group from South Kivu in eastern Congo produced a mythical narrative, forged around divine authority and the bipolar relation between autochthony and foreignness. This syncretic mythical narrative resonated deeply within the local society. It endowed Padiri with charismatic authority and enabled a highly centralized, authoritarian, and coercive form of rebel governance.

... very frequently the "world images" that have been created by "ideas" have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest. (Weber 1948: 280)

THE MORAL ECONOMY OF REBEL GOVERNANCE

When militiamen from General Padiri's Mai Mai group arrived in a new location seeking support for their armed resistance to a Rwandan-backed insurgent government in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), they would approach the local customary chiefs. They asked them to support their cause by providing supplies and recruits. To convince the local population

that their legendary invulnerability to enemy fire was not a hoax, they staged a simple demonstration. They sprinkled either a domestic animal, or piece of garment, with blessed water called *mai*, hence the name of the militia. They asked someone in the crowd to shoot at it. When the crowd saw that the animal had not been harmed or that the piece of hide or clothing had no bullet holes in it, many were convinced that spiritual forces protected the Mai Mai. To convince the remaining skeptics, the Mai Mai would ask one of them to shoot at a Mai Mai militia-man.

Part of the allure of a rebel group is its promise of a new and better society. Yet it is simplistic to think that rebels always stand in opposition to the existing socio-political order. No matter how radical the political vision of a rebel group, its practices are always embedded in historically contingent values, norms, beliefs, and forms of governance.¹ Thus, a rebel organization, which is endogenous to the political order within which it rebels, cannot avoid drawing on common cultural and political values (Clapham 1996: 11–15; Behrend 1999; Ellis 1999; Förster 2010). Indeed, rebels who fail to cultivate legitimacy among the civilian population act at their own peril, since they must rely on civilians for recruitment, intelligence, taxes, supplies, and labor (Kalyvas 2006: 174–76). This chapter examines issues of value-reciprocity between rebels and civilians in the specific case of General Padiri's Mai Mai in Eastern Congo between 1998 and 2003.²

The question of value-reciprocity between rebels and civilians concerns both structure and agency. The argument holds that, as a form of collective action, rebel governance is constituted in the dynamics among first, the historically contingent values, norms, beliefs, and practices that operate on an unreflective level in the mental structures of individuals within a socio-political order; second, the rebels' re-evaluation of these values, norms, beliefs, and practices; and third, the rebels' deliberate strategic calculations of the opportunities available within this socio-political order. As with other Mai Mai militias in North and South Kivu, General Padiri's Mai Mai carried out an armed insurgency with support from the Congolese government. Nevertheless, Padiri's Mai Mai group was the primary authority in the territory it held, not a delegate of the government in Kinshasa. It fought against the rebel governments of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo-Zaire (AFDL) and the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), both supported by the Rwandan Army in eastern Congo between 1996 and 2003.³

¹ I am grateful to Nelson Kasfir and Catharine Newbury who provided invaluable comments to earlier drafts of this paper.

² This paper is based on six months of fieldwork in eastern Congo, carried out between February 2005 and August 2010. Its primary sources are interviews with former members of the militia, as well as political and administrative documents produced by this group. After 2003, the majority of the group's members were integrated into the Congolese army.

³ The AFDL was the rebel movement that toppled Mobutu Sese Seko's regime and brought Laurent Désiré Kabila to power in 1997. The RCD was created in 1998 at the behest of Kabila's former allies Uganda and Rwanda.

The governance practices of Padiri's militia group drew on many of the values, rationalities, and practices of authority of the existing socio-political order of eastern Congo. The use of these values was sometimes a deliberate strategy to obtain a specific end: for example, rallying the population to fight against foreign occupation. At other times they were simply reproduced without conscious reflection. Despite the heterogeneity of the historical and geographical origins of the narratives and governance practices of the Mai Mai, three distinct tendencies stand out: pre-colonial, Christian, and nationalist beliefs and values. Nevertheless, these three basic tenets became amalgamated into a syncretic mythical narrative with a distinct universalizing logic centered on an opposition between "autochthony" and "foreignness."

The moral values and beliefs of myths and communal representations of Congolese political discourse shaped the narratives and governance practice of General Padiri's Mai Mai. When these mythico-religious values and beliefs were reprocessed into political values, they had powerful politico-epistemological effects on how rebels organized themselves and related to civilians through rebel governance. These effects raise two issues: first, that rationalities of mythico-religious thought are not superstitious forms of knowledge clouding the minds of primitive cultures (Lévi-Strauss 1966; Tambiah 1990); and, second, that political narratives invoking communal identities are not just smokescreens set up by rebel leaders to manipulate their audiences in order to reach their "real" objectives. Rather, mythico-religious values and beliefs and communal identities constitute an epistemological and political basis for legitimate rebel governance (see also Förster, [Chapter 10](#), this volume).

The values and practices of Padiri's Mai Mai were strongly influenced by the ethico-causal premise that good and bad fortune is metaphysical in origin. This premise had a profound impact on the rebels' modes of governance and combat. The narrative of the Mai Mai included a dehistoricized constitutive bipolar relation, consisting of the opposition between "autochthon" and "foreign" that in turn engendered a series of dividing practices. As a result, the group's governance practices were authoritarian, charismatic, cosmological, and personalized/charismatic.

Many scholars use a political economy approach to explain the causes of rebellion. In spite of their differences in approach, data, scope, and method, writers within the political economy approach share at least one assumption about the nature of rebellion: that representations deployed in political narratives are the byproduct of more fundamental dynamics. Whether the argument is essentially institutional, framing the causes of rebellion in terms of a "vacuum of government" (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Kaldor 1999), or rationalistic, framing rebellion in terms of "incentives" or "interests" (Weinstein 2007; Collier and Hoeffler 2002), representations and values are typically regarded as ephemeral phenomena compared to institutional breakdown and politico-economic interests. This leaves little room to analyze

the effects of values, beliefs, representations, and existing practices of political authority upon either the outbreak of civil war or the organization and practices of rebel governance. Instead, when narratives of rebels invoke communal identities such as ethnic groups and religious denominations, these writers depict them in *instrumentalist* and *utilitarian* terms.

The argument advanced here is not that rebels are actors without interests. Rather, a *moral economy* informs the power relations in which they act. Socio-political values and beliefs regulate their pursuit of interests. Moral economy provides a way to understand rebel governance that goes beyond both the trans-historical notion of interest of utilitarian theory, and a culturalist position which assumes that the thoughts and actions of individuals are dominated by a “Value System soaring above the populations and inducing their deportment” (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 44).

Instead, I argue that values of communal identity often inform both rebel and civilian thinking and practices. Evoking communal values may entrench rebel authority when notions of community are part of the core values structuring the unreflective experience of the social world for both rulers and ruled (Bourdieu and Waquant 1992: 73–74; Mampilly, Chapter 4, this volume). This authority may be converted into material benefits. This implies that notions of self-interest and beliefs in communal values do not contradict each other. On the contrary, they are mutually constitutive – hence the expression, the moral economy of rebel governance. But value-reciprocity between rebels and civilians is a double-edged sword. Rebels can evoke it to legitimize claims to authority, but civilians (and other claimants to authority) can also evoke it to challenge rebel governance.

The next section provides a historical context for the emergence of the Mai Mai militias in eastern Congo in the early 1990s. The fourth section outlines the organization of the Mai Mai administration of Padiri’s group. The fifth explains how old local cultural beliefs, combined with Christian and nationalist values, were recast and deployed in the exercise of authority by the Mai Mai. The final section shows how the beliefs and values of the group influenced the fighters’ conduct and affected their relationship with civilians.

THE EMERGENCE OF MILITIAS IN EASTERN CONGO

Today’s Mai Mai groups were not the first insurrectionists in eastern Congo.⁴ The direct predecessors of the Mai Mai were the Maoist-inspired Muleleists rebels of the 1960s. They were also influenced by nationalist values, opposed foreign domination, relied heavily on syncretic ritual spiritual practices, and, although ostensibly nationalist, were confronted by local and “ethnic” competition. They too tended to adopt the existing state administrative

⁴ Earlier insurrections have been studied in detail: for the case of the *Kitawala* revolt, see Biebuyck (1957: 7–40); Makombo (1998: 184–87); Merlier (1962: 231–49); Young (1965: 252–53); and for the *Binji-Binji* insurrection, see Njangu (1997); Cenyange (1976); Vlassenroot (2002).

framework in territories they conquered (Verhaegen 1966: 122; 1967: 332–34; Fox et al. 1965).

Mai Mai militias emerged during the profound crisis of legitimacy confronted by Mobutu Sese Seko's Popular Revolutionary Movement (MPR) single party regime (Vlassenroot 2002). The Mobutu regime governed the Congo between 1965 and 1997. Until the end of the Cold War, the regime was largely bankrolled by the West, which saw it as an ally against the spread of Communism in Africa (Young 1985; Kalb 1982; Nzongola-Ntalaja 1985, 2002). During Mobutu's thirty-two years in power, a politico-commercial clique consisting of persons with especially close kinship, ethnoregional, or personal ties to the president brought the country to the brink of ruin (Young and Turner 1985). In the process, the regime lost almost all its internal political legitimacy. When the cold war ended, the Mobutu regime lost much of its foreign support. Consequently, the focus of the regime's longstanding strategies of extraversion shifted from governments to private contractors, further fragmenting the country (Reno 1998). Mobutu's fall from diplomatic grace eroded the regime's already dwindling resource base, making it difficult for the regime to uphold its clientelistic rule.

Yielding under pressure from donors and the internal opposition, the regime launched a nominal democratization process in 1991 – the so-called *Conférence Nationale Souveraine* (CNS). However, as the regime opened political space in the republic, it intensified its strategies of patronage, oppression, and manipulation of ethnic competition to divide its mounting opposition (Reno 1998; de Villers and Tshonda 2002). *Géopolitique*, the stratagem of the Mobutu regime, required that delegates in the CNS process represent only provinces in which they were considered autochthonous. Consequently, the two Rwandan-speaking minority communities, the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge, were weakly represented (Jackson 2006: 102; de Villers and Tshonda 2002). While *géopolitique* allowed the Mobutu regime and its successors to gain much-needed political legitimacy among other “autochthon” communities, it infuriated Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge élites.

The regime's political calculus failed and events spiraled out of control as the country fragmented into a series of theaters of ethno-political conflict, mainly in Katanga and the Kivu (ICG 2006). In North Kivu a simmering conflict between autochthonous “ethnic” groups and the Banyarwanda that revolved around longstanding land issues and political rights boiled over in Masisi in North Kivu causing civil war (Mamdani 2002; Mathieu and Willame 1999; Jackson 2006). During this era, local communities started mobilizing their own militias (Vlassenroot 2002).

Historically, most Mai Mai militias that emerged in eastern Congo during the 1990s were linked to different “ethnic” communities, socially, politically, and economically (Vlassenroot 2002). Padiri's Mai Mai consisted mostly of Batembo (Padiri's “ethnic” group), although it recruited extensively from other

“ethnic” communities too. More importantly, the leadership group was almost exclusively Batembo and never abandoned ethnic political objectives.

ORIGINS OF PADIRI’S MAI MAI

According to local sources, the direct predecessor of Padiri’s Mai Mai was a Banyanga militia group called the *Katuku* (dynasty in Kinyanga) that began in a small village situated in Waloa-Lunda in Walikale on the border of Masisi, North Kivu, in the late 1980s. It mobilized in opposition to Banyarwanda militias. Batembo, a different ethnic group, from Bunyakiri became involved with the Katuku militia when *Mwami* (King) Katora Ndalemwa and his councilors of the sub-chieftaincy of Mubugu founded an alliance with them. Padiri is from Mubugu and became involved by trafficking arms to the Katuku in exchange for cattle.

In the confused and turbulent events following the defeat of the Rwandan National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND) regime in 1994, as many as 65,000 former soldiers of the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) and *Interahamwe* militia members, as well as part of the MRND leadership fled to the Kivu (Halvorsen 1999, 310; Emizet 2000, 165). The influx of over a million refugees and retreating MRND forces had an immediate impact on the conflict in the Kivu. Not only did it further militarize the Kivu, it escalated local conflict into the national and regional geopolitical struggle.

At first, the Katuku, including the Batembo, opposed the FAR and *Interahamwe* who had rearmed in the refugee camps along the border between the Kivu and Rwanda. Although the Katuku had fought the Banyarwanda and the Congolese army, it now sided with them (Prunier 2009). In 1996, the AFDL was organized by Rwandan and Ugandan military leaders first to remove the security threat posed by the FAR and *Interahamwe* in eastern DRC and then to overthrow Mobutu. Batembo leaders regarded the AFDL as a Tutsi invading force because Banyamulenge and Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) army units spearheaded it. In response, they formed an alliance with the FAR, *Interahamwe*, and the Congolese army and persuaded the Katuku to join.

However, cracks in these alliances soon appeared. The bulk of the Katuku fighting force were Banyanga youths. According to their code of conduct, the Katuku were obliged to live on a diet of meat. It became increasingly difficult for the Batembo leaders to supply meat for the Katuku and eventually the Katuku started pillaging the locals. Tensions quickly mounted. Since the Congolese army and the Rwandan Hutu units also pillaged, the Batembo leaders started to recruit their own self-defense militias.

In December 1996, Batembo leaders switched sides and accepted the AFDL’s claim that it was a liberation army. Mwami Katora Ndalemwa encouraged several thousand Katuku child soldiers – *kadogos* – to join the AFDL. However,

a large number of Batembo fighters stayed in Bunyakiri as a precautionary measure. At this point Padiri, who until then had only commanded a small group of fighters, became the leader. Padiri opposed the alliance with the AFDL due to its association with the Banyamulenge and the RPA. His group took to the bush to fight the AFDL. It operated in classic guerrilla fashion with hit-and-run attacks on AFDL and RPA units. The militia became a significant military challenge for the AFDL regime after the latter took power in the Congo, partly because Padiri maintained the alliance with former FAR and Interahamwe units.

In August 1998, Laurent Kabila, the president of the Congo, broke with Rwanda and expelled its troops. In response, Rwanda and Uganda organized the RCD to lead a new rebellion in the Kivu. The RCD lacked political credibility among the “autochthonous” population in the Kivu due to its allegiance to Rwanda, its Banyarwanda affiliation, its heavy-handed suppression of indigenous communities (Autesserre 2010; Reyntjens 1999; Namegabe 2005), and its involvement in the extraction of resources (Mampilly 2011; Tull 2003). The native population never accepted the RCD’s justification for the uprising – the re-establishment of democracy and the battle against corruption.

Kabila’s break with Rwanda provoked radical changes in the organization and political scope of Padiri’s Mai Mai militia. First, Padiri’s Mai Mai group allied with Kabila’s government, reversing its earlier opposition. In exchange, the Mai Mai received arms. Second, the escalation and regionalization of the conflict meant that Mai Mai groups became the rallying point of supra-ethnic nationalist armed resistance to foreign occupation and started receiving volunteers from the cities. Padiri’s group, for instance, received a significant influx of Bashi recruits from Bukavu. Third, Padiri and his officers saw the RCD attacks as an opportunity to empower the Batembo in the province and state. They used the Mai Mai to press for an autonomous Batembo geo-administrative unit, a demand that dated back to the colonial era (Bishikwabo 1984; Shanyungu 1988).

Padiri’s group gradually became the biggest Mai Mai group in eastern Congo. In November 1998, Padiri was nominally recognized as the leader of all Mai Mai in that area. In 1999 Kabila appointed him Brigadier General and supreme commander of all military operations in the East, thus officially recognizing the Mai Mai under Padiri’s command as part of the Congolese armed forces. Nevertheless, Padiri’s group retained its own command structure and freedom of operations. The withdrawal of Rwanda’s army in October 2002 and the Pretoria peace accords of December 2002 permitted the Mai Mai to control territory previously held by the RCD, greatly expanding its administration.

MAI MAI ADMINISTRATION

The organization of Padiri’s group and its relations to the civilian population underwent significant change after the group established itself in Mangaa in the

sub-chieftaincy of Kalima in 1998. For strategic purposes, the group's headquarters was hidden deep inside the rainforest. The leaders of the Katuku had been sidelined. During their period of dominance, the Katuku had not developed any organization to administer the population. Local accounts confirm that the group was akin to a warrior secret society. Civilians considered its members as delinquent youths who acted in a hostile and "barbarous" manner toward non-combatants, supplying themselves largely through pillage. Moreover, these youths were strongly attached to Banyanga as opposed to Batembo traditions.

The Katuku were known locally as "demons of the forest." The symbolic implications are significant. Historically, communities living in or near the rainforest in the Kivu distinguished sharply between "village" and "forest," seeing the two places as incompatible (Biebuyck 1976: 430). While the village offered protection and security, the forest was filled with danger and uncertainty. The forest was also a place of strange beings and monsters such as *Mpaca* (Specter) and *Kirimu* (Dragon-Ogre) (Biebuyck 1976). Katuku reclusiveness and hostility was probably linked to the village/forest dichotomy. As Biebuyck's account of circumcision rites among the Banyanga corroborates, young initiates, during their long seclusion in the forest, become beings of the forest and must act according to its rules (Biebuyck 1976: 431).

The new leaders of Padiri's group had different ideas. They wanted to include civilians in the "war effort," not exclude them. They took a more collaborative and inclusive attitude toward the civilian population. In addition, they infused the group's practices with methods of governance specific to the history of state and nation-building in the DRC. These methods were not new to the Batembo, who had been subjected to colonial administration since 1907 (Pindo 1976). What was new was that the Mai Mai were now the authorities performing as the state.

Padiri's group created a rudimentary governance structure called the *administration des forêts*. A significant number of people, including several customary chiefs who had supported the Mai Mai, had fled RCD and RPA counterinsurgency operations and settled in the forested localities of Mangaa, Chinéné, and Ekingi (Morvan 2005: 56). The general rationale for this early Mai Mai administration was to mobilize civilians to resume their daily activities and provide the Mai Mai with taxes and food. The Mai Mai used civilian agents – customary chiefs, administrators, intelligence agents, teachers, priests, and "animateurs" – to persuade them. A number of well-educated people joined the group and helped set up an administration based on the model of the defunct Congolese administration. In addition, they created a police and judicial structure.

The creation of the Mai Mai administration also marked a change in the group's discursive strategies toward the civilian population. The Mai Mai emphasized the idea that the Mai Mai and the civilian population constituted

an autochthonous community of destiny. Their slogan was “the Mai Mai are an army of the people.” But the new strategies of governance grew out of the Belgian colonial state’s mix of direct and indirect rule by creating a grid of nesting territorial subdivisions governed by state administrators at the higher echelons and customary chiefs at the lower ones (Callaghy 1984). The “État-Major” – the military headquarters presided over by Padiri – was officially at the top of the Mai Mai state within the state. Orders were passed down the chain of command to military and civilian personnel in charge of executing them. This geo-administrative system provided the headquarters with a grid of visibility through which they could control the population and territory, but not much beyond the administrative centers, especially since most of it was dense rainforest.

For the Mai Mai, the entire country had been corrupted and they took upon themselves to revolutionize it: “the spirit of corruption, tribalism, injustice, discrimination and division, of collusion with the enemy ... which haunts certain among our administrative personnel, civilian and customary, is contrary to our ideology” (FAC/OPS EST, June 8, 2002). Intermediary civilian authorities became indispensable for the Mai Mai. They were required to undergo an “ideological” education. The militia began organizing what they called ideological seminars intended to convert civilians to their cause. Mai Mai representatives preferred to hold these seminars in churches because their status as houses of God conferred the character of a revelatory sermon upon Mai Mai narratives. Priests of all denominations in Mai Mai territories became their crucial intermediary agents because they could influence the population.

Under the influence of defecting Congolese soldiers, the Mai Mai military organization was re-forged in the image of Congolese regular armed forces. It included a “Service de Renseignement” (Intelligence Service) attached to General Padiri’s headquarters. In addition, it worked with Rwandan – and to a lesser extent Burundian – Hutu insurgents, believing they faced a common enemy. This collaboration greatly increased the racialization and regionalization of the Mai Mai narrative. The conflict was increasingly portrayed as a war between Bantus and Nilotes. The main aspect that set the Mai Mai military organization apart from a conventional modern army structure was its “Bureau Six,” charged with responsibility for overseeing matters involving *dawa* (see *infra*; interview, Mai Mai “doctor,” May 7, 2005).

THE COSMIC ORDER AND AUTHORITY

Mai Mai governance adopted, recast, and deployed values and beliefs that pre-dated European influence. These are not *sui generis* Batembo, though. A Batembo culture has never existed as an integrated whole, in the manner that functionalist anthropologists used to think of “tribes.” Those who identify

as Batembo share several beliefs and practices with many other communities in the region, such as the Banyanga, Bahunde, Bahavu, and even the Bashi (Biebuyck 1976; Newbury 1991).

Authority and legitimacy derived partly from a mixture of ancient and Christian beliefs. At the summit of the cosmic hierarchy is *Ongo* (God), followed by *Nyamuariri* (chief of the divinities). The Mai Mai see Ongo as the same deity as the Christian God, but insist on their “purely African” way of worshipping the Supreme Being. For the Mai Mai “God” is the point of reference in the cosmos. Ongo is believed to be the “hearth of the earth,” the creator of all things, the ultimate cause and reason of everything: “The strength of Ongo is to put life into everything and to produce all the astounding things that surpass our understanding,” says one Banyanga proverb (Biebuyck 1976: 414). According to the Mai Mai, humans live in a symbiotic relationship with plants, animals, ancestors, and divinities.

In eastern Congo customary authorities still claim that the ancestors and divinities mediate the will of God to mankind, including decisions about who is to hold political office, notably the hereditary position of Mwami – the supreme (human) chief (interview, customary chief, August 5, 2010). Therefore, the office of the Mwami is vested with divine authority and is in principle inviolable. But the model of divine kingship, drawing its powers from a supernatural force soaring above society, was introduced by the colonial authorities trying to enforce chiefly power over the native in central Africa (Newbury 2009: 18). Prior to colonial intervention, the Batembo were organized politically into small-scale chiefdoms, each headed by a Mwami claiming ritual authority over his subjects and political autonomy from other chiefs of similar status. State organization had not developed to any significant degree amongst the Batembo (Newbury 1984: 36).

Unlike the Mwami, Padiri’s position was not hereditary and represents a break from the customary model of authority in the Kivu. Nevertheless, his authority was portrayed as divine by the Mai Mai and he was sometimes called *Général de Dieu* (God’s General). While the Mwami is considered the chief of a specific chieftaincy and the guardian of its customs, Padiri’s authority was grounded in nationalist values, such as the defense of the Congolese nation-state. In the narrative of the Mai Mai, Padiri possessed a divine mission to deliver the Congolese people from foreign aggression. Civilians in South Kivu, even non-Tembo, to some extent recognized the extraordinary spiritual powers of the Mai Mai. Many saw Padiri himself as a savior of the Congo imbued with the grace of God. It is hardly surprising that the Mai Mai mode of governance was authoritarian and highly personalized, with a vibrant personality cult centered on the person of Padiri.

The symbolic parallel between Padiri and the Judeo-Christian figure of the shepherd-ruler who watches over his flock (the Congolese) is unmistakable. It is God who has given, or promised, his flock a land – the Congo. Padiri, as God’s

emissary, gathers the dispersed individuals and leads them to the Promised Land:

In 1998 Padiri Bulenda emerged as the leader of the Mai Mai. He hadn't followed any military education. . . . He was called General of God because he was granted this grade without even knowing the capital of our country, but today he is a major general because of the combat he has waged for the country – it's one of God's miracles. He is also called General of God because he succeeded, at one time, in taking Bukavu without blood being spilled. . . . So he is chosen by God to do things that will amaze humanity. (interview, Mai Mai Assistant Territorial Administrator, May 2005)

Padiri was a “charismatic” leader because he became the personification of the struggle to liberate the Congo. The elevation of Padiri as God's chosen son served to install him as a messiah-like figure who, as the vessel of divine will, could bypass the existing socio-political order. In that sense the Mai Mai narrative made “descent from heaven that which it projects there from earth” (Bourdieu 1991: 20). Surrounded by a halo of divine authority, Padiri became the object of worship, requiring highly ritualized behavior that reflected his status as an elevated being.

Padiri's Mai Mai group attributed absolute value to the idea of the Congolese nation. For them the nation was a universal and trans-historical entity constituted by a conglomerate of Bantu tribes, built on the bedrock of shared authentic Bantu and Christian values. In their eyes, foreign interference and the RCD rebellion constituted a violation of the autochthons' God-given right to the land by foreigners. Since the Congolese state could not defend the nation, the Mai Mai considered its defense their divine right. However, this conviction among Mai Mai engendered a sense of entitlement. Belief in the justice of their cause led them to arrogate power. Consequently, the revolutionary message of the Mai Mai had a strong appeal among rural youth whose prospects of escaping socioeconomic marginalization had long been blocked by urban and rural elites (Vlassenroot 2002; Van Acker 1999).

The old order, based on respect for customary authorities and older generations, was disturbed.⁵ While Padiri's group collaborated with the customary authorities, the latter were clearly subjugated to the Mai Mai high command. In addition, kadogos, empowered by their newfound status as freedom fighters, started demanding respect and obedience even from senior civilians. As one kadogo explained: “The soldier is a great personality who should be respected because he defends his country and protects the population. In relation to the civilian, the soldier is superior because he ensures his security” (interview, demobilized kadogo, April 2005).⁶

⁵ Jourdan points to a similar reversal of power relations in the areas where the Lafontaine Banande militia was active in North Kivu (2004).

⁶ Morvan's research in Buyakiri also shows that youth enrolled in the Mai Mai militia tended to disrespect non-combatants (2005: 79–82).

THE COSMIC ORDER OF THINGS AND BEINGS

Rebels, so to speak, set values and beliefs in motion by engaging in governance practices. While not denying the importance of material interests, it is critical to trace the layers of values and beliefs that provided Mai Mai and civilians with a collective basis for socio-political order. Dislodging mythico-religious modes of thought and representation of communal identity from reality by labeling them as “false consciousness” obscures their impact upon Mai Mai governance practices and their relations to civilians.

In spite of their religious, ethnic, and political diversity, many Congolese share a conviction that the forces that govern humans are located in the realm of spirits and Gods.⁷ Dramatic syncretistic “religious movements,” such as the Kitawala movement, the Kimbanguist Church, and the Jamaa movement, are characteristic expressions, each endowed with a special spiritual force (de Craemer et al. 1976; Biebuyck 1957; MacGaffey 1983; de Craemer 1977; Fabian 1971). The same seems true of Padiri’s Mai Mai group and its connection to society in eastern Congo.⁸

This mode of reasoning is organized around a “fortune-misfortune constellation” (de Craemer et al. 1976: 463). In the underlying ethico-causal premise of this constellation both good and bad fortune are believed to be predominantly metaphysical in origin and caused by spirits and ancestors. One’s conscious or unconscious thoughts and feelings, or those of someone socially relevant to the actor, provoke these spirits into action. During grave conflict, this system of beliefs creates an atmosphere of extreme vigilance and distrust.

This cosmic outlook and the extreme anguish caused by the war led to the proliferation of purification rituals, taboos, and charms called *dawa* that protect the individual from spiritual and bodily harm. In fact, faith in the power of protective charms and amulets was so strong that the Mai Mai came close to exhausting the available Batembo stock. Local specialists were put under significant pressure to join the movement or to sell their services (interview, Mai Mai intelligence agent, Bukavu, December 2009). Consequently, the Mai Mai narrative was permeated with metaphysical convictions about the connections between people’s conditions and their spiritual bond with the environment, God, divinities, the nation, and their ancestors. These spiritual and cosmological aspects of Mai Mai discourse combined elements of local pre-colonial modes of thought with Judeo-Christian beliefs, similar to earlier spiritual movements in central Africa.

The Mai Mai narrative was providential, framing its mission as the extension of the will of the Supreme Being: “We believe that God Almighty directs man . . . our conviction is founded in an orientation which is superior to human life”

⁷ See Ellis (1999) for a similar observation in relation to the civil war in Liberia.

⁸ Padiri considered himself a Kimbanguist.

(interview, Mai Mai “doctor,” Bukavu, May 2005). Mai Mai believed that the ancestors were messengers from the spirit-world who could reveal to them otherwise inaccessible truths about the future (especially important in wartime), the presence of malignant sorcery, and new recipes for *dawa*. Contact with ancestors could be achieved through evocation rituals or at the initiative of the spirit through a person’s dream or by possession.

Since the Mai Mai narrative rested on the belief that the Supreme Being had created the cosmic order of beings and things, the Mai Mai considered the Congolese nation a timeless sacred entity. This notion enabled the Mai Mai to transform the liberation of the nation from foreign occupation into a sacred mission to restore the natural order. This cosmological myth had a high political exchange rate as the civilian population generally accepted this legitimating myth (Morvan 2005).

To underscore the heterogeneity of Mai Mai narrative and practice, its leaders actively promoted development initiatives and organized “development seminars” with civilians, greatly increasing their appeal. Like the colonial and the Mobutu state, the Mai Mai justified their claim to public authority as the champions of progress. In doing so, they inscribed themselves into a state-building routine performed in the Congo since the Congo Free State’s birth in 1885 (Dunn 2003; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). They were keenly aware of the obvious contradiction between simultaneously promoting a return to an authentic way of life and modernizing the DRC. They rationalized it as a dialectical logic, defensible on the grounds that the nation had to be developed in order to improve the conditions of the “popular masses” and defend itself against its enemies (interview, Mai Mai senior officers, Bukavu, May 2005).

THE SYMBOLIC EFFECTIVENESS OF DAWA

The influence of mythico-religious beliefs is obvious in the protective system of *dawa*. Rational and secular western science rejects mythico-religious practices such as *dawa* as superstitious, if not a sham. However, *dawa* is “symbolically effective” in Lévi-Strauss’s sense of rendering a given situation thinkable and acceptable within a specific social context (1958; Wahlberg 2008). As such, *dawa* provides concrete possibilities for moral and rational action.

The Mai Mai articulated *dawa* as a purely defensive system used to protect the combatant and civilians from spiritual and physical damage (interview, Mai Mai “doctor,” April 2005). If taboos were not transgressed, *dawa* was thought to protect a person from modern weapons. The cultural implication is as political as it is epistemological. It is hard to think of a more emphatic way to underscore the equation between “autochthony” and the Mai Mai than to demonstrate that they know and master authentic traditional knowledge. The Mai Mai, consciously and unconsciously, relied on this politico-epistemological effect when they staged demonstrations such as

shooting at a piece of hide or even a person. It produced a dramatized miracle-effect intended to convince civilians that the Mai Mai were benefactors of divine protection and possessed an other-worldly spiritual force.⁹ In the eyes of a population to whom the existence of God and spirits were as real as themselves, being imbued with divine protection was the ultimate sign of a just cause. But it also rendered the Mai Mai susceptible to charges of witchcraft and satanic practices (Wild 1998).

The ontological foundation of dawa is the unitary cosmic idea that all beings are spiritually interdependent. Humans live in spiritual union with plants, animals, ancestors, and divinities. If matters were to take their natural course, everyone would live a natural life span, triumphing over all obstacles (Douglas 1966). This perspective enjoined the Mai Mai to structure their actions to avoid rupturing the sacred bonds between a combatant and God's other creatures. A rupture could trigger revenge by the spirits: "The Mai Mai, like the Katuku, know that man is dependent upon having good relations with his environment and upon having good relations with the invisible beings, including the plants that live in total harmony" (interview, Mai Mai civilian activist, May 2005). Non-alignment was considered dangerous.

The causal mechanism believed to protect the Mai Mai could be styled as "spiritual interaction." Spirits of various beings were thought to interact with the spirit of the combatant when they entered his body. Spirits of animals, plants, and ancestors possessed the ability not only to protect the combatant, but also to augment his bodily capacities. For instance, the attributes of animals could be transferable to human beings when a combatant wore a particular part of a given animal: the lion (strong, fast, ferocious), the owl (night sight), and the gorilla (strength). The spirits of certain plants could also enhance the combatant's body: "There are trees that can resist all the seasons, and there are others that lose their leaves during the dry season. The leaves of trees that can resist all kinds of weather were worn by kadogos so that they could resist any situation and any circumstance" (interview, Mai Mai Assistant Territorial Administrator and Mai Mai doctor together, June 2005).

Each Mai Mai was obligated to observe a strict code of ethical conduct – *les conditions* – to preserve his bond with nature and to curb infractions against civilians (interview, Mai Mai civilian activist, May 2005). The sprinkling of *maï* (water) over the combatant was a purification ritual intended to cleanse the combatant of malignant spirits and impurities. Civilians could also be purified in this way. *Les conditions* also prohibited the Mai Mai from eating certain kinds of food – for instance, ducks were prohibited because they were slow. Mai Mai were not allowed to eat under open sky when it was raining because maledictions could enter the body, since they remain in the air until the rain cleanses it.

⁹ See Mampilly (Chapter 4, this volume) for an analysis of how the symbolic actions of rebels may legitimate their claims to political authority.

Money was generally considered an impure object, an “anti-value,” not only because it passed through the hands of many people, but also because it was associated with selfishness and personal profit. “If you become too attached to money, you will have sold out your conscience” (interview, Mai Mai officer and legal advisor, May 2005). For this reason, “the money that we obtained had to be kept in a pool” (interview, Mai Mai kadogo, May 2005). The prohibition against having sexual intercourse with women when the Mai Mai were at the front was a pivotal moral injunction. Women were considered potentially dangerous: first, because menstruation was believed to counter the effects of *dawa*; and second, because women were assumed to be naturally dishonest and capable of weakening the strength of men.

The logic of *dawa* as a system that was derived from the fortune-misfortune constellation was “perfect” in the sense that wounds suffered by a combatant or civilian could always be explained by lack of adherence to *les conditions*. Conversely, if a combatant or civilian overcame a great difficulty or enjoyed success, it demonstrated *dawa*’s effectiveness and the person’s spiritual “force.” The *dawa* code of conduct seems to have been so deeply inculcated that *kadogos* could revolt when their *commandant* failed to respect *les conditions*. *Les conditions* influenced both the internal organization of the Mai Mai and their relations with civilians – much like the ritual practices and oaths enabled *dozo* to be seen as trustworthy security providers in Korhogo (Förster, [Chapter 10](#), this volume).

THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN AUTOCHTHON AND FOREIGNER

The narrative of the Mai Mai was expressed in mythological time, which, as Lévi-Strauss points out, is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic (1958, 211). On the one hand, it held that the Congo was an eternal sacred entity that traveled through time untouched (synchronic time). On the other, it maintained that the Congo had a history from the beginning of time that had been disrupted by the imperialist ambitions of the “whites” and threatened more recently by foreigners intending to create a “Tutsi-Hima” empire in central Africa (diachronic time).

This narrative’s basic meaning expresses the dichotomy between “autochthon” and “foreigner,” often represented by the opposition between “Bantu” and “Nilo-Hamitic.” Several, ethno-racial identities were used as substitutes, such as “Batembo” as opposed to “Tutsi” and “Africans” as opposed to “Whites.” It provided a simple solution to the woes of the Congo: purifying the stain of the foreigner. By casting itself as a nationalist resistance movement fighting against Tutsi/Nilo-Hamitic aggression, the Mai Mai obtained political capital from the autochthonous majority. The foreign “Other,” especially the Tutsi, became the symbol for a highly complex patchwork of issues in eastern Congo (Jackson 2006: 117). As one former Mai Mai officer explained: “What pushed me to join was that we were told the Tutsi

are going to exterminate all the men and rule with the women in order to make the Congolese progeny disappear. I felt that was a threat” (interview, ex-Mai Mai officer, March 2005).

That the categories of Nilo-Hamitic, Tutsi, and Bantu were constructs invented by colonial writers preoccupied with categorizing the African population into racial typologies mattered little (Lemarchand 2009: 49–68; MacGaffey 2005; Mamdani 2002: 79–87). They were mythological representations whose function was both epistemological and political. The autochthon/foreign dichotomy provided Mai Mai and civilians with an explanatory model for the cause of the war. The Mai Mai mobilized civilian support by casting the invasion of the Congo by foreigners as a transgression of a taboo that provoked a defensive reaction by spiritual forces to restore the natural state. This mythical narrative tapped into popular outrage against Rwandan military intervention, the RCD rebellion, and the ensuing humiliations and brutality.¹⁰

Mai Mai agents consistently instructed the civilian population about their civic duty to support the Mai Mai cause of countering their enemies’ ambition to create a Tutsi–Hima empire in eastern Congo. But their moral lessons did not stop there. The revolutionary message of the Mai Mai also demanded Congolese citizens to purge the “anti-values” of egoism, ruthlessness, greed, ruse, sorcery, and adultery from their souls. As if to complete a logical argument, these values were depicted as a foreign disease that had alienated the Congolese from their “authentic” and virtuous way of life. The Mai Mai counted on their civilian agents to “awaken the nationalist conscience of the Congolese” (interview, ex-Mai Mai officer, March 2005). By focusing on a return to an authentic core, the Mai Mai joined another time-honored discursive strategy in the Congo – the Mobutu regime’s radical *autencité* campaign in 1973. Thus, while the Mai Mai claimed to revolutionize the Congolese by inculcating the values of a glorious past, their revolution tapped into the existing values of the socio-political order.

The autochthon/foreigner dichotomy also had a darker side. Mai Mai soldiers often acted erratically and violently toward the civilian population, sometimes even killing them. In any dispute, a soldier could justify himself by accusing the civilian of treason that had brought misfortune upon him (interview, former Mai Mai civilian agent, July 2010). Overall, the autochthon/foreigner dichotomy engendered a division in the local population between patriots and traitors. Informants working for the Mai Mai tracked down traitors who sympathized or worked with the “enemy.” Traitors could be punished by house arrest, incarceration, or, in extreme cases, death. In addition, the Mai Mai demanded that civilians devote themselves to the point of sacrificing their lives for the salvation of

¹⁰ For a detailed documentation of the worst atrocities committed in the Congo between 1993 and 2003, see UNOHCHR (2010).

the community. As one Mai Mai told me bluntly: “a man who cannot die for his land is not a responsible man” (interview, Mai Mai Territorial Administrator, March 2005). Thus, the Mai Mai placed heavy emphasis on the ethical principle of obedience to a higher cause, so much so that every citizen may be exposed to death, as long as this leads to the final liberation of the Congolese people.

The division between traitors and patriots also led to a division of social space between forest and town. The Mai Mai resided in the forest, while the RCD primarily occupied towns, roads, and certain mining areas. For the Mai Mai, this implied that those who chose to live along the road and in the main towns such as Bulambika in Bunyakiri were sympathizers of the RCD. When the Mai Mai attacked the RCD they justified pillaging civilians because the civilians’ choice to live with the enemy meant they collaborated with the enemy.¹¹

Despite its deep embeddedness in the social fabric, the emergence of the Mai Mai radically altered local power relations. Batembo leaders, not least chiefs who had been removed and their allies, chose to seek the support of the RCD (interview, Batembo NGO worker, Bukavu, June 2010; Morvan 2005: 53–54). Consequently, serious intra-Batembo violence was frequent. The combination of erratic violence, pillaging by fighters, pressure to supply food, excessive taxation, forced portage of munitions and other supplies, and forced recruitment of children gravely undermined Mai Mai legitimacy. Civilian discontent with the authoritarianism of the Mai Mai headquarters must be seen in light of the egalitarianism of Batembo society, where social cohesion arises from personal mobility and widespread alliance networks rather than from hierarchical political power (Newbury 1984). Civilians in Hombo were highly skeptical of the Mai Mai: “On days when the market is open, the Hutus and the Mai Mai shoot with their guns so they can pillage. The Mai Mai have lost the confidence of the population. They have forgotten that we received them. When they pass through here they harass us” (Morvan 2005: 51).

In many respects the Mai Mai acted within the socio-political order, but transgressed it by over-reliance on coercion of civilians. Lack of respect for local customs, particularly fighters’ conduct toward women, also reduced its legitimacy. Historically, sexual relations and marriage arrangements were regulated by Christian and pre-Christian values, as well as the interests of family and clan in forging alliances and acquiring dowry, especially in rural areas (Dikonda 1972: 260–94; Colle 1971: 65–100). The status of young Mai Mai fighters allowed them to transgress sexual and marital norms by taking several wives. Historically, only the nobility could do so (Colle 1971: 50). In addition, the Mai Mai could force women to have sexual intercourse. In earlier times customary law would have severely sanctioned the practice, in some cases

¹¹ Kriger presents a similar case in Zimbabwe (2008: 208).

by death (field notes, June 2010). Many civilians considered such behavior offensive and barbarian.

CONCLUSION

Layers of values and beliefs about appropriate practices shape rebel governance. Even rebels who want to make sweeping changes to the socio-political order often adopt local values. The governance practices of General Padiri's Mai Mai group were deeply influenced by a heterogeneous ensemble of pre-colonial, nationalist, and Christian values and beliefs. These principles combined to form a syncretic yet universalizing mythical narrative that was set in motion in the group's governance of civilians. This narrative was symbolically efficacious because it resonated deeply with local values and beliefs. It provided the Mai Mai with political capital that enabled them to connect with the local population. The narrative revolved around the notion of "autochthony" in opposition to "foreignness." The latter was presented as the singular obstacle to a return to a mythical authentic Congolese way of life. It offered a simple solution to end the current crisis by purifying the Congo from the stain of the foreigner. The mythical aspect of the Mai Mai narrative also endowed Padiri with charisma. He came to embody the divine cause of defending the Congolese nation from foreign aggression. Metaphorically speaking, the divine essence of the Supreme Being was transposed to him as the subject chosen to carry out His Will. Hence, the case of Mai Mai governance illuminates a curious puzzle about rebel governance. Sometimes the intention to change the existing political order ends up reinforcing society's underlying values and even imitating some governance practices of the state that rebels proclaim they want to extinguish.

By re-actualizing pre-colonial, Christian, and nationalist values and beliefs, by forging a syncretic myth, and by breathing new life into practices of governance and authority inherited from the Congolese state, the Mai Mai officials asserted their authority, although it was not uncontested. They undertook an authoritarian and coercive form of governance that required the civilian population to engage in the war effort by supplying labor, intelligence, recruits, taxes, and supplies at great cost in terms of human life and resources.

Popular outrage against Rwandan military intervention and the ensuing brutality was widespread in eastern Congo. This helps to explain why many in eastern Congo saw the Mai Mai's insurgency against the RCD as legitimate. However, the demands on civilians for the war effort and the erratic and sometimes violent behavior of the Mai Mai decreased their popularity. Many Christians came to see even their famed *dawa* as "black magic" rather than divine protection. This shows that rebel political narratives and performances evoking values and beliefs that are largely shared with civilians may strengthen rebel claims to authority. However, if in practice they transgress these values

and beliefs, their claims to authority may suffer. Values and beliefs are subject to conflicting interpretations and appropriations. They are not only moral codes, but also symbolic capital deployed by actors in concrete struggles over authority.

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Civilian Resistance to Rebel Governance¹

Ana Arjona

ABSTRACT

What explains the emergence of civilian resistance to governance by a non-state armed actor? Why does it take a particular form? This chapter theorizes the origins of different types of civilian resistance against rebel rule. It argues that some form of resistance emerges against all rebel governance – as with any kind of rule. Whether such resistance is against certain aspects of rebel governance – partial resistance – or against governance altogether – full resistance – depends on the armed group’s scope of rule and the quality of local institutions in place prior to the arrival of the group at the area. Whereas partial resistance is ubiquitous in rebel governments, full resistance tends to emerge only when (i) rebels (or counter-rebels) attempt to establish an interventionist rule, and (ii) pre-existing institutions are both legitimate and effective. This chapter illustrates the feasibility of the argument by presenting both quantitative and qualitative original evidence on Colombian local communities where guerrilla or paramilitary groups have operated.

INTRODUCTION

How can unarmed civilians defy armed insurgent or paramilitary groups that attempt to rule them? All rulers incite opposition and rebel rulers are not the exception: civilians disagree with, disobey, and even openly confront armed combatants who rule their communities. While civilian support is often

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discussed as a key means for rebel survival and success, resistance is rarely theorized. Excellent case studies have demonstrated the existence of civilian opposition to armed groups, but we ignore how common it is and why it emerges in some cases but not others. Neglecting this phenomenon obscures our understanding of civilian agency, rebel behavior, and civilian–combatant relations.

In this chapter I focus on two forms of civilian resistance against rebel rule: *partial resistance*, which entails opposition to specific decisions or actions by the rebels; and *full resistance*, which entails opposition to rebel rule altogether. I theorize when, and why, each of these forms of resistance is likely to emerge.

I propose two central hypotheses. First, partial resistance to rebel governance is present in every community where rebels govern. Second, full resistance is much more costly: it is likely only when civilians have both a strong desire to reject rebel rule and a high capacity to engage in collective action. Two factors determine civilians' willingness and ability to resist collectively: the quality of pre-existing local institutions (i.e., the institutions in place prior to the arrival of the rebel group), and the scope of rebel intervention in local affairs once the group arrives. I develop this argument by delving into armed groups' strategic needs as well as civilians' preferences for governance and capacity to organize risky collective action.

To illustrate the feasibility of the argument, I rely on original evidence as well as secondary sources on the interaction between local communities and both guerrilla and paramilitary groups in Colombia. This evidence shows how civilians negotiate with, and resist, non-state armed groups under different conditions.

The first section briefly discusses resistance within the existing literature. The [second section](#) defines the research question, introduces key concepts, and develops the argument. The third introduces the Colombian case. The fourth describes the two explanatory factors advanced by the theory within the Colombian context: minimal and interventionist rebel governance, and pre-existing local institutions. The [fifth section](#) discusses resistance by communities to guerrilla and paramilitary rule. The conclusion identifies implications for our understanding of civil war, rebel governance, and political order in general.

CIVIL WAR, CIVILIAN CHOICE, AND RESISTANCE

In civil war, civilians may offer an armed group their support voluntarily, passively obey its demands, oppose it, or flee. Understanding these choices is essential in addressing rebel behavior, war dynamics, and the effects of conflict on local populations. Scholars have stressed that rebels strive to win the support of local populations, given how crucial it is for their quest (e.g., Kalyvas 2006; Guevara et al. 1997; Mao 1978); yet, what the opposite of that support is, how it varies, and how it shapes war dynamics is rarely theorized.² In particular, resistance to armed actors has been largely overlooked.

² But see Barter (2012) and Arjona (2010, ch. 4) for a careful conceptualization of civilian choices.

In recent years, scholars and activists have written about “peace communities” or “zones of peace” – instances of organized, peaceful resistance during wartime. Most of this work is primarily empirical, describing how local communities have confronted rebels and militias, especially in Colombia and the Philippines (e.g., Hancock and Mitchell 2007), while a few investigate the consequences on civilians’ safety (Kaplan 2013). Other forms of less structured resistance have been explored in case studies that stress the importance of negotiations and transactions between civilians and combatants in war zones, as well as daily forms of hidden resistance (e.g., CNRR 2011; Barter 2012 and Chapter 11, this volume; Förster, Chapter 10 this volume; Lubkemann 2008; Uribe de Hincapié 2006; Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004). These studies highlight the importance of civilian resistance and call for an explanation: Why does it take place at certain times and places, but not in others? And why does it take a particular form?

THE ARGUMENT³

The argument I propose requires defining four concepts: community; the scope of rebel intervention in local affairs; the quality of pre-existing local institutions; and resistance. By community, I mean the people who inhabit a given local territory and “interact directly, frequently, and in multi-faceted ways” (Bowles and Gintis 2002: F420).

Turning to rebel intervention in local affairs, I focus on the establishment of rules to regulate civilian conduct by either insurgents or irregular counter-insurgents such as paramilitaries.⁴ The rules that these groups establish may concern any sphere of local life – be it politics, economics, or social relations. Following Arjona (2014), I focus on two types of governance based on the scope of the group’s intervention in local affairs.

The first is *rebelocracy*, the rule of rebels, in which the armed group acts as an interventionist government. It regulates conducts beyond security and taxation, in realms such as politics, economics, and social relations. The armed group may also provide, or intervene in the provision of, public goods and services such as education, health, or food. The second type is *aliocracy*,⁵ the rule of others, where the armed group does not intervene beyond the realms of security and taxation, thus leaving other matters in the hands of others – be it the state, traditional authorities, civic

³ The argument relies on, and extends, a theory of the origins of social order in civil war developed elsewhere (Arjona forthcoming).

⁴ For simplicity, I use the terms *rebel rule* and *rebel intervention* when presenting the theory. However, the argument applies to irregular insurgents as well as counterinsurgents.

⁵ From the Latin Word *alios*, meaning other.

leaders, or other actors. In other words, *aliocracy* resembles a minimal government while *rebelocracy* is closer to a comprehensive one.⁶

I now turn to pre-existing local institutions, which I define as the formal and informal rules that structure social interaction in a given community (North 1991), prior to the arrival of the armed actor to the area. These institutions may come from different sources such as the state, traditional or religious authorities, local organizations, and even charismatic leaders who succeed in organizing a community around a set of principles. Local institutions also vary in terms of their quality – that is, their legitimacy and efficacy. By legitimacy I mean that most members of the community believe their governing institutions are rightful. By efficacy, in accordance with legal theory, I mean that most people obey the rules.

I differentiate between high-quality and low-quality institutions. High-quality institutions are *both* legitimate and effective, whereas low-quality institutions are either illegitimate or ineffective. This classification merges communities that have deeply different structures. Consider a community in which people value their traditional norms but no longer observe them because they are deemed obsolete. By contrast, a community that is strongly divided along ethnic lines, with one group dominating another, may have effective institutions if the decisions made by the dominant group are enforced, but would appear illegitimate to a part of the community. Both communities fall under the category of low institutional quality. While they differ in many ways, I will argue that they face similar challenges when dealing with an armed actor attempting to rule them.

Finally, resistance refers to any act of opposition to an armed group. In the literature, what counts as resistance is subject to debate (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). I ascribe to a minimalist definition that includes both expressive acts showing disagreement and acts of disobedience. These acts vary along different dimensions: they may be overt or concealed; collective or individual; structured or loose; intended or unintended; peaceful or violent; sporadic or regular. Although all of these dimensions are relevant, I focus on scope to derive two broad types of resistance: partial resistance, where opposition is against specific conducts or decisions of the armed ruler but not against its rule; and full resistance, where opposition is against the group's rule altogether. To illustrate, a protest against a government's health policy is an act of partial resistance; a protest demanding the president to step down is an act of full resistance. It is important to note that I am not defining resistance based on civilians' perceptions or preferences of the ruler; rather, I focus solely on their behavior.

Partial resistance entails a variety of acts, ranging from symbolic expressions of discontent that often go unnoticed by the armed actors – what Scott (1985)

⁶ I argue elsewhere that these institutional arrangements are better conceptualized as forms of social order. For simplicity, in this chapter I refer to them as types of rebel governance. For a further discussion of social order and disorder in war zones see Arjona (2014, forthcoming).

TABLE 9.1 *Conditions Determining Partial and Full Resistance*

		Scope of armed group's intervention in local affairs	
		Low (Aliocracy)	High (Rebelocracy)
Quality of pre-existing local institutions	Low	Partial	Partial
	High	Partial	Full

calls “everyday resistance” – to openly questioning rebels’ commands or actions. A shopkeeper closing his store to avoid selling goods to a fighter, a youngster’s disobedience of a curfew, and a mother’s demand that combatants stop harassing her son are all examples of partial resistance.

For resistance to be full, opposition cannot be against *aspects* of rebel intervention; it must be against rebel rule altogether. It may involve one person or the entire community and can be highly organized or unstructured. Instances of full resistance include a person demanding an armed group leave the territory or an entire community disobeying all of its commands.

When is resistance likely to emerge in a locality where rebels rule? When is it partial or full?⁷ For simplicity, I refer only to situations where a single armed group controls the territory – almost a condition for rebel governance to emerge (Arjona forthcoming; Kasfir, [Chapter 2](#), this volume), and where it aims to create some form of order. The argument, therefore, concerns localities where a non-state armed group controls the territory and attempts to establish clear rules to regulate conduct.

I argue that (i) resistance is concomitant to any rebel government; and (ii) the form it takes depends on the scope of rebel intervention and the quality of pre-existing local institutions. While aliocracy tends to trigger only partial resistance, rebelocracy can elicit either full or partial resistance, depending on the quality of the local institutions that exist prior to the arrival of the armed group. Communities with high-quality institutions – those that are legitimate and effective – are more likely to engage in full resistance against a rebelocracy, while communities with low-quality institutions – those that are either illegitimate or ineffective – are likely to engage only in partial resistance. [Table 9.1](#) summarizes the argument, and the remainder of this section develops it.

Partial resistance is likely to emerge in all cases of rebel governance. Two reasons explain the ubiquity of partial resistance. The first is the impossibility of any ruler fully controlling the population. Theorists of irregular war have

⁷ Resistance emerges against rebel governance, violence (which may occur within or outside governance), or both. In this chapter I focus on resistance to rebel governance, not to violence per se.

convincingly argued that rebels (and counter-insurgents) strive to control local territories. Such control requires monitoring civilians, as they may aid enemy efforts (Mao 1978; Guevara et al. 1997; Trinquier 1964; Galula 1964; Kalyvas 2006). Rebels, therefore, typically obsess over defection and treason, similar to paranoid dictators. However, it is hard to fully control the behavior of the ruled. Even the most repressive regimes have fissures through which individuals can voice their disagreement. Subordinates often question the system in which they live – even if they do support it to some extent – and sabotage it either symbolically with jokes and songs, or substantively with small acts of disobedience and misconduct (Scott 1990). As it is virtually impossible to monitor everyone at every moment, expressive acts of opposition are likely to take place in every locality under rebel rule. Even an armed group with a large network of informants and a tight monitoring system will miss some acts that challenge its authority.

The second reason why partial resistance is common is that rulers cannot hold power solely on the basis of coercion, as political philosophers, researchers of dictatorships, and revolutionary leaders alike have noted. To start with, rebels cannot rely on coercion alone to elicit the kind of support they need from civilians (Wood 2003). In addition, even if a community lacks the capacity to launch organized resistance, individuals can help the enemy to gain control. Several scholars have noted that the decision of rebels to rely only on oppression often backfires. Gutiérrez-Sanín (2003), for example, describes how civilians who are abused by an armed group end up supporting its enemies. Similarly, Wickham-Crowley (1987; Chapter 3, this volume) argues that when guerrillas break the social contracts they establish with civilians, they are likely to lose control. Mampilly (2011) also argues that rebels must take into consideration the demands made by civilians in order to secure their loyalty. Therefore, armed groups learn that they need at least some voluntary cooperation from locals, and that giving them voice to express their discontent is a useful strategy.

To be sure, this voice is strictly limited, as armed groups also want to minimize displays of opposition that could discredit their rule and avoid any possibilities for challengers to mobilize others against them. The tension that arises from the group's need to control the behavior of its subjects while allowing some expression of discontent gives place to partial resistance.

In sum, as with any kind of rule, some willingness to oppose at least certain aspects of rebel rule is to be expected regardless of how popular or repressive rebels are. In fact, it is in the rebels' interest to allow for some expression of this opposition. Partial resistance is therefore to be expected in most, if not all, rebel governments.

Full resistance, however, is a different beast. When armed groups strive to preserve their control over territories and populations, it is unlikely that they will tolerate civilians' opposition to their very rule. Just like dictators, rebels seek to eliminate potential mobilizers against them early on; for this reason,

while they allow individuals to voice disagreements with the specifics of rebel governance, total defiance is not tolerated. If a single person were to overtly oppose rebels' rule, the response would be harsh. Individual civilians are therefore unlikely to take this risk.

Yet, a community can have some leeway if it can make a credible threat of massive disobedience and sustained opposition. Armed groups face significant costs when killing many members of a given community: first, violence may lead to negative sentiments toward the perpetrator, making civilians less amenable to offering voluntary support in the future and therefore making it harder for the group to control the territory for a long period of time; second, such intense violence may stir a strong response from the state; and finally, there are reputational costs, as rebels may lose support elsewhere (both domestically and abroad). Since rebels are not likely to kill everyone in the community, for civilians the risk of engaging in full collective resistance is lower than that of doing so alone. It follows that full resistance is likely to emerge in the form of organized, collective opposition, rather than individual opposition.

Full collective resistance against rebel rule requires two conditions: a generalized desire to resist, and the capacity to do so. I argue that the desire to fully oppose rebel rule is not to be expected everywhere, as civilians may not have strong preferences for preserving the pre-rebel status quo and may even welcome rebel intervention. However, civilians not only have to *want* to resist, they also have to be able to do it. Under what conditions would civilians both want to resist and have the capacity to do so?

The answer, I argue, lies in the existence of high-quality local institutions prior to the arrival of the armed actor – that is, institutions that are both legitimate and effective. Institutional quality shapes resistance through two mechanisms: first, by shaping community members' preferences for existing institutions, and therefore their desire to oppose a new regime that threatens them; and second, by affecting their capacity for engaging in collective action.

Under the first mechanism, local institutions shape civilians' preferences for change: in a community with high-quality institutions, people value their institutional status quo and have a strong preference for preserving it. In a community with low-quality institutions, people are less likely to value their current institutions; even more, those who perceive their institutions as illegitimate or ineffective may welcome change.

Traditionally, collaborating with rebels has been portrayed as an instance of collective action – while people anticipate gains, participating in the rebellion is costly (e.g., Popkin 1979; Wood 2003). In areas where either insurgents or irregular counter-insurgents rule, however, cooperation tends to be the dominant strategy, as it leads to pleasing the armed actor and avoiding its reprisals. Full resistance, in contrast, is risky and its benefits cannot be delivered to participants alone. In other words, it is a classic collective action problem.

In addition to shaping preferences for current institutions, the quality of pre-existing institutions also affects the community's capacity for collective action. The existence of legitimate and effective institutions influences the extent to which community members rely on shared norms of behavior and conflict resolution, as well as their organizational capacity, interpersonal trust, and reciprocity. These factors have been repeatedly found to affect the capacity to initiate and sustain collective action (e.g., Flora et al. 1997; Ostrom 1990, 1998, 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Temple and Johnson 1998). Communities with low-quality institutions, on the other hand, lack such attributes. The resulting divisions make it difficult for them to agree on a course of action and overcome the issue of free-riding. These communities are therefore unlikely to organize resistance to either rebelocracy or alioracy.⁸

Under what conditions do communities with high-quality institutions engage in full resistance? I argue that despite having the capacity to resist any type of rebel governance, such communities are likely to do so against rebelocracy but not alioracy. Institutions are certainly not all that civilians care about: safety matters too, as do the time and resources that resistance requires in order to succeed. Incurring these costs is deemed worthwhile only when civilians anticipate a high probability of success – that is, rebels giving into their demands. While rebels are likely to give in when civilians engage in full resistance against rebelocracy, they are not when such resistance is directed against alioracy. Let us discuss this condition further.

When civilians oppose rebelocracy, rebels essentially have an alternative mode of governance – alioracy – that allows them to preserve their control over the territory, even if they give up some control over civilian affairs. However, when civilians defy alioracy, they are opposing rebels' monopoly over the use of violence. Controlling a territory without this prerogative is rather challenging, if not impossible. Hence, if rebels were to give in, they would risk losing their territorial control altogether – a situation they are not likely to accept because controlling territory is often their primary goal (Kalyvas 2006). The odds of success of collective resistance to alioracy are therefore rather low.

Furthermore, incurring the burdensome costs involved in collective resistance is only justified when armed groups significantly threaten the institutional status quo that civilians want to preserve. When rebels aim to establish alioracy, such status quo is not radically threatened; when, on the other hand, rebels pursue rebelocracy, local institutions are expected to change dramatically. It is against such intrusive rule that communities are

⁸ Communities' capacity for collective action may also change as a result of either top-down or bottom-up processes triggered by policies, social movements, and even widespread violence. See Arjona (forthcoming).

willing to organize collective resistance in order to defend their institutional status quo.

In sum, full resistance is likely to emerge when an armed group attempts to establish a rebelocracy in a community with high-quality institutions. Otherwise, civilians are not likely to be both willing and able to launch full resistance against rebel rule, and are therefore more likely to engage only in partial resistance.

THE COLOMBIAN CASE

The Colombian conflict started in the 1960s when self-defense groups that formed during a civil war called *La Violencia* (“The Violence”) launched a Marxist armed movement known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Other rebel groups embracing communism emerged in the following years.

In the mid-seventies, many of these groups saw an accelerated expansion as they used illicit drugs, kidnapping, and extortion to finance their operations, develop their military capacity, and expand to new territories. Their activities, together with decentralization policies and the possibility of peace agreements with the government, threatened regional and local elites, who formed paramilitary groups (Romero 2003). Based on income derived from drug trafficking and both voluntary and coerced contributions from landlords and firms, paramilitary groups expanded throughout the country, creating a new wave of intense violence between the 1980s and 2000s. The national army failed to combat these groups, and in fact often cooperated with them (Romero 2003; López 2010).

The 1990s were characterized by an unprecedented territorial expansion of all warring sides (Sánchez and Chacón 2006). The FARC became the strongest of all guerrilla groups, while some smaller groups negotiated their demobilization with the government. Paramilitary groups also underwent a tremendous expansion during this period, often allying with narco-traffickers and politicians (Romero 2003; López 2010).

Under President Uribe’s first term (2002–2006), many alleged members of paramilitary groups demobilized. According to most sources, violence decreased in the mid-2000s (e.g., CNHM 2013). Since 2008, violence by neo-paramilitaries, the so-called criminal bands (CNAI 2009), and the FARC’s hit-and-run operations (Valencia and Ávila 2011) have increased. Although homicides have decreased in the country as a whole, certain regions, especially on the Pacific coast and along the border with Venezuela, currently suffer from intense violence. Since 2012, the Colombian government and the FARC have been negotiating a peace agreement that, if successful, would put an end to the five-decade long conflict.

REBEL GOVERNANCE AND PRE-EXISTING LOCAL INSTITUTIONS IN COLOMBIAN COMMUNITIES

I argued that resistance is explained by the scope of rebel intervention in local affairs and the quality of pre-existing local institutions. A brief description of variation in rebel intervention and local institutions is therefore necessary to investigate civilian resistance in Colombia. I rely on extensive fieldwork where, with the help of an outstanding research team, we combined surveys, structured interviews, and focus groups in seventy-four randomly selected communities located in nineteen (of thirty-three) departments of the country. By community I mean a village, town, or neighborhood. Only communities that had interacted for at least six consecutive months with guerrillas, paramilitaries, or both between 1970 and 2012 were included in the study.⁹ After briefly describing the overall attributes of rebel intervention and pre-existing institutions, I turn to specific cases that illustrate the explanatory power of these factors in determining the type of resistance that emerged.

Rebel Governance

As defined, *aliocracy* is characterized by an armed actor that does not rule beyond security and taxation. In the cases included in the study, combatants often established rules to preserve public order, such as forbidding theft and rape. In some cases, they also collected some type of contribution, sometimes in the form of regular payments, while others involved more sporadic demands of money, food, or goods.

Rebelocracy, on the other hand, involves intervention beyond security and taxation. Depicting this type of rule requires more details, given how varied armed groups' intervention is across cases. I briefly illustrate this variation by focusing on armed groups' administering of extralegal justice, their provision of public goods, and their regulations of specific conducts.

Both paramilitary and guerrilla groups created an extralegal justice system in many of the areas in which they ruled. Sometimes people would bring their conflicts to representatives of the community first, and only turn to the armed group when the former failed to resolve their conflicts; in other cases, people would go directly to the armed group. The types of private conflicts for which these organizations provided third party dispute resolution included disputes over land borders, damage caused by animals, conflicts over the distribution of inheritances, and even disputes between husbands and wives. In most cases where rebelocracy emerged in the studied communities, the armed group established a parallel justice system.

⁹ For details on the sample and data collection methods see Arjona (2014, forthcoming).

Eradicating delinquency and crime among civilians is another key component of rebelocracy. The so-called social cleansing campaigns are, indeed, quite successful in garnering civilian support for combatants (Arjona 2009, forthcoming; Gutiérrez-Sanín, [Chapter 12](#), this volume; Taussig 2003). In all cases where rebelocracy operated, clear rules on the use of violence were established.

In regards to the provision of public goods, there is great variation in both the extent to which these organizations became involved with public goods and the strategies they chose to provide them. In general, armed actors in Colombia do not directly engage in the creation of health or education systems as insurgents have done in other countries. Instead, they usually influence how local government officials provide those services, and sometimes fund certain projects. Armed groups frequently gave orders to mayors and council members directing expenditures of public funds for infrastructure, education, or health projects.

Armed actors also intervened in other economic matters. The most common were activities related to the cultivation, production, and transportation of coca. Although these practices varied across time and space, both the guerrillas and paramilitaries became involved in every step of the production chain. In addition, taxes or some other form of economic contribution were collected in most cases.

Both guerrillas and paramilitaries established norms concerning a wide variety of issues including domestic violence, personal appearance (such as long hair for men, or skirts for women), sexual conduct, and freedom of speech. More than half of all cases of guerrilla or paramilitary rebelocracy exhibited rules pertaining to these types of conducts.

Politics were also tightly controlled under rebelocracy. In close to half of the cases, interviewees reported that combatants intervened in elections. Sometimes the guerrillas or paramilitaries decided who could run for office; in other cases, combatants told locals whom to vote for. Sometimes voting was banned altogether. In recent years, researchers have presented systematic evidence on armed groups' involvement in elections, and the Colombian judiciary has sentenced several politicians for striking deals with armed actors (López 2010).

Unlike rebel-controlled areas in other countries, in Colombia rebelocracy rarely meant that the state was completely absent from the region. Even in remote areas where the state's armed forces were not present, other agencies of the state did operate. With a few exceptions, neither the guerrillas nor the paramilitaries sought to dismantle the formal local government altogether. Rather, they tried to control it by forcibly intervening in its decisions, capturing it through the appointment of their own members or allies, or both.¹⁰

¹⁰ For a more extensive description of rebelocracy and aliocracy in Colombia see Arjona (2014).

Pre-existing Local Institutions

I now turn to the second explanatory factor of my theory: pre-existing local institutions. In most of the developing world, the local norms that structure human interaction come from a plethora of sources including the state, religious leaders, tribes, clans, and *sui generis* organizations. Although the Colombian state is stronger than its counterpart in many developing countries experiencing civil war, there is great variation in the kind and scope of state presence within the Colombian territory (González et al. 2003): in some areas the state rules effectively and legitimately; in others, it performs poorly. In those areas where state institutions are lacking, there are often few alternative sources of regulations, and the local population lives in a poor institutional environment. In other cases, however, communities manage to develop high-quality institutions despite the limitations of the state.

In many of the communities I have studied, institutions were ineffective, illegitimate, or both prior to the arrival of armed actors. Yet, in some communities local institutions were both legitimate and effective. The source of such institutions varied: in some cases, they were state institutions; in others, they were a product of peasants' organization or even *sui generis* schemes to organize local life. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities often relied on traditional norms and community councils, whose rulings were largely obeyed and seen as legitimate. These patterns lead to substantial variation in the quality of local institutions across and within Colombian regions.¹¹

PARTIAL AND FULL RESISTANCE TO REBEL GOVERNANCE

Resistance to rebel governance in these communities ranged from sporadic, unorganized, and hidden events where individuals expressed disagreement or made small requests, to deliberate, collective, and open demands that the armed group respect local community institutions. The former exemplifies an instance of partial resistance, while the latter illustrates a case of full resistance. When members of communities ruled by either the guerrillas or paramilitaries were asked about their interactions with these groups, moments of agency came to light almost everywhere. As soon as one scratches below the surface of the official discourse that reigned where armed groups governed, it became evident that civilians found ways to express their views, complain about certain issues, negotiate with combatants, and even openly defy the new order.

In this section I describe instances of partial and full resistance to illustrate the theoretical account. These cases were not randomly selected and are therefore not necessarily representative of Colombian communities in conflict

¹¹ Measuring institutional quality is challenging. I relied on structured surveys and focus groups to gather comparable data across communities. See Arjona (forthcoming) for details.

zones. However, they vividly illustrate the mechanisms by which the scope of rebel intervention and the quality of pre-existing local institutions shape resistance.

Partial Resistance

Consistent with the theory, partial resistance was common in all the communities where I conducted fieldwork, regardless of the quality of pre-existing institutions and the scope of rebel governance. I provide evidence on communities living under rebelocracy and alioracy. Prior to the arrival of these armed groups, some had low-quality institutions while others had high-quality institutions.

Partial resistance was common in all rebelocracies. In addition to intervening broadly in local affairs, armed groups used violence to punish disobedience and deter defection, and threatened anyone who envisioned local autonomy. Local leaders were often harassed and hurt. Even though support for rebel or paramilitary governance was common, locals also developed a deep sense of discontentment, which eventually led to acts of partial resistance.

Despite describing an armed group as a totalitarian ruler that controlled all aspects of society in their interviews, civilians remembered many instances in which they had signaled their disagreement or requested changes. These disagreements often had to be voiced under a veil of deference to the armed actor. Still, in some cases civilians scored important victories.

In the 1970s in a rural community in San Vicente del Caguán (Caquetá department) – a region that would become one of the strongholds of the FARC – the state was largely absent and most people were migrants from different parts of the country. Therefore, there were no state institutions to rely on or shared cultural norms; locals faced a real vacuum of authority. When the FARC arrived at this community, it quickly became the *de facto* ruler, intervening in social, political, and economic activities, and regulating many types of conducts. Most interviewees agreed that civilians had little autonomy vis-à-vis the rebels. “The control that the armed actor had when I arrived here was total,” said a community leader who came in 1980. Nevertheless, locals found ways to communicate their preferences to FARC commanders and influence some of the ways in which things were done.

A thin line marked the forms of disagreement that were tolerated by the armed group from those that were not. For civilians to exercise their agency, they had to learn exactly where that line was. For a local leader, “it was not easy to talk when the guerrilla had just executed someone, especially someone who hadn’t done anything. But the leaders always had their voice about topics that were important for the community and had the capacity to tell the commanders about those problems.” He recounted that he decided to tell guerrilla leaders to change the way they dealt with youngsters who were attracted by job

opportunities generated by coca and soon became drug addicts: “the guerrillas killed them without saying a word. In response to the indignation this caused in our community, I said that like those ill with malaria needed care, drug-addicts did too; I said that someone should not be killed because of being ill.” The guerrilla accepted the intervention of the community: drug addicts were not killed anymore, but expelled from the region.

Other forms of resistance involved requests to set up new regulations. A leader in the same area recounted the negotiation between the community and the FARC that led to establishing a “beer bonus” – a tax on transporting, selling, and buying beer that was used to pay the salaries of schoolteachers. Another interviewee recounts that taxes on prostitution were established in agreement among the guerrillas and the community.

It is worth noting that even though some locals in this area embraced the FARC’s ideology as a whole, partial resistance was still common. As with any political order, subjects may agree with the political goals of the ruler but still disagree with the specifics of its rule.

Partial resistance was also common in communities governed by alioracy. In an indigenous community in Puerto Gaitán (Meta Department), the paramilitaries arrived peacefully and agreed to respect the community’s autonomy. “He always respected our territory,” an indigenous governor said of Guillermo Torres, the paramilitary commander. “He always said that he was not going to pick on us as we did not deal with *guerrilleros*.” Nevertheless, the paramilitaries later tried to further penetrate the community and extend their influence over it. The community governor explained that the paramilitary commander had suggested they create a cooperative, offering his advice as well as weapons for defense. But the community always managed to reject these offers. The governor said they knew that if they agreed, their autonomy would have been compromised. By finding ways to prevent the armed actor from crossing the line, the indigenous community was able to live under alioracy and keep the paramilitaries at bay for more than fifteen years.

Similarly, in an Afro-Colombian community in Medio Atrato (Chocó department), the FARC came to the locality peacefully, telling the community they were there to protect it. They assured locals that they respected the local authority – in this case, the Community Council (*Consejo Comunitario*). Later, when the FARC’s 43rd Front established a permanent presence in the area, the local council approached the commander to inform him about the pre-existing statutes that ruled the community. These statutes made it clear that the community was neutral in the conflict and that they had their own rules for solving problems among its members. The presence of any armed actor, including the national army, was forbidden in the houses as well as in the school. The demands of the community even included that FARC combatants abstain from getting personally involved with community members, in particular in romantic relations with local women. The FARC accepted these

rules and consolidated an aliocracy, which lasted until other armed groups arrived at the area.

The interaction between the FARC and an indigenous community in Hato Corozal (Arauca), in the southwest of the country, was similar. The FARC arrived in the area in 1987. The commander invited the indigenous community to several meetings, but local authorities were emphatic about preserving their own politics and organization. The FARC respected the decision of the community for about three years, during which an aliocracy functioned without problems. Around 1990 a new FARC commander tried to intervene more in local affairs, this time by threatening the indigenous community. The local leaders sought a meeting with the commander and reiterated their commitment to community institutions. The FARC responded by trying to ally with some members of the indigenous community; however, the community realized what was happening and expelled these persons from local political organizations. Soon they recovered the FARC's respect for their autonomy and interacted with the group under aliocracy for many more years.

These forms of opposition illustrate that civilian–combatant relations are fluid, rather than static. As Uribe de Hincapié (2006: 64) argues, armed groups' control over the local population is sustained by a “nourished net of micro-negotiations, transactions, contingent agreements, transitory alliances, and intermittent ruptures” that impose some limits on combatants' behavior. To be sure, their omnipresence does not make these forms of resistance trivial: civilians live under difficult conditions where these groups rule, and defying their power, even minimally, may result in disastrous consequences. Yet, these instances show that opposition to the ruler is intrinsic to rebel governance – as to any political order.

Full Resistance

I argued that full resistance to rebel governance is likely to take place when two conditions are met: (i) the community has high-quality institutions prior to the arrival of the armed group, and (ii) the armed group attempts to establish a rebelocracy. Armed groups often anticipate this outcome and adapt their strategies accordingly: they learn that rebelocracy tends to trigger resistance in these communities, leading to a costly confrontation with locals that may end up jeopardizing the group's control over the territory – usually the groups' primary goal. Therefore, combatants often abstain from establishing rebelocracy in communities with high-quality institutions, opting for aliocracy instead (Arjona forthcoming). Given that it is not common to find armed groups establishing rebelocracy in communities capable of collective resistance, full resistance against rebelocracy rarely materializes.¹² What is common, however,

¹² Indeed, most cases of organized resistance in Colombia have emerged after prolonged, intense violence, as opposed to armed groups' attempts to establish rebelocracy.

is that communities that *can* resist collectively exploit the bargaining power that such capacity confers them to negotiate with armed actors. Even though such negotiations often involve risks and threats, they often succeed.¹³

Yet, in some cases armed groups do attempt to establish rebelocracy in communities with legitimate and effective institutions – perhaps because they miscalculate locals’ capacity to resist, or because the territory has such high strategic value that the group is willing to incur the costs of an open confrontation with the community (Arjona forthcoming). In these cases, the theory presented in this chapter suggests that communities would rely on their institutional capacity to organize resistance against rebelocracy.

In the remainder of this section I rely on two cases to illustrate how high-quality institutions can foster collective resistance against armed groups’ ruling attempts. In the first case, civilians were able to sustain resistance despite being victims of harsh violence over a long period of time. In the second case, civilians were able to negotiate with the rebels and therefore collective resistance did not materialize

Located in the southwest of the country, Cauca is home to approximately half of Colombia’s indigenous population. After building a strong, ethnic-based movement, the indigenous communities of the region consolidated a system of local governance widely supported by their members (Troyan 2008). The core of this movement was the Regional Indian Council of Cauca (CRIC), which was created in 1971 and represented the majority of Cauca’s indigenous population, most of whom belong to the Nasa and Guambianos ethnic groups. The movement sought to recover and defend indigenous land, strengthen the *cabildos* (autonomous village councils), ensure the implementation of indigenous laws, preserve indigenous culture, and train teachers in order to ensure education according to their culture and language (Sandoval 2008: 42). The organization’s impressive record of land recovery and formal political organization testify to its success: according to a renowned Nasa leader, “in the 1960s we had six *cabildos* and 200 hectares [of land]; today we have 122 *cabildos* and 570,000 hectares” (Verdad Abierta 2014).¹⁴ The territory is divided into *resguardos* – that is, major areas in which the indigenous communities have inalienable collective land ownership and the right to manage political and administrative affairs. In Cauca, the *cabildos*’ laws are generally supported and valued as an essential part of the indigenous culture. Community members enthusiastically obey their *cabildo*’s decisions, even when they entail high risk, as will be shown later in the chapter.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of the process by which armed actors and communities negotiate the terms of new social orders, see Arjona (forthcoming, esp. chapter 6).

¹⁴ Sources differ regarding the number of hectares that the CRIC has recovered in their struggle. See for example Hristov (2005:99) and CRIC (2007: 64).

Cauca has endured the presence of several armed actors over the years, especially the FARC. The indigenous movement has publicly rejected the presence of all state and non-state armed actors in their territory, as well as their attempts at social control and recruitment of indigenous peoples, and demanded respect for their culture and territories (Caviedes and Caldón 2007: 92). Despite being persecuted and victimized, these communities have sustained their resistance and mobilized against threats to their self-governance (Caviedes and Caldón 2007; Sandoval 2008; Rappaport 2007). Recently, they expelled FARC members as well as soldiers of the Colombian army from their territories, leading to tensions with both the government and insurgents (El Tiempo 2012).

The case of Toribío, a *resguardo* that is part of the CRIC, illustrates how legitimate and effective institutions allowed these communities to defy armed groups' rule and violence. According to our interviewees, the FARC arrived in Toribío in the early 1980s. In those early years, there was constant tension between the FARC and the community, but the cabildo remained the undisputed authority among most residents. The FARC attempted to rule local life extensively, establishing rules over many spheres of life. Yet, the population disobeyed many of the group's rules. As an interviewee explained, "They [the FARC] imposed norms . . . but civil society didn't really follow their rules. So, over time, the rules disappeared" (interview with local resident, 2006).

Although the Nasa and the FARC share a long history of conflict, the tension between them reached its peak in the 2000s when Cauca became highly strategic for the warring sides. In 2005, an analyst stated bluntly, "that who dominates the Colombian Massif [where Toribío is located] will determine the course of the war" (FIP 2005:28). As the FARC fought intensely to control the area, attacks against Toribío became more frequent. At the same time, the rebels intensified their efforts to subdue the population, trying to "impose their norms over those of the authorities of the *resguardo*" (Neiva 2009). Yet, the indigenous movement still did not give in. As a Nasa leader put it, "[the FARC] want to rule in our territory and we don't let them" (Neiva 2009). Several events illustrate the kinds of risks that such resistance has entailed.

In 2004, Vitonás Noscué, the mayor of Toribío and a prominent indigenous leader, traveled to the Southern department of Caquetá. On his way back to Cauca, a FARC commander stopped him: "Why haven't you quit your post as mayor since we, the FARC, gave the order that all mayors quit?" Noscué replied: "Precisely for that reason. Because you do not give us orders. You are wrong because you were not the ones who elected us, it was the community and it is the community we obey." The commander decided to kidnap the mayor, who assured the guerrilla that the Indigenous Guard would soon rescue him (Neira 2005).

The Indigenous Guard is a non-violent, civil defense organization created in 2001 by indigenous peoples in Cauca to protect their communities from armed actors. Community members of all kinds – men, women, teenagers, and elders – have volunteered to join the Guard. It is supervised by the cabildo and has about 6,000 members. It has alerted communities when armed actors were present, recovered bodies, and rescued kidnap victims (Ballvé 2006). After Noscué was kidnapped, about four hundred members of the Guard scoured the mountains until they found the FARC and Noscué. Armed only with their ceremonial canes that symbolized the authority of the Guard, they surrounded the FARC and demanded the immediate release of Noscué. The FARC had no choice: killing four hundred people would have been too politically costly, and it would have probably triggered a draconian response from the state.¹⁵ They let Noscué go (Neira 2005).

In 2009, the FARC's Sixth Front issued a death threat to three Nasa leaders in a pamphlet. The cabildo ordered the Indigenous Guard to make night rounds and alert everyone in the territory. A few months later, the FARC extended its warnings to all authorities of the cabildo as well as public servants in Toribío. The cabildo responded by calling for an extraordinary general assembly, which decided to prohibit the threatened individuals from quitting their posts and assigned each of them ten members of the Indigenous Guard as bodyguards (again only armed with their ceremonial canes). It also forbade parties and closed bars in order to reduce the likelihood of massacres. The cabildo's governor summarizes their position bluntly: "they may kill one; they may kill two ... they may kill a hundred. But they won't kill us all" (Neira 2009).

As of 2013, this community still carries on its struggle. It publicly demanded all armed actors, including the national army, to abandon its territory. In July of 2013, after the army decided not to leave, at least one thousand community members got together to physically remove the soldiers from their territory (León 2013).

Another example of full resistance comes from a small community in a natural park known as Nudo Paramillo.¹⁶ Migrants created this community in the 1970s in a remote, rough-terrain land without any state presence whatsoever. It took people at least one day of travel to reach their municipal capital. Yet, the community was well organized. It operated a large productive cooperative with clear rules for solving problems and engaged in many collective efforts to provide public goods and build infrastructure.

¹⁵ To illustrate, one of the largest attacks by the FARC killed 119 civilians in a rural area in the Chocó department in 2002. This event received massive attention by the media, political groups, NGOs, and international actors. The reputational effects of the attack were clearly large. The José María Córdoba bloc, the FARC unit responsible for the attack, made a public statement lamenting the event.

¹⁶ The information on this case is based on interviews conducted by the author in 2007 and 2008.

When the FARC arrived at this area, its criticism of the state resonated with locals' situation. However, they did not want combatants to rule them and came together to prevent it. Despite being far away from any state authority, and unarmed, the community demanded the respect of the guerrilla commander for their own rules. According to one of the community's leaders, "at the beginning [the FARC] tried to rule over everything. They came to our meetings. They told us what we could do, where we could go, and when. We could not let this happen. We had been our own rulers for years." To stop the FARC from taking control of their local cooperative, the community decided to talk to the commander:

We told [him] very clearly that we did not want militiamen in the area. That it was not needed. "If what you need is some information, we will give it to you. But we do not need orientation or guidelines. We don't need any of that. We know very well what we need to do."

And at the end, the commander agreed. After a long discussion that included threats and insults, the guerrillas agreed to respect the cooperative and avoid intervening in its affairs. They would still require some contributions, and if civilian cooperation with the army were to be discovered the deal would end.

As with Toribío, this case illustrates how high-quality institutions are put to work to organize and sustain collective resistance against rebelocracy.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a theory of civilian resistance against armed groups' rule. I argued that rebel or paramilitary governance limited to the spheres of security and taxation tends to trigger only partial resistance – that is, opposition to some aspects of rule, without demanding its removal altogether. When rebel governance expands beyond security and taxation, however, the response of local civilians depends on the quality of the local institutions in place prior to the arrival of the armed group to the area. Communities with high-quality institutions are more likely to engage in full resistance – that is, opposition to the group's rule altogether – while communities with low-quality institutions are likely to engage only in partial resistance. Original evidence from the Colombian armed conflict illustrates the plausibility of this argument.

The presence of resistance does not imply, of course, that it is always successful in securing autonomy or reducing victimization in the community. The internal organization of the armed group, competition with other organizations, and the strategic value of the territory are also likely to shape armed groups' willingness to tolerate civilians' demands for autonomy (Arjona forthcoming).

The phenomenon of civilian resistance against rebel or paramilitary rule brings to the fore several puzzles that have been neither tackled theoretically

nor documented systematically. Yet, they warrant attention. To start with, the very existence of resistance (either partial or full) suggests that the dominant approach in the academic literature that civilians are deprived of agency in areas where armed actors rule is flawed (Barter 2012; Mampilly 2011). Even though people are forced to cooperate with combatants and find it difficult and risky to defy them, civilians often find ways to influence, even if minimally, the new social order that emerges under the rule of these organizations. Understanding how civilians respond to the presence of armed actors can also illuminate rebel behavior as insurgent organizations are likely to take civilian responses into account when planning their strategies (Arjona forthcoming). Denying such agency not only obscures our understanding of what happens on the ground in war zones, but also reduces our capacity to identify and study the heterogeneous effects of war on communities and individuals.

Second, the possibility of civilians uniting to defy a violent actor – let alone succeeding – is rarely taken into account when theorizing civil war violence, analyzing counter-insurgent policies, or designing non-governmental wartime intervention to prevent violence or attend to victimized communities. Yet, this phenomenon could have important implications on all three fronts.

Theories of civil war violence need to tackle several questions. If communities can confront violence under certain circumstances, how do armed actors respond to it? Do guerrillas and paramilitaries learn to anticipate resistance? Do they consider it when they select their strategies? Does resistance shape armed actors' choices of whom they target, what form of violence they use, how intensely they inflict it, and when they use it?

In terms of policy, strengthening local institutions and community mechanisms for collective action could be a viable policy to protect communities. In fact, some have argued that resistance is a significant means to prevent violence and stop atrocities (Mégret 2009; Kaplan 2013). Yet, others warn that resistance can be futile heroism and often terribly costly (García 2009). It remains to be seen whether communities that engage in full resistance end up being more or less victimized, and how often they succeed in protecting their autonomy from warring sides. Positive questions about the causes and consequences of resistance, and normative questions about whether it should be promoted, require further research.¹⁷

Moving beyond civil war, resistance to armed actors speaks to more general questions about risky collective action and organized political behavior. It also sheds light on questions about the origins of political order and its stability. Civilian adaptation to violence and rebel governance speaks directly to relations between the ruler and ruled, as well as the creation and destruction of different forms of political order. Unarmed civilians committed to a collective effort to limit the intervention of an armed actor

¹⁷ See Kaplan (2013) for an example of new research in this direction.

in their community can deeply influence how guerrillas and paramilitaries exert territorial control. These – often implicit – negotiations between the ruler and ruled lie at the core of a central question about the conditions for political order.

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Dialogue Direct: Rebel Governance and Civil Order in Northern Côte d'Ivoire

Till Förster

ABSTRACT

We tend to believe that rebel governance is based on an excessive use of violence. However, insurgents often establish a regular exchange with civilians under their domination. Building such an exchange affects both sides. It transforms rebel governance into a more civil order that builds on former experiences and incorporates long-lasting modes of communication that oblige both sides to respect the underlying cultural norms and values. This contribution analyses rebel governance in the city of Korhogo in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Since 2002, when a failed coup against President Laurent Gbagbo split the country into two halves, Korhogo was dominated by a stable configuration of rebels and other, mainly neo-traditional actors. The segmentary balance between them was informed by shared norms and values on which new institutions were built, guaranteeing a regular exchange between the parties. "Dialogue direct" was the slogan adopted from national politics to characterize this emerging partnership between rebels and civilians.

INTRODUCTION

According to conventional wisdom, we may think of rebel domination as based on an excessive use of violence or as chaotic, driven by a complex configuration of competing social actors with different economic, social, and political agendas. However, many rebel movements enjoy a remarkable degree of legitimacy among the dominated population. Certainly, their legitimacy is at least partially based on coercion if not the mere threat of violence (Kasfir, [Chapter 2](#), this volume), but besides this basic mode of establishing authority, their domination often builds on other types of legitimacy as well.¹

¹ On basic legitimacy see von Trotha ([1995](#), [2000](#)); Popitz ([1992](#)).

As for other forms of domination, rebel governance is characterized by a combination of different types of legitimacy. The threat of violence is a pillar of their authority when rebel movements start to establish their rule, but, by the same token, violence is increasingly complemented by practices that may provide more permanent legitimacy. Direct interactions with the local population may surface as successful means to negotiate claims and demands on either side. Rebels may also learn more about the expectations of the general populace.

Normative ideas about how governance should work and what services and public goods should be delivered exist in every society. They build on former experiences, for better or for worse. In most cases, the experience of the state and state administration, as it existed until the rebel movement took over, has left deep traces in the collective memory of the population (Mitchell 1991; Förster 2012). Hence, expectations of governance often take forms that neither simply reproduce the former executive practice of the state nor break completely with the past. On the one hand, the similarities will remain visible as many acts of domination turn into habitual practices. On the other, the differences between state and rebel governance become more manifest whenever the population is dissatisfied with the former performance of the state administration.

Some particularities of rebel domination often play a role when rebels want to establish their own modes of governance. Rebel movements often can successfully claim cultural identity with the local populace and build or maintain a boundary between them and “outsiders” or other actors who, they say, do not belong to them and their culture. From a long-term perspective, however, another type of legitimacy seems to be much more important. Many rebel movements gain legitimacy because they actually provide public goods to the ordinary people – in particular, the ones that the population asks for. To some degree, they guarantee security, justice, and other public services, but they seldom do so in the same way as the former state. To meet the expectations of those whom they dominate, rebels often cooperate with civilians and other social and political actors, at times even leaving some of their authority to them. Rebels and civilians work together much more frequently than the state perspective suggests.

The precise nature of this cooperation between rebels and civilians is understudied. The most obvious reason is that state actors have an interest in depicting rebel domination as based solely on threats of violence. Another is that cooperation between rebels and civilians may take many forms, depending on the history of the conflict and, perhaps more so, according to the public good that the population demands and that the insurgents want to deliver. Both dimensions – that is, the socio-political figuration that underpins the conflict, and the fields of governance – highlight which modes of rebel governance are likely to emerge under what circumstances.

I analyze the interaction between rebels and civilians with regard to one case, the rebellion in the north of Côte d'Ivoire, and in particular in the city of Korhogo, the second largest city under rebel domination, with some 170,000 inhabitants (estimation 2002). I compare two fields of governance, each supplying a different public good: security, and the collection of taxes and fees. My underlying assumption is that the fields of governance will correspond to different modes of cooperation that have shaped the structuration of rebel governance.

Hence, this chapter examines the interaction between rebels and civilians by using two crosscutting perspectives: I first look at how the interaction between rebels and civilians relates to the fields of governance supplying public goods. Second, I analyze how their present shape can be traced back to the histories of these interactions that, in the end, changed both sides. The actors think of this cooperation between rebels and civilians as “*dialogue direct*.” The metaphor was initially used in French for the negotiations between rebel leaders and the representatives of the sitting president. But soon, all interactions between citizens – or “subjects,” according to the view of many state agents – and powerful actors irrespective of their status as state or non-state actors were cast into that metaphor.

REBEL DOMINATION IN NORTHERN CÔTE D’IVOIRE

Until the end of the 1990s, Côte d'Ivoire seemed to be one of the most stable states of Sub-Saharan Africa. Under the regime of the first president and founding father of the post-colonial nation, Félix Houphouët-Boigny², the country saw a period of relative prosperity. The country attracted millions of migrants from the sub-region, accounting for roughly one-fourth of the populace (Le Pape and Vidal 2002). After Houphouët-Boigny's death in 1993, his successor Henri Konan Bédié tried to occupy the same dominant position in Ivoirian politics. To compensate for his personal weakness, he adopted a policy of political discrimination and prevented his main rival, Alassane Dramane Ouattara, who originated in the north of the country, from participation in the presidential elections.³

Bédié underpinned his politics of exclusion by adopting and actively promoting the notorious idea of *ivoirité*, or “Ivoirianness.”⁴ Ivoirité redefined the post-colonial politics of belonging in terms of ethnicity, autochthony, and religion. By the end of the 1990s, it had become an ethno-nationalist ideology and a political instrument that built on populist fears of xenophobia. Every citizen of “dubious nationality,” in particular people from the north and the west of Côte d'Ivoire, faced outright discrimination.

² On Félix Houphouët-Boigny, see Grah Mel (2003), Diégou (2000), Koné (2003), Teya (2004).

³ Poamé (2007) provides an overview of the Ivoirian crisis.

⁴ On Ivoirité, see the collection in *Ethics* 1, 1996; from a scholarly point of view, see Dozon (2000) and Marshall-Fratani (2006).

The politics of exclusion became one of the driving forces of the military insurgency that erupted on September 19, 2002. After a few days of heavy fighting, however, it became clear that the insurgents would not be able to overthrow the Gbagbo regime that still controlled the south, including Abidjan, the biggest city of the country and its economic hub. The rebels, then holding roughly the northern half of Côte d'Ivoire, gradually established services and offices that guaranteed a more or less normal life. Some of them stood in direct continuity to the former administrative structures, but others were new and grew out of the continuous exchange with the population and with international NGOs and the UN peacekeeping forces that were dispatched to the major cities in the rebel zone since 2003/04.⁵

Rebel domination and rebel governance are highly heterogeneous, and the balance of social actors that I describe for the city of Korhogo may be different in other towns (Heitz 2009). The city, an old trading town with a strong Muslim community and a stronghold of the rebellion, had a comparatively peaceful experience of rebel governance. Only during the first period after the failed coup was rebel domination based more on violence. From 2007 through to the end of the rebellion in 2011, a fairly stable configuration of actors, which had emerged over the first four to five years, provided security.

Though these groups often maintained a relationship of competition, they developed informal arrangements that later turned into more formal conventions and accords determining who would be responsible for what part of the territory and for what type of action. Through the interaction with competitors, some of the groups developed a more corporate nature and a more hierarchical organization. Consequently, the rebel movement increasingly respected certain demands expressed by these groups and other social actors, leading to stable governance arrangements with them. The crucial point here is that governance builds on social norms and values, not on anonymous market forces only. It is obvious that this inherent normativity of governance arrangements needs at least some social consensus that grows out of an ongoing political discourse. But how does such a consensus emerge?

Governance is not mere service delivery. Right from the beginning of the rebellion, social norms and cultural values played a role in the decision-making processes of most ordinary people who experienced governance under rebel domination. The ethic of honesty and integrity of the so-called traditional hunters – the *dozo* (Hellweg 2004, 2011), which I discuss below – was more than what economists would call an incentive to sell one's own services. Security was not a mere commodity – civilians also looked at how and by whom it was provided. Unlike the delivery of power and water, security implies a particular relationship of mutual trust between social actors.

⁵ *Opération des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire* (ONUCI).

By another thread, governance has become a kind of antonym to government and refers to “soft mechanisms” of coordination (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992), those that emerge from the social practices of competent actors in society. What I adopt from this approach is the focus on actors and their practices that leads to a more stable coordination and a more reliable provision of collective goods. But a demand for more or better governance does not simply grow out of a situation where, from a Western point of view, there is a lack of governance. If it did, governance would plainly emerge in all such societal situations – but it does not.

To frame my analysis of rebel–civilian interactions, I need to briefly address two more theoretical points. First, it is important to recognize that a reductionist understanding of governance as institutionalized modes of coordinating actions and practices that are not subject to market forces but to a predetermined set of cultural values and norms only is of no help either. In the field of security, such a culturalist approach fails to explain the emergence of segmental governance arrangements. It ignores that actors may have different cultural convictions leading to competing claims when a governance arrangement emerges. It also cannot explain how this normative framework is affected by the articulation of divergent political claims.

Governance emerges out of the interactions between the different actors, their regularities and contingencies, as discussed below. Normative understandings of governance are not simply a mirror of a predefined set of existing social values; the norms are also shaped by the interaction of different actors who articulate their own convictions. Not all norms are local. The UN and, in particular, the World Bank may have a say in that process when they promote their understanding of governance (Hill 2005; Kaufmann et al. 2007).

Governance also has to be conceptualized as a public good that is simultaneously subject to normative evaluations and embedded in the articulations of cultural meaning as political claims. The normative and value-oriented practices of the ordinary population play a much more prominent role in the provision of such public goods than social and political scientists tend to acknowledge (e.g., Elwert 1997, 1999; Mehler 2004; Lambach 2007).

I also posit that the process in which the actors articulate their cultural convictions shape these practices. An analysis of how rebels communicate and how this relates to the general negotiation of norms and values in society is thus essential to any understanding of governance. The continuous interaction between rebels and civilians can breed remarkably stable governance arrangements. A majority of the population in Korhogo says that the city under rebel domination was safer than under the former administration of the state.

After the signature of the Ouagadougou peace treaty on March 4, 2007, it was planned to bring state administration back into the rebel-held parts of the

country. The process proved to be much slower than foreseen and did not lead to a re-establishment of state authority. Only after the fall of the Gbagbo regime in April 2011 were state institutions partly re-implemented in the former rebel-held part of the country. Today, a new kind of parallelism between state and non-state institutions, practicing different modes of governance, seems to have emerged. Whether that form of governance will be sustainable is a question that only the future will answer.

Second, from a general sociological perspective, one could argue that order provided through “good” governance has a value in itself because it satisfies a basic need of the population – that is, a certain predictability of social life.⁶ A particular social and political order may be unjust or outright oppressive, but as long as it answers such general demands, in particular the demand for security and the possibility to make a living, it is often acceptable to the majority. The value of order is, however, often counterbalanced by disorder as a political instrument (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Even though there may be an obvious demand for more or “better” governance, and even when the majority articulates its demands, the ruling actors may not answer it, preferring to maintain a state of what could be called governance through unpredictable ad hoc decisions. While one might expect this from rebel governance, my findings show otherwise. Rebels sometimes aim at predictable governance. As I will show, they may even implement more bureaucratic procedures than the state.

WHO IS A REBEL AND WHO A CIVILIAN?

The distinction between rebels and civilians is as blurred as the older one between state and non-state actors (Arnaut and Højberg 2008). It is related to the institutional uncertainty that underpins all interactions between rebels and civilians. The distinction between military and civil roles depends more on the specific situation, whether a particular person acts as a representative of the insurgents, or more on behalf of his or her own interests and within a personal social network. Yet, it would be misleading to understand the social and political order under rebel domination as merely chaotic, as the outcome of politics of confusion (Arnaut and Blommaert 2009). It is more appropriate to describe the first three to four years under rebel domination as a reconfiguration of the social order that led to a more or less stable structuration of the social world (Förster 2010).

During the first few months of the insurgency, almost all social interactions were characterized by uncertainties, in particular concerning institutional obligations and backgrounds of the actors. While trust in role ascriptions

⁶ Popitz calls it in German the “Ordnungswert der Ordnung” (1992: 221). Von Trotha extends the argument to Africa and analyzes first the formation of colonial domination (1994) and then post-colonial states (1996, 2000). “Basic needs” translate into “social problems” that governance addresses (Koechlin and Förster 2014).

based on institutional affiliations faded, the flipside – trust in personal identities – became much stronger than before. During this first period of the rebellion, many rebel soldiers demonstrated their affiliation with the movement by a conspicuous display of weapons and uniforms, making clear which side they were on. Identifying a social actor in everyday encounters was framed by the particular situation in which actors met as individuals.⁷ Seen from the individual actors' point of view, the social world was often less confusing than it had been prior to 2002.

New role ascriptions through institutional affiliations emerged only after the initial years, when the rebellion slowly built up a more stable organization. One reason was the agreements insurgents made with other social actors – in Korhogo, particularly with the traditional hunters' association, the *dozoya*. The latter became responsible for security in the inner city, and, at least officially, rebel soldiers were no longer allowed to carry weapons in the areas where hunters did the policing.

The second, less important, factor was the presence of the UN peacekeeping forces. Their authority in the city was seen by most people as limited and insufficient to guarantee security because they did not intervene in any violent acts. The UN forces did not interfere because their mandate did not allow them to do so, but this was not known to the population, which regarded the retreat of the UN forces as a sign of cowardice and an acknowledgment of the superiority of the other armed bodies. However, the UN forces did have an influence on how rebel officers planned and executed their activities. They engaged in the discourse on governance and security in the city – for instance, by establishing direct links to the rebel command and by participating in weekly meetings with civil society representatives. The rebels eventually agreed to a moratorium of armed actions in the city that the United Nations (UN) command partly mediated. The UN peacekeeping forces were seen as an actor whose role was clearly defined from the outside.

The role of all other actors in the urban arena of Korhogo was shaped by the circumstances of the situation – that is, by the specificities of interaction among and between them. There was no clear-cut distinction between military and civil authority. A man could take either role if necessary and if the situation allowed him to do so.

BUILDING SECURITY AFTER COMBAT

Long before the beginning of the insurgency in 2002, security became a major concern of the ordinary population in the north of Côte d'Ivoire. By the early 1990s, many policemen and custom officers were suspected of working closely with thieves and criminals (Förster 2002). The only corporate group that enjoyed a reputation of reliability and sincerity were the “traditional”

⁷ On frame and framing see Goffman (1967, 1971, 1974).

hunters' associations, the dozoya. After a long period of decline, they re-emerged at that time as protectors and guardians because of the dwindling security of civil life (Förster 2009, 2010).

The dozo successfully drew upon the rites and initiation ceremonies of the old medieval empire of Mali (Hellweg 2006, 2011), but their internal organization differed significantly from place to place and also from other former secret societies.⁸ The dozo always claimed that they were independent from local politicians and that they relied on the old values of bravery, frankness, and honesty. They stated that they had to remain upright men because any violation of the oath each hunter had sworn would mean that his protective medicines would turn against him and even kill him. Among the Senufo, the dozoya had adopted in the early 1990s a more stable organization, largely segmental in character and not hierarchical, as the state's police had assumed. This structure allowed them to form large units without becoming visible as a corporate organization.

When the crisis gained momentum in the 1990s, numerous self-defense groups emerged in both rural villages and cities. They were mainly composed of armed young men between 15 and 25 years of age. They erected barriers at the entrance of villages and held night watches. Many groups were organized on a rotating basis and came close to what the *poro* (the village secret societies) had been a hundred years previously, before colonization. In some urban centers, vigilante groups emerged, frequently in response to local elders conveying popular demands. The values of these youth associations were conservative.⁹ Because many of them mutated into militias, the rebels later dissolved most of these groups. Some continued to operate in the shadows, in particular where rebels did not provide "enough" security, such as in outlying, peri-urban quarters.

At the beginning of the rebellion, many ordinary instruments to secure one's civil life ceased to work for some time. After the initial months of reckless military violence, the situation in urban centers became so precarious that many ordinary people started to complain openly about the rebellion. As in other armed conflicts, security became the most pressing issue for the vast majority of the population (see also Reno, Chapter 13, and Hoffmann, Chapter 8, this volume). As one of the most basic public goods essential to public life, it remained central to rebel governance.

My interlocutors remembered the first period of rebel domination as being extremely difficult. Insecurity dominated all spheres of life, preventing men and women from going to the market and children from going to school. Travel was

⁸ I have conducted fieldwork in northern Côte d'Ivoire since 1979. The data for this contribution was collected from 1999 onwards.

⁹ It is often assumed that these groups turn the power structure upside down (e.g., Utas 2003). In Côte d'Ivoire, however, youth associations remained indebted to local values as the defense of their own quarter, village, and old relatives.

nearly impossible. This first period is probably best conceptualized as a time when security was a commodity that was offered on a security market.¹⁰ Ordinary people often had to “buy” it from actors that “offered” it – for instance, by paying “fees” or in-kind contributions to self-defense groups operating in their quarter. But that period soon ended.

After the initial period of insecurity, the rebels adopted – or rather adapted – procedures from the former state administration. They partly answered the expectations of the population, though they also remained independent from long-established powerful milieus, such as the Muslim traders who had kept close contacts with the older state bourgeoisie (Médard and Fauré 1982). The uneven provision of public goods as it developed under rebel domination grew to a considerable degree out of changing relationships between the insurgents and civilians. Rebels built on general cultural expectations, but always mediated them through exchanges with other social actors.

While the insurgents never held a monopoly of power, they were the best-armed and most powerful group. Though many in the north had welcomed the rebellion, the call for more governance and accountability was strong. It was first uttered in a discrete but powerful medium: daily gossip in the streets of the city.¹¹ The rebel movement reacted when, in early 2003, they drove through the city of Korhogo in their pick-up trucks, communicating through loudspeakers that they would now provide more security and that it was again safe to participate in public life. They called on everybody to do business as usual. Apparently, most traders believed in their statements and resumed their former commercial activities. As Abidjan’s harbor was inaccessible, many established new and long-lasting relationships in the countries neighboring Côte d’Ivoire, especially in the ports of Lomé, Accra, and Conakry.

During the first few weeks after the rebellion began in 2002, rebel soldiers did not request anything from the local population. They even paid their bills at the filling stations when they drove their troops to the battlefields. This was a sign, they said, that they were “children of the soil,” just as everybody else, and that they fought on their behalf.

But that ended when it became clear that the rebellion would take far longer than expected. They started to require direct “contributions to the common cause,” as they called it. Besides the seizure of all kinds of goods, they requested day-to-day contributions in terms of food and meals from the urban population. Some of my informants in Korhogo interpreted the later dissolution of self-defense groups by the rebels as a competition over these resources as the population was unable “to feed” both the rebels and the young men in the quarters.¹²

¹⁰ On the commoditization of civil services and “markets of violence,” see Elwert (1997), but compare Mehler (2004).

¹¹ As many young rebels still lived in the courtyards of their families, they were directly exposed to the conversations there and reported it to their comrades in the barracks.

¹² The verb “to feed” is used in a literal as well as metaphorical sense (see Schatzberg 2001).

During these months, the rebels established regular exchange with the civil population. Besides public announcements through various media and the accompanying gossip, these acts of rebel soldiers were understood by civilians as explicit statements about what they intended to do and how they wanted to re-order civil life. Acting visibly in front of an audience was a means of communication among all sides. The demonstration of superior weaponry by rebel soldiers, and later the display of proper uniforms, targeted a particular audience. On the one hand, it aimed at recruiting young men, who were often attracted by the mixture of youth culture and military might in the rebel movement. On the other hand, it intimidated those who perhaps thought that they were in a position to rival the military wing of the movement.

BEYOND THE COMMODITIZATION OF SECURITY

While the provision of security was often rivalrous and excludable during the first period of rebel domination, this changed through the increasing interaction with other actors. The hunters, the dozo, were particularly important. They had never asked for any direct contribution, though they received support from the local population. They always claimed that they only received voluntary gifts. As a discursive strategy, the claims to ritual purity that guaranteed personal as well as corporate integrity proved successful. Precisely because they offered their services for free, they became one of the most important actors in the field of security.

The hunters' continuous presence, and even growing significance, obliged the rebels to legitimize their own activities by arguments other than cultural belonging. They had to show that they were able to order civil life and provide the security needed for this. This trajectory led to a more stable provision of security in the city and reversed the usual presumption of its increasing commoditization in areas of precarious statehood. Korhogo was safer than under state domination.

A brief reflection clarifies the theoretical relevance of the hunters as a "non-profit organization." Security as a commodity that is offered within a market implies that actors take rational decisions about whom to support, or pay for services rendered. They pay a certain amount of money or other contributions to a particular actor because they assume this actor provides more security than another. In a precarious social setting, such evaluations are always doubtful. First, most ordinary people do not have access to the information necessary to make this assessment. This argument does not contradict the assumption that their decisions are based on rational considerations – they try to get as much information as they can, try to evaluate what they hear, and then privilege the most convincing provider of security. Or, if that remains unclear, they perhaps distribute what they can afford among actors that could provide security.

Actually, both practices co-existed in northern Côte d'Ivoire during the first period of rebel domination. However, many ordinary people changed their attitudes after the first few months of high insecurity. They made a choice, privileging one or the other group – and not necessarily those with the most powerful guns, or those who promised to protect them best. Neither the mere threat of violence nor a rational calculation of price-performance ratio explains their choice. They privileged the hunters who, they said, were more trustworthy because, through their oath and ritual practices, they were intrinsically bound to honesty and bravery.

The rebels referred to such norms and values too. When they drove through the streets of Korhogo in their pick-up trucks with machine guns on the back, they also claimed that they were acting on behalf of the entire population, would always act in agreement with “Senufo culture,” and, more prominently in the city of Korhogo, with the “Muslim faith.” Certainly, such statements related to the discourse about national belonging and hence were also statements about the identity of the north and the necessity to maintain cultural and, in extension, political self-determination. But undoubtedly, they were also meant as a commitment to the “just cause” of the northerners. In the city of Korhogo, the reference to Islam was also intended to co-opt influential Muslim traders. At this crucial moment, civilians became partners, not subordinates. Otherwise, the rebels would have lost legitimacy and material support by the general populace.

Rebel governance is characterized by what I call partial presence. It forms a kind of network that links the bigger cities in the area without involving all rural villages. It has a kind of inner frontier that to some degree resembles the limits of the former state. Some towns that did not accept rebel soldiers on their ground are relatively large, sometimes including more than 2,000 inhabitants. Many of these towns had little strategic value, or had strong organizations and institutions to solve their internal affairs (see Arjona, [Chapter 9](#), this volume). Some also promised not to act against the rebellion. Still others were economically marginal, from the rebels' point of view.¹³ In urban settings, such inner frontiers may consist of disadvantaged neighborhoods. These often rely much more than others on self-organization and often develop alternative modes of governance that the rebels must cope with. In both urban and rural cases, the limited resources of the rebels may also have led them to accept such spaces of independent governance, though they would not admit that such considerations played a role in their decisions.

More important, however, is the rebels' complementarity to the hunters' associations. It was not the same in all places, but nowhere did the rebels ever try to suppress the dozo as a corporate group. It is possible to interpret this as a

¹³ The emergence of such “pockets of peace” needs to be studied in more depth. They exist(ed) in almost all West African conflict zones and are the subject of a new research project of mine.

weakness of the rebel movement, but I believe, as do my interlocutors, that this is more due to the fact that the rebels saw the hunters as “natural” allies rather than as competitors.

In this context, “natural” refers to the shared historical experience of having roots in the same society and sharing its mutual values, yet being excluded from political participation. Except for the Ivoirian West, where hunters’ associations hardly existed, dozo and rebels worked hand-in-hand from the beginning of the rebellion. This close cooperation affected the codes of conduct of the insurgents and transformed the hunter associations into a much more hierarchical organization with leaders that served as intermediaries to the rebel officers.

SHARED GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

In Korhogo, the cooperation between rebels and hunters as two providers of security became particularly successful. Though largely informal, it led to a number of agreements that regulated rights and duties of both parties. In 2004, the rebels formally gave up the direct control of the inner parts of the city and handed it over to the hunters’ association, the dozo, which was organized in two subdivisions. The insurgents thus abandoned the near monopoly of force that they had held until then. The population still recalls that the insurgents negotiated a mutual understanding with the two hunters’ associations in the city. The outer limits of the dozo-controlled zone were demarcated by the tarmac ring-road that separated the suburban quarters from the center.

According to this agreement, the rebels were responsible for the control of the peri-urban areas and for the main roads that led into the city where they had already erected checkpoints. As for everybody else, the agreement did not allow them to carry weapons in the city – though some visibly carried them under their shirts. The only exceptions to this rule were the hunters who, from 10pm onwards, patrolled the city during the night.

The agreement between rebels and hunters worked reasonably well. It incorporated several elements that regulated the distribution of authority within the city. The prosecution of crime was the task of the dozo, if they could catch somebody red-handed. They were entitled to punish the person, for instance by flogging him, but they could not carry out capital punishment. The rebels stated that there was no death penalty under their domination, though some criminals disappeared without trials. The population knew about such practices and tended to tolerate them. It helped to make the city safer, many claimed, because criminals could no longer buy themselves off, as they usually had with the state police.

Hunters were also active outside the inner city, where they organized in smaller units. At the end of 2009, the leader of the rebels of Korhogo, Fofé Kouakou, provided them with a pick-up truck and formally asked them to

patrol along the four main roads that link Korhogo with neighboring cities and with Mali. At the time, a few official policemen had come back from the south to join a mixed brigade that was composed of rebels and members of the state's *forces de l'ordre*. By then, cooperation of rebels and other actors in the city had taken a regular form.

Every Thursday morning, the rebel command responsible for the city held a meeting in the former barracks of the gendarmerie. This meeting grew out of a briefing that the rebel leader had initially held for his troops. Since most people knew that they could meet Fofié on that occasion, they increasingly tried to attend a meeting to present their wishes and pleas. Though they had no official right to speak up, their request to explain their cases was often accepted. My interlocutors all stated that these encounters with the rebel command were unpredictable in the beginning. If the rebel leader was not in a friendly mood, one could end up with an additional fine for trying to defend one's own interests. Over the years, however, local forms of conduct increasingly regulated these meetings. They included the etiquette of Manding culture that granted a right to speak to every person or, more precisely, to all representatives of a particular group in society. Since 2009, however, these meetings became marginal as rebel governance increasingly incorporated former administrative procedures.

SEGMENTED GOVERNANCE IN PRACTICE

In the northern cities where the hunters have strong roots in the local culture, shared governance worked fairly well. A case that I witnessed in January and February 2009 illustrates how this segmented distribution of power worked in practice. In Cocody, a suburban neighborhood of Korhogo nicknamed after the rich and glamorous quarter in Abidjan, a young woman of about 18 to 20 years had been killed and her body found in the morning. This happened only a few meters from her parents' courtyard. The inhabitants of Cocody found this highly alarming. In almost every corner, young and old discussed whether the dissolved self-defense group of the quarter should be set up again for protection against such criminals. Somebody had seen the woman quarrelling with a young man of the quarter the evening before. The parents and immediate neighbors warned they would call for the hunters if the man did not show up by the next day. In many cases, such public notice had proved to be highly efficient as the overwhelming majority believed in the extraordinary powers of the hunters and their ability to trace any criminal to his hiding place.

One day later, a young man under suspicion contacted the brother of the murdered woman. He was a close friend of the brother – and a learned Muslim who served as second imam in the mosque. He did not deny the crime, arguing that he had a right to commit it because the young woman “did not behave properly.” Nobody, said he, should try to prosecute him, as he

knew better what he was allowed to do and what not. The same day, all this became the subject of ongoing debates in the quarter. The brother was advised to ask the hunters to arrest the murderer. They would certainly bring him to justice. The mere fact that the relatives would turn to the hunters redefined the situation. Because of their oath, they would surely act properly. It was clear that the man must have done wrong – despite his claims to know better because of his knowledge of the Holy Book. In the following days, his status as a scholar of the Holy Quran was questioned more and more.

In the end, his identity was completely redefined. He was, so the ordinary people agreed, a “false Muslim” who, for selfish reasons, had cheated the “true imam” in order to camouflage his own, evil intentions. His faith was no longer mentioned; instead, in ordinary conversations, he was referred to as “this man who has killed one of our daughters.”

It was only then that the rebels showed up. Cocody belonged to the area where they were in charge of public security. The young man was brought to the main camp of the rebels – that is, the former barracks of the *gendarmérie nationale*. Nobody heard from him again, nor was his name ever mentioned in the quarter. A friend of mine commented on the outcome as follows: “Si c’est arrivé là, c’est terminé. On ne sait pas trop ce qu’ils font avec un criminel comme lui, mais on ne veut pas savoir aussi.”¹⁴

Hunters and rebels policed different spaces and did so under different social and cultural understandings. At times, it was sufficient that one of the groups provided legitimacy to the actions of another actor, as the hunters did in this case. These interactions certainly did not lead to a state of law, but, at least in the field of security, this segmental organization of governance proved to be successful. Most people said that Korhogo was safer than under state administration. At that time, they said, a criminal could easily escape the police by bribing policemen. Bringing a thief to the police was useless – you would see him again the next morning in the street. Things changed. The hunters were generally not corrupt, and the mere threat of involving them often sufficed to arrest a criminal, as this case showed. Additionally, the rebels improved their reputation.

TAXES AND FEES

The illicit collection of “fees” by the police and other armed bodies was, until 2002, one of the most hated practices of domination. It was the practical side of Ivoirianness, too. A feeling of enough is enough spread among people of the north in the late 1990s, when many of those who carried identity cards with

¹⁴ “Once it gets there, it’s finished. We don’t know too well what happens there, but we also don’t want to know.” Bakari Sangaré, February 4, 2009.

Manding names became aware that their identity documents earmarked them as having “doubtful nationality.”¹⁵

By the turn of the century, the daily harassment by the police had become proverbial. There are, it was said, two kinds of brigands: unauthorized ones – criminals – and authorized ones – the police (Förster 2002). While thieves had a good life, giving the police a part of their booty, ordinary people had to pay the usual 500 frs. “for nothing” at every roadblock – or more, if a policeman decided to intimidate someone because of his supposed origin. The daily harassment by the police was regarded as outrageous, as one could hear on *radio trottoir* every day.¹⁶

The rebels wanted to draw a clear line between them and the former police by establishing a predictable administration of overland travel and transport. When the rebellion broke out in 2002, public transport first came to a standstill. Checkpoints were taken over from the police or, in a few cases, erected anew on all major overland roads. When the rebels invited the merchants of the city to resume business, it was clear that they also had to provide access to the markets across the borders and to the rural areas where cash crops were produced. In addition, the reopening of the main market in Korhogo required administrative services formerly provided by the city council.

When overland transport became feasible again, the rebels were far fewer than the police and gendarmerie, who were still in place in the south. According to bus and lorry drivers, the rebels did not expect much of a payment in the beginning, but started to ask for more as time passed. Everybody knew that ordinary rebel soldiers did not get much for their service, while officers and high-ranking officials often made a fortune during the first years of the rebellion. Simple foot soldiers had a right, rebel leaders said, to one meal per day and to an indemnity of 5,000 francs CFA per year (about US\$12).

Knowing this, many drivers and passengers agreed to make “contributions to the common cause.” After two or three years of service, many young rebels who had been enthusiastic when the rebellion started became disappointed. They yielded to the temptation to squeeze something in addition to the “official” rebel fees out of the drivers and passengers. The influential traders claimed that they needed more predictability to do business and that the amount demanded should not exceed their profit margins (Förster 2009). The rebel leaders accepted their request to make this mode of governance more reliable.

¹⁵ At the time, Ivoirian identity cards showed a bracket with three characters after the registration number on the front and on the back of the document. The characters certifying full citizenship are CIV for Côte d’Ivoire. In case of doubtful citizenship, they are replaced by three zeros. If an identity card had six zeros (i.e., three after each registration number) it was not renewable. The bearers spoke of themselves as *les six zéros*, as people excluded from Ivoirian citizenship.

¹⁶ *Radio trottoir*, literally “Radio Sidewalk,” is the term for public gossip in local French.

Over the years since 2003/04, a system of fees and tax collection was established. By 2009, it had become more bureaucratic than the practice of the former state. There were fixed rates for various vehicles and for particular commodities at specific checkpoints. A truck, for instance, had to pay 7,000 francs CFA (about US\$16) at the entrance and exit of the two big cities of the rebel zone, Korhogo and Bouaké. The truck's commodities were counted and assessed separately. A bus had to pay 5,000 francs (US\$12) at the same checkpoints. A private car was charged 1,000 francs (\$2.25).

All this money was sent to Bouaké where the *Forces Nouvelles* had their headquarters. If one traveled on one of the secondary roads, the fees were lower. Young rebels who were entitled to levy smaller amounts from private cars and motorcycles mainly ran these checkpoints. A private car then had to pay 400 to 500 francs (US\$1 to 1.25); a motorcycle was likely to pay 200 to 300 francs. This money – or, more precisely, a part of it – was not sent to the headquarters but to the regional commander of the rebels. The young men at the roadside often took a little more than they were supposed to take. The rebels based their regulation on the former experience of state domination, but formalized it to a greater degree than the police and gendarmerie had.

First, the chief rebel commander of zone 10 published a list of quasi-official checkpoints.¹⁷ The radio station associated with the rebel movement, and later also private radio stations, communicated the list. Second, the rates of the fees at “official” checkpoints were fixed by the rebel command of zone 10. To avoid exploiting travelers and to prevent embezzlement, the rebel command issued numbered receipt books that had to be used at all authorized checkpoints (Figure 10.1). The receipts showed the name of the checkpoint, the category of the vehicle and its license number, with its date and duration of validity, the amount levied, and, last but not least, the signature of the collecting agent and his *matricule* – that is, his registration number under which he was enrolled in the FAFN. The receipt also included a statement that it was meant as a *péage*: a road toll to enable the FAFN to maintain roads.

Whether the tolls were actually spent for this purpose was unclear. Though the expenditures were not transparent, it was at least possible to trace who had collected what amount at what moment at a particular roadblock – an administrative practice much stricter than anything the police had done before. When this system was installed, and until about 2008/09, most drivers donated a few additional coins to the young rebels at the checkpoints, stating that they wanted to *encourager* – that is, “to strengthen” – their commitment to “the community” or to “the just cause” of the rebellion.

¹⁷ The ten zones under rebel command were dissolved in June 2010 in favor of four military districts recognized by the state. The 4th military district remained under the command of the same (now former) rebel leader, Fofé Kouakou Martin.

FIGURE 10.1 FAFN receipt of checkpoint fee

Dialogue Direct

Needless to say, these donations were embedded in a context that was at least partly informed by the general practices of rebel domination. It was at the center of a popular discursive formation that framed the interaction between rebels and civilians as *dialogue direct*: “direct dialogue.” The French term “dialogue direct” had been coined in 2006/07 by the main representatives of the political wing of the *Forces Nouvelles*, in particular by Guillaume Soro, who later became prime minister in the national government under President Laurent Gbagbo. This slogan demanded direct negotiations between the rebel movement and the Gbagbo administration in Abidjan. The latter had refused to talk directly to the insurgents, fearing that such talks would imply official recognition of the “illegal” rebellion as a political party. The rebels, on the other hand, claimed that negotiations through intermediaries would inevitably lead to a one-sided outcome. When the Gbagbo administration finally ended its resistance to direct talks, negotiations led to the peace treaty of Ouagadougou on March 4, 2007.

During these years dialogue direct became a metaphor that was used on many occasions, but in particular for exchanges with representatives of the rebellion on the one hand and the state on the other. It was also used for any exchange between civilians and armed bodies. In the south, it was used at checkpoints when negotiating the usual bribes. In the north, it became a widespread term for additional “contributions” to the rebels. Dialogue direct

was understood both as a call for each side to limit its demands, and for compromise that respected the normative expectations of all parties.

Dialogue direct served as a normatively laden daily interface between the rebel movement and the ordinary population. As a social practice, its outstanding feature was its claim to formal procedures that guaranteed equal rights to both sides. The direct exchange at roadblocks became a contested site for the interaction of the insurgents with the local population under their domination. As individuals, ordinary people experienced generalized and anonymous rebel domination at checkpoints and also reacted to it. Attempts of the insurgents to regulate this interaction by implementing bureaucratic measures against harassment were consciously aimed at maintaining good relations with the general population and gaining more legitimacy from them. Later, when young rebels abused their position at checkpoints, relations between rebels and civilians seriously deteriorated.

From 2007 through 2009, most drivers of heavy vehicles and public taxis knew about the insurgents' tax (or fee) system. Each one knew, for instance, that the complement to the matricule on his or her receipt was the number on the badge that every agent of the FAFN was supposed to wear. The badge was often understood as a direct continuity with former state authority. A policeman had to wear the emblem of his military rank, otherwise he was not on duty. However, many policemen did not observe this regulation. Under rebel government, the badge became a kind of official identification card because it signified a position in the FAFN.

Identification papers had been a hotly disputed issue in Ivoirian politics since the mid-1990s when President Henri Konan Bédié adopted the ethno-nationalist ideology of *ivoirité*. Not having an Ivoirian ID had only meant exclusion from political participation, but also had practical consequences. An Ivoirian ID card provided full citizenship. Without it, one often fell victim to the roughest harassment practices that the police had to offer. These discriminating practices of state domination greatly fostered the emergence of the rebel movement (Banégas 2006; Arnaut and Blommaert 2009).

When the insurgents came to power, many rebel leaders deliberately introduced other modes of interaction to show they were acting on behalf of the ordinary people and were faithful to the old communal values. The bureaucratic governance of ID papers by the rebels made the new modes of communication and negotiation visible. Since there were no offices to renew old, invalid ID cards, alternative cards became widespread. Some badges and ID cards were issued by the rebels, but many by other organizations. Even the *dozoya* (the hunters' associations) issued membership cards. Most of these cards were accepted as identity papers by the rebels and, since the reopening of the major north-south roads, even by the police and gendarmerie in the government-controlled part of the country. Such exchanges between equals were also labeled as *dialogues directs*.

Rebel governance was expected to grant freedom of movement. The collection of fees and taxes at checkpoints was acceptable as long as it did not affect the provision of that public good. Because of its specific nature, which implicates anonymous interactions between rebels and travelers, rebel governance of taxes and fees took a more bureaucratic form than it did in the field of security.

The subsequent deterioration in supplying this service highlights this particularity. After the Ouagadougou peace treaty of March 2007, the re-establishment of state authority was repeatedly postponed, and, until April 2011, the state was largely unable to implement its administration in the rebel-held parts of the country. Nonetheless, many rebels in subordinate positions thought that their work as *barragistes* (literally, “roadblockers”) would soon come to an end. During 2009, more and more unofficial checkpoints were erected.

The tax and fee system lost its former predictability. The “fees” collected were again much more arbitrary and often higher than many drivers could afford to pay. Many people said that the young rebels would need the additional money to secure a smooth return to civil life – but they unanimously added that it was not right to squeeze so much money out of the drivers and passengers. The violation of normative expectations stimulated subversive resistance to the collection of fees. They were no longer seen as appropriate contributions to the rebel movement, but, rather, a selfish exploitive practice.

BEYOND DIALOGUE DIRECT: CONCLUSIONS

As a corporate social actor, the rebels provided governance continuously and directly to the ordinary population. To some degree, rebel governance worked. Rebel governance involved some coercion, but also took the expectations of the local population into account to a considerable degree. The interaction with civilians affected both sides. The local population adapted to rebel governance practices, while rebel governance took a more “civilian” form.

The metaphor of dialogue direct characterized the new social order and the new modes of governance. Neither the rebels nor the population could do without each other. Their interaction was not based on supply and demand – that is, on competition in an unregulated market. The social actors often were competitors, but a chronological analysis shows that the initial dominance of market forces increasingly gave way to non-violent interactions aimed at complementary solutions.

Rebel governance became part of a wider network of segmentary governance. Different modes of governance were interwoven and held together by specific norms and values that informed social life and to which all actors could refer. They did not always make use of the same norms and values, and, of course, they evaluated them differently. Nonetheless, these norms and values served as the bottom line for societal practices.

It is clear that the centrality of the state as an organization with a monopoly of force in many Western conceptualizations of governance forecloses a thorough understanding of the situation in the rebel-held zone of Côte d'Ivoire. No actor held such a monopoly. However, if governance is understood in a less normative sense as the provision of collective goods and the regulation of access to them, governance does exist under rebel domination. Rebels in northern Côte d'Ivoire participated prominently in the emerging governance arrangements.

Yet they were neither the only actors, nor did they dominate them. Even in the field of security, they had to cope with other actors – though they had the last say. More importantly, they respected the norms and values that informed the expectations of the ordinary population. Besides the mere superiority of force, they needed another type of legitimacy – that of being able to provide public goods together with others. This legitimacy required interactions with the ordinary population. Rebels had to take their normative ideas into account. The complementarity that linked them to other actors was based on shared norms and values and how they were articulated in different fields of governance. The interactions were certainly affected by the rebels' military power, but were not limited to it. They delegated or shared a significant part of their governance services with other actors because of these exchanges.

I call this mode of governance “segmentary governance.” It is characterized by actors who perform similar modes of governance in different sectors of society or in different spaces while remaining integrated through how they relate to shared norms and values.¹⁸ The classical definition of segmentary social organization posits that the social units are of similar size and that the members are recruited by the same principle. That is not the case here. But if one recognizes that the complementarity of a segmentary social order also incorporates different types of actors that perform similar tasks, it makes sense to use the term to characterize this particular form of governance in northern Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁹

The segmentary modes of governance between rebels and civilians in Côte d'Ivoire are based on specific forms of interaction in the two fields of governance analyzed here. In the field of security, governance builds on mutual trust between actors that are familiar to each other. This shapes the modes of interaction, generates particular institutions such as regular meetings between rebels and civilians, and leads to a more or less stable network.

¹⁸ Segmentary governance recalls, of course, the classic definition of segmentary, acephalous societies in political anthropology (e.g., Evans-Pritchard and Fortes 1940; Middleton and Tait 1958; Sahlin 1961).

¹⁹ On governance without government, see Rosenau and Czempel (1992); Kaufman (2007). Compare also the discussion in Hill (2005).

It has, however, spatial limits – in this case, the outskirts of the city where the agreement between the rebels and other actors ended. In the field of taxes and the provision of free movement, the interaction took another form. It was anonymous and, at least for some time, adopted abstract and bureaucratic regulations. It was not trust in other social actors but in the reliability of formal procedures that took a much stricter form than under state domination. Though different in form, there is a bottom line to both. They recognize each other as a partner that will want to share the same understanding of how governance should work – even if they will need to sort this out. If rebel governance in northern Côte d'Ivoire is seen as a success, it is because it built on this will of all actors to engage in what they called dialogue direct. Through this exchange, the actors were able to articulate their norms and values – that is, their own normative understanding of governance – and to relate it to that of the others.

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The Rebel State in Society: Governance and Accommodation in Aceh, Indonesia¹

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ABSTRACT

Rebel organizations cannot be understood solely in terms of their coercive capacities. Many seek to displace the state and usurp its functions. How do rebel groups establish systems of governance? Applying Migdal's state in society approach, I show how rebel governance can evolve through alliances with societal forces. I do so by focusing on the evolution of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia. GAM came to govern a handful of districts by allying with two groups – rural Islamic teachers (*ulama*) and urban student activists – whose goals and identities were in many ways at odds with its own. These rebel state/society alliances were mutually beneficial. Ulama and activists gained security and were able to pursue their agendas through GAM, which in turn gained wider support and the capacity to govern the local population. These alliances were also transformative, resulting in significant convergence in terms of the identities and goals of all parties.

INTRODUCTION

Rebel organizations cannot be understood solely in terms of their coercive capacities. Insurgents often seek to control and shape local populations, usurping many functions of governance from erstwhile states. Experts have long understood that insurgencies rely on complex administrative institutions (Pye 1956). As this volume demonstrates, rebels may demand taxes, construct symbolic elements of statehood, create administrative units, build infrastructure, provide services, and even hold elections. This chapter speaks to how they are able to do so.

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The capacity of states depends in large part on their relations with society. The ability of the state to extract wealth, conduct wars, and regulate society largely evolved from alliances with the aristocracy, the church, and merchants (Tilly 1990). States may face opposition from, be supported by, or compromise with societal actors, leading to varied forms of state power. For Migdal (1988: 31), “the most subtle and fascinating patterns of political change [result] from the accommodation between states and other powerful organizations in society.” This chapter applies a “state in society” perspective to rebel governance. While resisting state domination, aspiring rebel governments are not fundamentally different from conventional governments, developing the capacity to govern through societal alliances.

Based on field research in Aceh, Indonesia, I show how the Free Aceh Movement (GAM: *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*) established systems of governance by allying with rural Islamic leaders (ulama) and urban activists. GAM was not a natural ally for either group – its leaders avoided references to Islam and trumpeted an ethno-nationalist vision. Why did GAM incorporate social forces, especially ones whose goals and identities did not align with their own? These alliances brought the rebels greater legitimacy among local and international audiences and enabled the rebels to resemble a state. Ulama served as administrators, advisors, teachers, and judges, while activists served as publicists, administrators, and teachers, and encouraged popular participation. In turn, many ulama and activists joined the secessionist movement to gain security and because they found that they could achieve some of their own goals through GAM: ulama promoted a more pious society while activists resisted the Indonesian military. The rebel state and societal forces worked together because doing so was mutually beneficial. Another factor, and the key to explaining cohesion over time, was that these alliances were mutually transformative, leading to a degree of convergence. GAM developed a more religious perspective and spoke in terms of human rights, while the ulama and activists turned toward Acehnese ethnic nationalism and ignored rebel excesses. Allying with societal forces enabled the rebels to govern; however, the content of this governance was not what they originally envisioned.

This chapter begins with a brief look at the state in society approach and how it might apply to rebel governance. Secondly, I introduce the case of Aceh, touching on historical governance and war. The [third section](#) details how secessionist rebels and societal forces allied and the forms of governance that resulted. The [fourth section](#) explains how the tensions inherent within these alliances were managed.

REBEL STATE IN SOCIETY

Coercion, domination, and contestation are core concerns for the modern state and those who study it. While authors have shown that the state is a powerful actor, instead of simply a site of politics (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and

Skocpol 1985), state power varies and sometimes fails. Writers have looked to societal forces to explain why. Charles Tilly (1990: 26) notes that states originated as armed groups, evolving through alliances with provincial magnates and merchant capitalists who demanded concessions in exchange for support. Joel Migdal (1988, 2001) outlines what he calls the state in society approach, in which the state is understood as embedded, and even entangled, within web-like societal forces. State power cannot be understood in isolation from society – “there is no getting around the mutuality of state-society interactions” (Migdal, Kohli, and Shue 1994: 2). Sometimes warlords, priests, or clientelist networks resist the state, but they may also work through it, leading to unexpected results.

How might the state in society approach help explain rebel governance? There are reasons to be skeptical. Mampilly (2011: 66) cautions against drawing too closely from state development to explain rebel governance. After all, rebel movements oppose the state, thwarting governance of an enemy order. And while states rarely die, rebel rulers have high mortality rates, facing an international system which favors states as well as incumbent state symbols, institutions, and armies. Rebel rule is reflexive, shaped by the behavior and capacity of the incumbent state. When state forces utilize indiscriminate violence, societal forces have a greater incentive to support insurgents, either to gain security (Kalyvas 2006) or correct injustices (Wood 2003). The evolution of rebel governance will be very different from the evolution of state rule.

Yet, there are several reasons to believe that the state in society approach might be helpful in explaining rebel governance. Migdal (2001: 12) notes that, in struggling to establish control, “states are no different from other formal organizations or informal societal groupings.” States and rebels each utilize coercion to control territory, seeking to monopolize violence, extract wealth, gain legitimacy, and establish administrative power. Rebel forces that are weak in relation to state opponents tend to be in dire need of societal alliances and may be willing to bargain for their support. Mampilly (2011: 96) suggests that, to establish effective control, rebel leaders must “tap into and even co-opt pre-existing institutions and networks of power.” Aspiring rebel governments encounter powerful societal forces. It is costly to eliminate them and risky to allow them to remain neutral, as they may support the incumbent state or draw away potential supporters. Working with societal forces may bring benefits, providing access to resources or deepening their legitimacy. And it can be cost-effective, enabling rebels to govern while not diverting resources from war-making. For a variety of reasons, rebel groups may seek to co-opt or ally with societal forces in their efforts to establish governance.

The study of state/society relations is largely about processes, answering “how” questions instead of explaining causes (Migdal 2001: 23). This chapter explains how GAM came to govern over time, not necessarily why its leaders chose to do so. Consistent with other ethno-secessionist movements,

there was never any doubt in the minds of GAM leaders that they sought to become a government.

HISTORICAL GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT IN ACEH

Located on the northwest tip of Sumatra, Aceh has a proud history as an independent state. The Acehnese, who make up approximately 78 percent of the provincial population, inhabit narrow lowland coastal strips punctuated by rivers and swamps. The mountainous interior of the province is home to indigenous and migrant minorities. The lone region that seems amenable to state control is the northeastern district of Pidie, which features flat terrain, wet-rice agriculture, dense settlement, and a homogenous population. Perhaps paradoxically, while the mountainous interior has been more or less stable, Pidie has been home to near-constant rebellion and is the least governable part of Aceh.

The most powerful of Aceh's rulers was Iskandar Muda (r. 1607–1632), one of Southeast Asia's most tyrannical kings and (not coincidentally) the first to establish an effective state. After this "Golden Age," the Acehnese state declined. In 1873, the Dutch invaded, but met with stiff resistance from the headmasters of Islamic schools, the ulama. Civilian colonial rule was introduced in 1918, and extended through alliances with various local merchant leaders. In this context, a new breed of reformist ulama emerged, steeped in modern Islamic teachings and western forms of organization. Led by the charismatic Daud Beureueh, these reformist ulama reinvigorated anti-Dutch resistance. In the wake of World War II they led a social revolution, killing off Dutch collaborators and other sources of opposition (Sulaiman 1997).

The newly independent Republic of Indonesia also struggled to control Aceh. In 1953, Indonesia merged Aceh into another province and dissolved its government, leading Aceh to join the Darul Islam Rebellion. Led by Beureueh, ulama guerrillas enjoyed effective control of the Pidie region, where they operated hospitals and schools, conducted international trade, taxed local businesses, and even held elections in 1955 for a parliament, the *Majelis Syura* (Sjamsuddin 1985: 198–208). Beureueh went so far as to criticize his Darul Islam allies in other provinces for not governing (Sjamsuddin 1985: 244). Rebel administration was carried out by the *zuama* – pious youth which had emerged from the mixed curriculum schools of reformist ulama. In 1959, Indonesia came to terms with the *zuama* by granting Aceh provincial status, while leading ulama held out. Indonesia established control through an alliance with *zuama* administrators, a homegrown class of technocrats upon which Jakarta could build a New Order.

For over a decade, Suharto and Aceh's technocrats brought significant development: opening schools, building roads, improving irrigation, expanding the electrical grid, and extracting resource wealth (Schlegel 1979). In 1974,

a liquid natural gas contract excluded a group of Acehnese businessmen led by Hasan di Tiro. In 1976, these men founded the Free Aceh Movement. From its inception, GAM was swaddled in the aura of a state, reflecting what Mampilly ([Chapter 4](#), this volume) refers to as “symbolic sovereignty.” GAM rebels provided “a textbook case – indeed, almost a parody – of ethnohistory” (Aspinall [2009](#): 54). GAM leaders introduced a national flag, a coat of arms, history textbooks, a national anthem, official holidays, and ministerial titles for its exiled leaders. They later lobbied various micro-states to open Acehnese embassies, apparently succeeding in Vanuatu.

The initial GAM uprising in 1976 was not successful. The rebels were led by a handful of businessmen, while its fighters were veterans from the Darul Islam Rebellion or youths recruited through kinship ties. Indonesian forces killed many early GAM leaders, while others fled to Malaysia, Libya, and Sweden. At this time, the Indonesian state provided reasonably effective governance and tangible development. Aceh was one of the few provinces with homegrown provincial leaders and support for an opposition political party. Acehnese secessionism was not eliminated, but it was on life support.

By the 1990s, GAM had become a formidable military force. What accounts for this change? The Indonesian state had changed a great deal. It was rife with internal divisions, as the army was increasingly critical of President Suharto and functioned as an autonomous actor (Crouch [2007](#): 356). Aceh’s homegrown technocrats were displaced by the military, which came to dominate politics and control the economy, beginning with petroleum and expanding into construction contracts, shipping, and the drug trade. By the late 1980s, the military was wracked by internal turf wars. GAM expanded by allying with former soldiers and other assorted toughs. For one GAM Commander, “Whoever was brave, even if he had a criminal background, we let them join” (cited in Aspinall [2009](#): 165). This transformed the secessionist organization, which gained military capacity and branched out beyond Pidie, but sacrificed reputation and discipline.

GAM’s evolving coercive capacity was amplified by the return of hundreds of trainees from Libya in 1989. This prompted the Indonesian military to crack down, beginning a decade of severe human rights abuses. While many Acehnese were frustrated with Indonesian rule before this, security forces were now the primary source of insecurity. Economic development stalled while abuses mounted, providing an ideal environment for rebel growth. But GAM was not yet a dominant social or political force. In the wake of the economic crisis and the fall of Suharto in 1998, Acehnese student groups, non-governmental organizations, Islamic scholars, and other societal forces took part in protests against the New Order. Indonesian leaders apologized for human rights abuses, but simultaneously renewed their attacks, killing critics and rebels.

SEEMING LIKE A STATE

Against an abusive but suddenly weakened military, GAM grew into a force whose power at last matched its rhetoric. From 1998 until the 2005 Peace Agreement, the Free Aceh Movement established many elements of governance, but only in the greater Pidie area on the northeast coast. In the rest of the province, GAM was much weaker and remained a largely criminal organization, lacking the territorial control necessary for governance (Kasfir, [Chapter 2](#); Kalyvas, [Chapter 6](#), this volume) and indeed facing civilian resistance (Arjona, [Chapter 9](#), this volume; Barter [2013](#)). The proto-statehood achieved by GAM was confined to districts in the northeast, which is the focus of this chapter.

Although the following pages highlight how GAM performed the duties of a state, I do not wish to exaggerate its capacity. Aspinall ([2009](#): 159) warns against exaggerating GAM's "civilian infrastructure" because the rebels "provided government without governance." GAM did not hold elections and were subject to occasional sweeps by the Indonesian army. Instead of issuing their own state identification and contracts, GAM forged Indonesian documents using stamps and seals stolen from government offices. One official explained that "there were bloody fights for the stamps. With a stamp, GAM could forge documents and hold authority."² GAM never became a functioning state, not even in its strongholds, but it did establish impressive systems of governance, making steps from "war-making to state-making" (Tilly [1990](#): 96). It did so through alliances with two major societal forces: Islamic leaders and urban activists.

Ulama: Administrators, Advisors, Teachers, and Judges

The alliance between rural Islamic leaders and GAM rebels was a puzzling one, as in many ways they were competing social forces. Despite Aceh's history of religious conflict, the secessionist conflict contained surprisingly few religious elements. Some authors explain the absence of Islam in terms of it being a common link between Indonesia and Aceh, and thus not useful in terms of differentiation (Aspinall [2007](#)), while others focus on interests of powerful, pro-western GAM leaders (Barter [2008](#)). Either way, the struggle did not afford Islam a prominent place. Influenced by western concepts of ethnic nations as the core of demands for self-determination, GAM leaders steered their organization toward ethno-nationalism and away from religion. Not only was GAM not Islamic, many prominent Islamic leaders supported Suharto's New Order, joining institutions such as the state Islamic Council, a "vehicle for the government to co-opt senior *Ulama*" (McGibbon [2006](#)). In 2002, the Indonesian Government granted Sharia Law to Aceh, largely to appease the ulama and isolate the rebels. The absence of religion in the conflict and

² Interview with the Lurah of Laksana, Banda Aceh, January 25, 2008.

the co-optation of many ulama by the Indonesian state led many observers to view Aceh's Islamic leaders as sell-outs (Kell 1995). While this may have been true in state strongholds and among the most visible ulama, things were different around Pidie, where many ulama became supporters and members of the Free Aceh Movement.

Originally, even ulama who were critical of the state did not flock to GAM. With the fall of Suharto, rural ulama formed an independent organization, the *Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh* (Association of Traditional Acehnese Scholars), which joined student groups in criticizing Indonesian abuses and demanding a referendum. As the military cracked down on activists of all stripes, and even burned the schools of critical ulama, many came to side with GAM. However, security was only one reason why ulama joined the rebel movement. Other factors were social, as many rebels were former or current students who maintained contact with Islamic teachers. And as GAM established some control, rebel soldiers came to interact with many ulama. Some cooperated to avoid trouble, and some because they expected the rebels to win. Perhaps most importantly, ulama allied with the rebels in opposition to continued abuse at the hands of the army (Barter 2011a). One prominent ulama explained that he did not like GAM at first, since many rebels were criminals, few were pious, and their goals were not concerned with religion. But as he witnessed army abuse and got to know GAM Commanders, he relaxed his views and allowed his students to join. In 2001, Indonesian soldiers killed two students and torched his school, so he joined GAM: "I had to do more than just teach. Islam is a religion of living justice."³ Another factor motivating the ulama to join GAM was that the rebels accommodated them, requesting their help, incorporating religious themes, and providing ulama with prominent positions in their organization. Ulama were able to achieve their goal of encouraging Islam in Acehnese society through the rebels.

Just as ulama saw GAM as a vehicle to achieve their goals, GAM saw Islamic leaders as useful allies. Ulama provided the rebels military advantages, legitimacy, and civilian governance. Military support for GAM began with providing sanctuary for persons pursued by military forces, which drew angry responses from soldiers.⁴ As ulama witnessed army abuses and were themselves abused, many began to support GAM, recruiting through mosques and schools, hiding weapons, ferrying information, and praising the rebels during sermons.⁵ Rural ulama also helped GAM by sounding the call to prayer when Indonesian soldiers were nearby, allowing GAM time to flee.

Ulama also provided the rebels with an opportunity to deepen their legitimacy among rural Acehnese. Effective governance is about more than

³ Interview with Teungku Yahya Abdullah, Bireuen, February 4, 2008.

⁴ Interview with Teungku Faisal, Secretary General of HUDA, Banda Aceh, January 26, 2008.

⁵ For example, Teungku H. Muhammad Wali al-Khalidy, from a respected family of *ulama* in North Aceh, spoke highly of GAM leaders and his *dayah* became a centre for GAM recruitment (Aspinall 2009: 203).

providing security and services. It is also about the right to rule. GAM already enjoyed some popular support, rooted in kinship ties, anger toward Indonesian abuses, and identification with ethno-nationalist symbols. This said, GAM was a shady organization and many villagers were suspicious of them. Ulama support was crucial in overcoming such doubts through spiritual endorsement. They did so at first by speaking favorably of the rebels, then by venturing into GAM bases to deliver sermons. For one GAM Commander, “*ulama* came to us for *Jumaat* prayer, which was important for our morale and image.”⁶ Many traditionalist ulama blessed GAM soldiers and weapons with holy water. Ulama became outspoken critics of Indonesian forces – some referred to the Indonesian military as non-believers and, echoing anti-Dutch resistance, recited the *Hikayat Prang Sabil* (Epic of the Holy War). At the peak of the conflict, pro-GAM ulama announced that if Indonesia did not grant independence to Aceh, they would declare a Holy War (Miller 2008: 343). By publicly supporting the insurgents, GAM gained significant credibility in rural areas.

Islamic leaders also helped the insurgents govern. As religious administrators, ulama and *imam* continued to preside over weddings, births, circumcisions, and funerals. They also provided emergency assistance to their communities, as mosques served as makeshift shelters. GAM developed a network of mosques to organize GAM rallies and convey rebel views. Some ulama served as GAM tax collectors, as they were seen as honest, plus cultural institutions such as *zakat* facilitated this role. Islamic students also collected taxes through roadside collections. Throughout Indonesia, it is common to see mosques under construction at the side of the road and volunteers collecting donations from passing motorists with nets. This became a source of GAM revenue, a traditional institution adapted to new uses.

Ranking ulama also became GAM advisors, lending their expertise and legitimacy to Commanders. This is consistent with Islamic and Acehnese traditions. In Aceh’s past, senior ulama were granted titles such as *Shayk* (elder), *Mufti* (Interpreter /Scholar), and *Wali* (Guardian). Their roles were to review policies, make judicial statements (*fatwa*), and advise the Sultan, responsibilities evident under the New Order through the state *Majelis*. By asking ulama to serve as advisors, GAM pulled powerful Islamic leaders into its organization. For their part, ulama were now able to influence the insurgents and gain prestige. Since the conflict, many have not returned to teaching, remaining active in political campaigns and village courts.

Another contribution made by ulama toward rebel governance was providing a system of education. Aceh has a long history of Islamic education, beginning with traditionalist *Dayah* boarding schools, later joined by mixed curriculum *Madrasah*. Under the New Order, Islamic schools were challenged

⁶ Interview with GAM Commander Kowboy Effendi, Bireuen, February 4, 2008.

by state schools. This hit Madrasah particularly hard, as they were previously the sole venue for math, economics, and science. During the conflict, GAM targeted state schools, which they accused of teaching a pro-Indonesian curriculum. As schools were burned down and teachers fled, ulama saw an opportunity to expand. Many included GAM perspectives in their lessons, emphasizing Acehese history and ethnicity. Through boarding schools, usually traditionalist Dayah, GAM was able to socialize future recruits, while ulama were able to spread Islamic teachings. Some ulama even established schools in GAM camps, providing religious education to GAM soldiers.

The primary contribution of the ulama to GAM rule was providing a judicial system, serving as judges (*qadi*) in rebel courts. Like education, creating courts in GAM strongholds was especially important because state courts were largely inoperative. GAM courts originated in a desire to discipline troops, then expanded to include cases of civilians acting against rebels, such as providing information to Indonesian forces. For one GAM Commander, “if we just kill people, we do what the army did, create a generation of vengeance.”⁷ However, early investigations and trials were not viewed as neutral. The rebels recognized this and, consistent with Islamic norms, looked to Islamic officials. Requesting ulama assistance was a strategic move, as it made their trials appear neutral, brought ulama into their organization, decreased time constraints on Commanders, and improved their public image. The rebels were able to select judges who were favorable to their cause, but were unable to determine the outcomes of specific cases. For one GAM member, “we chose which *ulama* would be judges, but we did not choose blind followers.”⁸ One judge said, “people listened to us. Sometimes, we did not rule like the Commanders wanted.”⁹ The emergence of ulama as judges is explained not only by the interests of GAM and ulama, though – many Acehese preferred ulama judges. Many chiefs encouraged ulama to serve as judges, as they helped moderate the rebels and ensure a fair hearing: “sometimes GAM was not fair, they were too angry. It was important to have *ulama* preside, and do what was right.”¹⁰ Instead of being executed, guilty parties were now more likely to be exiled to other parts of Aceh after swearing an oath on the Koran.

Rebel courts helped GAM govern and were favored by many villagers, but also provided a means through which ulama could pursue their own aims. It did not take long for rebel/ulama justice to expand into matters unrelated to the conflict – first to criminal matters, and then to the social realm. For example, in

⁷ Interview with GAM Commander Ismuda, Bireuen, February 4, 2008.

⁸ Interview with Anwar, student activist, *Ulee Sagoe* in Peusangan Selatan, Bireuen, February 4, 2008.

⁹ Interview with Teungku Mohammad Wali al-Khalidy, Bireuen, February 4, 2008.

¹⁰ Interview with Chief Syarbini, Saree, Aceh Besar, November 1, 2007.

2002, a village chief in Aceh Besar was accused of hoarding government rice rations. GAM forces organized a trial and invited a prominent ulama, Teungku Faisal, to preside over the case. He found that the rice never reached the village and was stolen by the sub-district chief. The accused chief recalled that, “the Teungku explained that I was good to the community and heard many people talk about how bad the *Camat* [sub-district chief] is. GAM was convinced, and chased the *Camat* out.”

By 2003, GAM courts came to enforce limited forms of Sharia Law, a core demand of Aceh’s ulama since the Darul Islam Rebellion. In 2002, Indonesia granted Aceh the right to enforce Sharia; however, this was rejected by most Acehnese and many ulama as a ploy to undermine the rebels, as it would be implemented by loyal, pro-state ulama. GAM ulama responded with their own brand of Islamic law. One of the pioneers of GAM Sharia explained that their system differs from Indonesia’s: “our Sharia is very basic, and not concerned with backwards punishments.”¹¹ GAM Sharia policed liquor consumption and drug use, ensured that businesses were closed during prayer time, regulated male/female contact, and pressured women to wear head scarves. “We moved from military judgements to social ones, making Aceh healthier.”¹² GAM Sharia was hardly enforced, developing as the rebels’ power began to wane. The victory for GAM ulama was largely symbolic but, considering GAM’s non-religious nature, was a surprising shift for the insurgents.

Through the ulama, GAM gained military support, legitimacy, and governance. By serving as administrators, advisors, teachers, and judges, Acehnese ulama helped GAM take on the functions of a state. The ulama were also able to create a more Islamic society, expand their schools, and implement Sharia Law. The ulama were able to achieve their goals not by confronting the rebel movement, but instead by transforming it. In doing so, many ulama changed a great deal as well, supporting a conflict that they previously saw as outside of their interests and taking up careers with the rebels. Many ulama came to emphasize ethnic Acehnese identity, excluding Javanese communities and incorporating local historical themes into their sermons. The alliance between GAM Commanders and rural ulama was mutually empowering as well as mutually transformative.

Activists: Publicists, Administrators, Teachers, and Participation

While the roles of international civil society in shaping armed conflicts are increasingly understood, less attention has been paid to the roles of local activists. Below, I show how despite initial tensions, the Free Aceh Movement

¹¹ Interview with Teungku Mohammad Wali al-Khalidy, Bireuen, February 4, 2008.

¹² Interview with Teungku Yahya Abdullah, Bireuen, February 4, 2008.

came to ally with significant portions of Aceh's homegrown activist community, as current and former students came to provide the rebels with more sophisticated public relations, served as administrators and teachers, and worked to encourage a degree of popular participation.

The national student and NGO movement that helped overthrow Suharto was a product of New Order development, which produced new groups of educated urban activists as well as epic corruption and human rights abuses. Initially, Aceh was similar to other provinces. Acehnese universities were established by Acehnese technocrats and were firmly enmeshed within pan-Indonesian networks. Aceh was home to two major universities, located in close proximity to one another just outside of Banda. They produced tight-knit student groups which evolved into non-governmental organizations as the students graduated. Others became lawyers, journalists, and academics, but maintained close ties to NGO activists. Acehnese activists were essentially Indonesian, traveling widely throughout the country, joining national campaigns, and speaking Indonesian at home (Siegel 2000). In 1998, they mounted protests involving tens of thousands of persons, which, while anti-government, had little to do with secession, and were instead consistent with national student movements.

That protests in Aceh were not initially secessionist in nature is often forgotten. Since GAM claimed protests as their own, the army concurred that their critics must be GAM, and over time many NGOs gravitated toward the insurgents. GAM leaders were initially hostile to Acehnese activists, whose ability to mobilize the provincial population and gain international support dwarfed their own. Activists and the rebels diverged in many important ways. Activists largely identified as Indonesian and were part of Indonesian networks, while GAM was founded upon an exaggerated sense of Acehnese distinctiveness. GAM targeted ethnic Javanese migrants, while activists included many Javanese born in Aceh. Second, GAM envisioned a Sultanate while activists demanded democracy. Next, activists were not initially pro-independence, but instead wanted national reform and justice (Aspinall 2009: 129). Activists became sympathetic toward independence as Aceh failed to change while the rest of the country was undergoing reforms. When they spoke in terms of independence, it was through a very different frame. While GAM founded their claims for sovereignty on a complex historical/legal argument, activists accepted that Aceh joined Indonesia, but Indonesia repaid them with decades of abuse – what Drexler (2008) refers to as the “broken promise” narrative. Influenced by events in East Timor, activists demanded a referendum, which they saw as consistent with democratic principles, while GAM insisted that a referendum would acknowledge Indonesian authority over Aceh. Finally, activists and rebel soldiers did not generally like each other. Many activists saw the rebels as thugs or hicks, and some were weary of GAM corruption. Meanwhile, the insurgents saw activists as urban elites who were out of touch with the real

Aceh.¹³ Like the ulama, Aceh's activists were by no means natural allies for the Free Aceh Movement.

By 2000, the independent position cultivated by students and NGOs was increasingly untenable. The military had regrouped and initiated a violent crackdown on all critics. Attacks on activists were severe, leading many to side with an increasingly sophisticated Free Aceh Movement. But insecurity was not the only factor pushing activists toward GAM. Activists also felt a sense of betrayal, as the country they identified with was undergoing reforms everywhere except for Aceh, where the New Order limped on. Another factor was that while investigating abuses and fleeing from the army, activists came into contact with GAM for the first time. As students residing in the capital, activists heard the worst of the guerrillas. As they met GAM face-to-face, activists were impressed not only by rebel soldiers and Commanders, but also by their genuine popularity. Finally, activists joined the rebel movement because they were able to achieve some of their goals through it, such as criticizing the military, promoting popular participation, and delivering aid to Acehese villages.

Not all activists allied with the rebels. Older, more established activists were critical of GAM, worked with national and western NGOs, and were more likely to flee (Barter 2014). But a significant number of activists, especially young students, came to ally with and join the rebels (Drexler 2008: 185). For Aspinall (2009: 141), "although most NGOs were officially neutral on independence, as time passed, some of the student activists became closer to GAM politically." Like the ulama, students and NGOs were pushed by the army toward the rebel camp and GAM welcomed these new allies.

Activists did not simply document Indonesian abuses and communicate them to an international audience; they also ignored GAM abuses and condemned those who did not. Reports criticizing GAM for attacking Javanese minorities were met with threats from pro-insurgent NGOs. Activists were not only empowered by this alliance, they were also transformed by it. Aspinall (2009: 123) details how groups that previously identified as Indonesian nationalists became "a new vanguard of Acehese nationalism." Activists spoke Acehese instead of Indonesian and became interested in local culture. Living in the countryside, betrayed by Indonesia, and influenced by GAM, Acehese activists underwent a cultural revival. While they had previously looked to Indonesian identity and criticized GAM parochialism, NGO reports now touched on Acehese history and featured Acehese terms. While activists gained security and a platform to achieve their goals, they were also transformed.

¹³ *Ulama* differ from activists in this regard, as most GAM soldiers had personal relationships with Islamic teachers and held them in deep regard. Rebel soldiers had no such respect for urban students and activists.

The Free Aceh Movement also found the alliance with activists to be beneficial. Unlike ulama, urban activists did not enhance the military capacity of the rebels. Nor did they bring much local legitimacy. Instead, activists brought new opportunities for GAM to improve its international image. By issuing statements and holding press conferences, activists helped to build a pro-GAM constituency among western journalists and NGOs, whose views were soon “dominating representations and analyses of the conflict” (Drexler 2008: 193). They also updated how the rebels framed the conflict, as the language of the day had shifted from socialist anti-colonialism to protecting human rights. Viewing the success of Timorese activists, the rebels adopted the language of democracy, referendum, and human rights. Activists made for a more sophisticated GAM, launching careful public relations campaigns that improved the legitimacy of the rebels abroad.

The primary reason that GAM welcomed activists into their fold was because they helped build up the rebels’ administrative apparatus, providing GAM with a civilian wing (GAM *Sipil*) and serving as sub-district administrators (*Ulee Sagoe*). An important indicator of rebel as well as state governance involves distinguishing between civilian and military wings. GAM proclaimed new administrative divisions as early as 1978, but these were solely aspirational. The influence of educated activists provided GAM with civilian administrators on the ground, institutionalizing and regulating rebel governance. They contributed to rebel governance by providing public services, managing tax revenue, staffing schools, and encouraging popular participation. As Indonesian officials fled, activists tended to take their place, managing basic government services in ways that were little different from their predecessors. Some activists maintained government records such as births, deaths, and property. Aspinall (2009: 159) notes that “villagers were going to GAM officials to do business they had formerly conducted in government offices: registering land sales, resolving minor disputes, and even obtaining identity cards.” Activists distributed emergency rice rations to villagers and even carried out public works. For example, one activist turned Ulee Sagoe brought in contractors to repair local irrigation systems, paid from GAM coffers.¹⁴

Providing public goods requires funding. From the beginning of the conflict, the most visible element of GAM authority was taxation. The secessionists collected “*Nanngro*e Tax” through robberies, roadside tolls, and extortion. Activists helped expand GAM’s capacity to collect tax and changed how they managed it, as GAM came to collect regular income taxes from state officials and business owners. They even established hotlines to report extortion, officially by groups pretending to be GAM. For one restaurant owner, “nothing changed. I was taxed the same by Indonesia

¹⁴ Interview in with Anwar, *Ulee Sagoe* in Peusangan Selatan, Bireuen, February 4, 2008.

and GAM. GAM soldiers actually demanded less food and money than state soldiers because they were disciplined.”¹⁵ Although the taxes collected by GAM officials often went to Commanders and soldiers, activists managed to reinvest some revenue in the community, such as by repairing infrastructure and helping widows.¹⁶

Activists also served as teachers. Products of western-style post-secondary education, as activists fled from the military, they helped to reopen former state schools, infusing lessons with themes such as human rights, sustainable development, computers, and English, while also featuring new interpretations of Acehese history and ethnic identity.¹⁷ I will return to how this interacted with Islamic education below.

A final element of rebel governance provided by activists involved encouraging popular participation in the rebel movement. Along with public works, Ulee Sagoe were tasked with a sort of ombudsperson role. They communicated local complaints and criticisms to GAM, although in forums controlled by the rebels. This made limited feedback safe for the villagers and allowed GAM to become more responsive. One example concerns village guards, created by the Indonesian military to combat the rebels. Villagers did not want to serve, but were not in a position to refuse: “We approached the *Ulee Sagoe* and explained our situation. We came to an agreement that guards would be here, but not on active duty. We would leave a symbol, usually prayer mats hanging from a laundry line, so GAM would know that we won’t stop them and they won’t attack us.”¹⁸

Another form of feedback utilized by the activists was through local media, also staffed by former students. GAM Commanders published their cellular phone numbers in local papers, with advertisements asking Acehese to provide information on army locations and the misdeeds of “fake GAM” (Aspinall 2009: 182). Activist efforts to encourage participation stopped short of holding elections. However, after the conflict, activists helped organize local elections, transforming GAM into a political party and running as candidates. Activists made great strides toward encouraging participation, helping GAM evolve from an armed group into a social movement and a political machine.

Just as the goals and identities of GAM activists were transformed, the rebel movement was simultaneously altered. GAM did not merely gain personnel – it was infused with new concepts and language, speaking in terms of human rights instead of just armed conflict, multiculturalism in place of ethnic nationalism, democracy in place of monarchy, and a referendum in place of some natural right. The reason for independence

¹⁵ Interview with restaurant owner, Saree, Aceh Besar, October 30, 2007.

¹⁶ Interview with Nurdin Abdul Rahman, former GAM negotiator, Bupati of Bireuen, November 5, 2008.

¹⁷ Interviews with Juanda Djamal, Saree, Aceh Besar, November 2007.

¹⁸ Discussion with farmers, Abeuk Usong, Bireuen, February 3, 2008.

shifted, so that instead of simply being rooted in history and international law, it was based on an abusive relationship with Indonesia. Such changes were evident in the 2002 Stavanger Declaration, a constitution of sorts written by GAM leaders and activists, which recognized di Tiro as the Head of State (*Wali Neugara*), not the Sultan. The Declaration proclaimed “the State of Aceh practices the system of democracy.” GAM also affirmed its support for “friendly and neutral NGOs” at home and abroad and proclaimed its adherence to human rights. The document also stated that there were two national languages: Acehnese and English (notably excluding Arabic). Most importantly, GAM clarified that while “the people of Aceh” are defined by blood, “citizenship is determined by both principles of *ius sanguinis* and *ius soli*.” This marked a major change from years of attacks on ethnic minorities. These changes were not merely rhetorical. GAM made real efforts to improve the conduct of its troops and softened its stance toward (remaining) Javanese minorities (Aspinall 2009: 173).

The incorporation of activists and their ideas likely even provided a foundation through which the conflict was overcome. Activists provided GAM with skilled negotiators and a new diplomatic vocabulary. Early claims of ethnic distinctiveness were not negotiable. By emphasizing human rights and democracy, not ethnic differences and independence, negotiation became possible. And by emphasizing democracy and human rights, it was more difficult to oppose a country embarking on impressive reforms. After a series of peace agreements, a massive tsunami devastated the province on December 26, 2004. The disaster accelerated talks with newly elected President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Activists were key members of the rebels’ negotiating teams, serving as rebel diplomats (Coggins, Chapter 5, this volume), who brought in western advisors, and were later elected to office through the former rebel’s political party.

Student and NGO activists transformed the very meaning of the secessionist struggle. This echoes the expansion of states, in which the “injection of new social organization” leads to an influx of symbols, styles, and ideals, forcing “changes and accommodations on the part of the state’s components as they adapt to the specific patterns and forces” (Migdal 2001: 25). The alliance forged between activists and rebels was mutually empowering, allowing each to achieve their goals. GAM provided security, a platform through which activists could resist the army and protect civilians, and an opportunity to pursue human rights and democracy. Activists provided GAM with a new international image, more effective administrative control, new forms of popular participation, and a new generation of political leaders. Their partnership was mutually transformative, as activists started sounding like the rebels and the rebels starting speaking the language of activists. Indeed, “ideological convergence was a two way process” (Aspinall 2009: 142).

MANAGING TENSIONS

Neither ulama nor activists were natural allies for GAM or for each other. Ulama and activists were seemingly antagonistic, and one might think they would clash in terms of education policies, even though they became absorbed into a single rebel movement. How did the rebel movement maintain cohesion? Below, I show how they did so during the conflict as well as how they have attempted to maintain unity after the conflict was formally resolved in 2005, where tensions have become far more visible.

There have always been tensions within GAM, namely between field Commanders and exiled elites, a division only partly related to ulama/activist schism. It is common for the leaders of armed groups who are geographically (not to mention generationally and ideologically) distant from ground forces to lose control of their organizations. While exiled elites in Sweden were foreign-educated businessmen, field Commanders were of humbler origins. The willingness to compromise the demand for independence and agree to peace was both a consequence and a cause of divisions between exiled leaders and local Commanders. These tensions became public during the 2006 elections, where the gubernatorial candidate preferred by the exiled elite was rejected by GAM rank and file. However, the division between GAM elites and ground forces has not been fatal, as the exiled elites have treaded carefully and worked to ensure a wide distribution of patronage.

Such tensions partly explain why GAM incorporated disparate social forces. Rebel forces on the ground tended to ally with ulama, as they were educated in Islamic schools and maintained links with their teachers. Meanwhile, exiled elites leaned toward activists, perhaps to balance the influence of the ulama. During the conflict, such tensions were largely masked. Some discord became visible after September 11, when GAM leaders issued statements supporting the United States – a source of disagreement for many GAM ulama.¹⁹ Following the conflict, some former societal allies have been critical of the former rebels. When ex-GAM members formed *Partai Aceh* (PA), some ulama and activists formed distinct local political parties. This said, most GAM ulama remained loyal, forming a faction within PA, known as the Ulama Council of Nanggroe Aceh, comprising those “who had been imams for the GAM forces during the conflict” (International Crisis Group 2009: 5). Activists have also clashed with their rebel allies, but, again, these divisions have not been fatal. GAM Commanders became critical of their leaders for affording non-combatants, especially activists, such a prominent role in their organization.²⁰ After the conflict, many activists shifted to support GAM Commanders against the exiled elites (International Crisis Group 2009: 3). Mohammad Nazar, a former activist and pro-GAM figure, was elected as Vice Governor alongside the candidate

¹⁹ Interview with *Teungku Zakaria*, Abeuk Usong, Bireuen, February 3, 2008.

²⁰ Interview with GAM Commander Udin, Aceh Besar, November 3, 2007.

put forth by GAM Commanders. This was not to last, though, as activists and Commanders fielded separate parties in the 2009 elections, with activists reporting intimidation from former GAM (Barter 2011b). In the 2012 elections, former rebel hardliners drove former rebels affiliated with activist groups from elected office, as the power of activist rebels has waned considerably.

There have been surprisingly few public tensions between rural ulama and urban activists. There were debates between ulama and activist political parties in 2009, and GAM leaders report some disagreements within the organization regarding local Sharia Law.²¹ One might expect that education would be a battleground for these two forces, as ulama enjoyed the opportunity to expand their schools as state institutions weakened, while activists, who were mostly products of state education, sought to reinvigorate former state schools. But clashes over education were notably absent. One village in Aceh Besar is illustrative. Here, rival ulama expanded their schools after the state schools were closed in 2000. Months later, activists fleeing from the army re-opened the classrooms. Instead of competing, activists and ulama created an integrated system in which activists instructed students in the afternoons, while the ulama remained as head teachers; students resided at boarding schools and gained traditional instruction in the mornings. This can be explained by the fact that many activists had some Islamic schooling in their youth and saw ulama as integral to ethnic Acehnese identity, and it was clear that activists could not compete with ulama for rural support. The primary factor was that activists were themselves pious, respecting the ulama; “*ulama* could not provide some modern forms of education, but we had to work with them. They are Aceh’s moral center.”²² In the post-conflict era, former activists have created new schools to supplement state and Islamic schools, often serving to mediate between these two forces. While one might have expected tension, mutual respect and common goals have allowed for interesting compromises.

Why were there so few intra-rebel tensions during the conflict? Even after the conflict, ulama and activists have not clashed. For one, potentially rival forces inhabit different geographical spaces – GAM ulama were largely rural, while activists were urban – providing fewer opportunities for clashes. A second explanation concerns common identities. Aceh’s activists, while pro-western, are typically pious. There is no contradiction between their faith and human rights, and some activists remain close to their childhood Islamic teachers. A third factor is exit. Ulama and activists who disagree with GAM have left the organization. For one ulama in South Aceh, “I was with GAM, but after the conflict they changed, so I joined PDA [*Partai Daulat Aceh*].”²³ Fourthly,

²¹ Interview with Nurdin Abdul Rahman, former GAM negotiator, Bupati of Bireuen, November 2008.

²² Interview with Juanda Djamal, Saree, Aceh Besar, November 2007.

²³ Interview with Teungku Syafei, Pasi Lembang, Aceh Selatan, April 14, 2009.

backed by the organizational might of the Aceh Transition Committee (KPA: *Komite Peralihan Aceh*), GAM Commanders and soldiers have dominated the economy and electoral contests. Elections have served as a means through which KPA affiliates have emerged the clear winners, leaving others with little choice but to fall in line. A fifth reason why potential tensions have not been fatal to the organization is due to skilled internal diplomacy. Activists and many GAM leaders do not support Sharia Law, but they have been careful to only criticize Indonesia's version of it, avoiding confrontation with their ulama allies. A final reason for cohesion among these disparate groups has been emphasized throughout this chapter. The alliances between GAM and societal forces have not simply been marriages of convenience, but have instead been transformative, leading to a degree of convergence. Many criminal elements have become devoted separatists, many ulama have opted not to teach in favor of political involvement, and activists have become ethnic nationalists. Their identities and goals have changed through interaction, in a process of socialization.

CONCLUSION

States typically begin as armed groups, then seek to extract taxes and create courts. These elements of proto-statehood were evident in the evolution of the Free Aceh Movement. From here, to gain war-making capacity and support, aspiring states must make compromises with societal forces, leading to the civilianization of armed groups, the militarization of societal forces, and an expansion of governance. These partnerships often lead to unanticipated consequences, with armed groups and the societies they govern rarely resembling the early visions of military leaders (Migdal 1994: 17).

The Free Aceh Movement originated as a small group of intellectuals whose base was mobilized through personal loyalties and kinship networks. Early on, it became an effective armed group by allying with shady former state soldiers, gaining coercive capacity at the expense of reputation and control. With the fall of Suharto, GAM faced a *mélange* of competing societal forces. Ulama of various stripes, as well as student and NGO activists, challenged Indonesia in distinct ways. As the Indonesian military cracked down, GAM deftly accommodated these forces, without which it would not have grown into the movement that it did. Each group helped the guerrillas deepen their legitimacy and provide governance. But Islamic and activist networks were not putty in the hands of the rebels, as they sought to achieve distinct goals through a rebel movement that came to feature Islamic advisors and local Sharia Law on the one hand, and calls for elections and human rights on the other. Ulama and activists became more sympathetic to GAM, embracing ethno-nationalism and supporting calls for independence, and have since emerged as leaders among the former rebels. The story of rebel governance in Aceh is not one of a powerful

rebel group simply filling a vacuum and taking on elements of statehood, nor is it a story of ruling through naked military force. Instead, it is a story of accommodating powerful societal groups, resulting in compromises and unexpected patterns of governance.

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Organization and Governance: The Evolution of Urban Militias in Medellín, Colombia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the relationship between the way in which the leftist militias organized and the governance structures they created and deployed in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Medellín, Colombia. These militias displaced violent bands that had previously dominated the local population without establishing order. They succeeded due to superior organization, military discipline, and intelligence gained from disaffected civilians. The militias, motivated by leftist ideologies, gained popular support by restoring a modicum of order with harsh punishments of deviants and engaging in social campaigns of re-education among residents. But their success eventually resulted in the loss of their ideological coherence, discipline, and military capacity by recruiting former band members and local youth, and by seeking rents for personal benefit. These transformations eroded their popular support. Changes in militias' internal organization, profile of fighters, and competition with other armed actors reveal some of the mechanisms through which organizational dynamics and models of governance affect each other.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the relationship between the way in which the leftist militias organized and the governance structures they created and deployed in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Medellín, Colombia. It makes two simple, interrelated, claims. First, governance structures reflected pre-existing organizational dynamics. Second, the experience of governing transformed and perturbed those organizational dynamics. The militias were able to establish themselves as a relatively stable and continuous rule-setting presence in some territories – an urban neighborhood or *barrio* – and

precisely because of this they suffered complex, substantial changes. These changes were related to many factors, which indeed included the capture of rents and the use of violence against unarmed civilians, but in ways that seem to go squarely against the predictions of the “greed or grievance” literature and its heirs. For example, I will suggest that it was precisely the moralistic and ideological drive of the militias that pushed them toward a violence “beyond the permitted bounds” once they became the dominant presence in the barrio, which in turn undercut their legitimacy. It deserves to be noted, however, that “violence within bounds” enjoyed broad support, at least during the initial period during which the militias established their dominant position.

The early Medellín militias, which are the focus of this narrative, operated between the late 1980s and 1994. In that year, they negotiated their reinsertion with the city authorities. A main tenet of the peace agreement was that the militia fighters would be entitled to create and manage a legal security cooperative (which eventually took the name of Cooperative of Community Services, or COOSERCOM, by its Spanish acronym), that would hold the militia political/security project together and would protect, and watch over, the barrios. But COOSERCOM failed miserably, and eventually a substantial proportion of its members were killed by their own comrades or by competing illegal groups.

At their zenith, the militias were able to establish strong forms of governance throughout the city.¹ Indeed, they claimed to be a state in the making: “We are a state inside the state,” according to Pablo García, the leader of the original militia project. In the words of a barrio resident, “Here the state has never existed, they come here to shoot, the police have committed massacres and this we and the community know ... The militias were born as a product of the need of the people to self-govern, defend themselves, and fulfill the vacuums.” This is an overstatement, and indeed a major aspect of the militias’ saga was that they only produced a partial order, which continuously had to be negotiated with state agencies and other illegal actors. On the other hand, it is true that during their golden years the militias acted as the main provider of security in several neighborhoods of Medellín, as an adjudicator of claims, and as an alternative authority.

The Medellín militias are an idiosyncratic experience, even with respect to other rebel forms of governance in Colombia. To begin with, Medellín is demographically and economically Colombia’s second city. Despite the illusion of total state absence that quotes such as those of the previous paragraph express, the militias were forced to interact on an everyday basis with a state that was very much present, as a provider of services and eventually as a competitive allocator of claims. Second, this was an urban war, while

¹ Some militias remained active in specific barrios after that, but without their former dominance.

the bulk of the Colombian conflict is rural.² Third, the *mélange* of narco-trafficking, armed insurrection and political disarray that turned Medellín into a territory of war in the late 1980s and early 1990s is probably unique. Many aspects of this narrative simply do not lend themselves to any kind of reasonable generalization.

Even then, I believe that the Medellín militia experience can suggest interesting avenues of research and reflection. I highlight two. First is the complex interaction between the rebel organization and governance. On the one hand, I will show that after their victory over their illegal rivals, the militias drew on the worldview and skills that had allowed them to win in the first place. But these were not necessarily instrumental to building a stable and self-reinforcing governance. On the other hand, I exhibit some concrete mechanisms – absorption of part of the personnel of the defeated groups, growth of the followership but not of the intermediate layer of tested cadres, delivery of punishment and threats, change of stakeholders, access to new rents – that changed the course of the militias once they achieved their dominant position.

Second is the complex status of violence against civilians as a resource for rebel governance. A substantial part of the literature on civil wars is informed by straightforward assumptions. According to the first, when an illegal (or governmental) agent exercises violence against civilians, it immediately loses legitimacy. An additional, necessary, but equally unwarranted assumption is frequently introduced: groups and civilians appear in front of each other as clearly separate and unitary entities. The experience of urban militias in Medellín suggests that the way in which the exercise of violence affects the degree of legitimacy that the rebel group enjoys should be taken as an empirical outcome, not assumed. In Medellín, there was a strong demand from broad sectors of the population subject to the control of the militias to repress specific civilian targets: transgressors, deviants, and so on. The capacity of these militias to deliver death sentences remained a significant source of their legitimacy. It was an indispensable component of what amounted to a Hobbesian pact. As will be seen, support by civilians and some stakeholders did weaken when violence went above specific bounds. It is probably the case that the militia constituencies did not accept too much violence, nor too little.

The chapter proceeds in the following order. First, I describe the context and the opportunity structure within which the militias appeared and acted.

² Urban war in Medellín involved complex interactions of five types of actors who competed and allied with each other. In this account I refer to them as the state (mainly agencies of Medellín municipal administration), the guerrillas (the large rural-based insurgent organizations such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the FARC), the narco-cartels or traffickers (primarily Pablo Escobar's organization), the bands (or gangs, small-scale criminal groups that controlled parts of the barrios), and the militias (the larger groups that are the subject of this paper).

I identify three major militia objectives (the defeat of the bands, the putative reconstruction of a harmonious community in the barrios, and the tracing and stabilization of frontiers between militia and alien territory) and describe how they worked. In the [second section](#), I focus on the model of militia governance and its growth crisis. The [third section](#) describes the unraveling of the militia project. Finally, I put together organizational structures, governance, and their unraveling and show why success destabilized the militias.

The narrative is based on literature produced by Medellín academics, much of which is based on very high-quality field work, a set of in-depth interviews with fighters and experts that my research assistants and I collected over the course of several investigations, judicial interventions, and a press archive. Uncited quotations in the text were taken from these interviews.

THE BACKGROUND

The boom of drug trafficking in Colombia in the late 1970s created favorable conditions for the spread of criminal activities. Simultaneously, the country relapsed into a new cycle of war. True, Marxist guerrillas had set up already in the 1960s, but it is probably reasonable to date the initiation of the conflict to between the late 1970s and the early 1980s. During and after that period, guerrilla groups became stronger, and their challenges to the state more direct and spectacular. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which eventually became the country's main guerrilla group and which by 1978 had no more than 1,000 members (Ferro and Uribe 2002: 29), declared itself a "people's army" in its Seventh Conference in 1982. Other guerrillas, such as the M19, also made credible bids for producing a substantive change of the political order.

By the end of the 1970s, Medellín also started to heat up. With approximately one million inhabitants, Medellín was an industrial hotbed, credited with a long tradition of efficiency. One might have thought that the state had both the incentives and the means to prevent any challenge developing there. However, violence in Medellín developed faster and went much further than in the country as a whole. Two factors help explain why. First, Medellín hosted the eponymous cartel – one that favored an extremely aggressive project of expansion, combining violent killings and raids – with networking with parties, entrepreneurs, and state agencies. In addition, the Medellín cartel promoted an early "politicization of crime" (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Jaramillo 2004), which included the launching of a massive attack against "kidnappers" – that is, guerrillas. Indeed, the first paramilitary group was the MAS (Muerte a Secuestradores: "Death to Kidnappers"), headed and coordinated by the cartel.

Second, the national guerrillas operating in the countryside eventually chose Medellín as a laboratory for taking the war to the big cities. The majority of the

guerrillas had engaged in a peace process during the Belisario Betancur administration (1982–1986), and some of them used the truce to strengthen their links with the population. But they had not abandoned the ideal of armed resistance or rebellion against the state. The guerrillas launched several initiatives that offered important knowhow and ideas to key cadres. The M19 in particular created “peace camps” in popular barrios of Medellín and Cali (another big city), where it delivered political and practical instruction – for example, martial arts and the manipulation of small arms (Villamizar 1995: 397–98). Other guerrillas, whose urban tactical repertoire had been limited to the creation of military units for attacks, hold-ups, and blackmail to support their main activity – rural war – eventually tried to follow the M19 path, with mixed success.

The combination of both factors created a security crisis in the city that deepened gradually as both the guerrillas and the narco-cartels became stronger and more audacious. In the late 1980s, Pablo Escobar declared his war against the state. The Colombian security agencies, both challenged and deeply penetrated by the cartels, responded by focusing on big offenses committed by major criminal structures, leaving lesser crimes below the radar. The Medellín Metropolitan Police, which had been created in 1983 to respond to an already sharp insecurity increase, was unable to turn the tide. It had been penetrated by the Cartel and other illegal agencies, and later, when Escobar declared policemen a military target (in part because he felt that the rival Cali Cartel had even more influence in the police than him), they spent a substantial part of their energies defending themselves. In the meantime, the guerrillas, who had grown incessantly and were now reaching their membership ceiling, overcame their deep mutual differences and created a covering structure: the *Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar*.

For the popular neighborhoods, the crisis appeared in a very practical and tangible way, as a radical breakdown of the provision of security. Many of them were overtaken by *bandas* – criminal gangs that freely used unrestrained violence against their targets but also against common neighbors. Some of the bands had direct links with Escobar and his henchmen, but independently of this many of them developed very quickly due to several factors: rapid access to money and weapons, the existence of a market of experts in violence, and the aloofness of the state security agencies with respect to “ordinary” crime committed in the periphery of the city. Band members used their control over the barrios to steal, raid, and rape, as well as to hide. Arbitrariness was their rule. They resembled Olsonian (1993) “roving bandits” – warlords who plundered communities and then moved on to others rather than providing any semblance of order and predictability.

What were the key organizational characteristics of the bands and their members? First, they discounted the future very heavily and were not inspired

by any kind of ideology. Second, they relied on violence to prevent any defection (including resisting, resorting to the authorities to protect themselves, or simply failing to pay extortions) from the population. Indeed, they cultivated a reputation of extreme violence. Third, their main objective was to become rich fast, and they indulged systematically in the use of violence to satisfy their individual whims and proclivities. Because these goals were well known in the barrio, they molded the expectations of aspirants and thus shaped recruitment. As expected, greed led to negative selection (Weinstein 2007). Fourth, although the bands were violent, they had no semblance of hierarchy or military discipline. They were flat and loose associations without any sense of discipline. Drug consumption was the rule rather than the exception, both in everyday life and during violent actions. For example, neighbors complained that bands disposed of people's lives while intoxicated with either drugs or booze.

This model of occupation created deep resentment and hatred among neighbors. By the early 1980s, small groups of barrio residents were already promoting social cleansing (*El Colombiano* 1983). But this semi-spontaneous resistance was escalated by the leftist militias, which undertook the task of ousting the bands from the barrios.³ The organizational differences between the militias and the bands were quite obvious. First, they were inspired by a variety of leftist ideologies. Second, they had flexible relations with several guerrillas, and in some cases presented them as an example to their recruits, but did not depend on them. Some probably even paid the guerrillas a rent for logistical and military support, but they never surrendered their autonomy. They took direct orders from no one. Third, their real military adversaries were the bands, not the state. Members of the militias report that they tried to evade direct confrontations with the police, unless these supported the bands openly. Fourth, they made formal security commitments in favor of the inhabitants of specific neighborhoods. This implied negotiating limits with bands or other militias, and regulating the presence of criminals in each neighborhood. For example, they could allow criminals to live in the barrio, as long as they did not commit any crime there. Fifth, they developed structures to help barrio dwellers sort out their conflicts and moral and economic differences. They were intent on “creating” – in reality, “restoring” (see next section) – the fabric of communal life in the barrios. The militias developed alternative ways of delivering justice and settling communal conflicts. They saw themselves as the incarnation of a communal revival. A militia member offered the most parsimonious definition of their ethos: “in the day we made social

³ The most important were the Milicias 6 y 7 de Noviembre, created in 1986; the Milicias Populares del Pueblo y para el Pueblo (MPPP); and its splinter group, the Milicias Populares del Valle de Aburrá (MPVA). New groups appeared later, such as the Milicias Independientes del Valle de Aburrá (MIVA), Milicias del Barrio San Pablo y las de la Plaza La Minorista. The details about their differences and confrontations are not essential for this narrative.

and communal work, and in the night we switched to military activity.” Sixth, and last, they supported all their communal orientation on the credible threat of the use of violence. For example, all these militias got involved to different degrees in social cleansing (and some announced publicly that they would operate on this basis; see, for example, *El Colombiano* 1983). They regarded the bands as an expression of social decay. In their view, rapists, drug consumers, deviants, and people exhibiting disorderly behavior were all part of the syndrome that had originated the bands. So they engaged in a vast plan of re-education that castigated wife battering, incest, public drug consumption, and small-time theft in the barrios (see below).

MILITIA GOVERNANCE

At first, the militias were very popular. They defeated the bands and brought order and predictability. Neighborhood associations of barrios that did not have militias traveled to barrios that had them to request their help in evicting the bands and putting things in order.

This success allowed them to expand both the areas under their control and the range of their activities. However, their success paved the road for later defeat. The process from initial victory to destabilization and defeat allows the identification of some of the mechanisms through which a rebel group can be transformed by the implementation of its own models of governance. This transformation can be broken down into four stages: the initial organization of the militias and the defeat of the bands; the governance in the barrios; the rise of popular support and its effect on the militias’ access to resources; and the changes in the militias’ internal organization, recruits, and behavior, leading to their subsequent dissolution.

Organizational Structures

The militias were utterly successful in their objective to evict the bands from the barrios. The presence of the militias resulted in a wave of assassinations of band members, many of them public. The victims were chosen for their arbitrariness, viciousness, or involvement in particularly hideous crimes such as rape. Epics of their anti-criminal struggle have appeared in several testimonials (Jaramillo et al. 1998). This success owes much to the organizational structures of the militias that enabled them to overcome the bands. Despite having less firepower (at least initially), they defeated the bands in open clashes. The militias, in effect, had several advantages over the bands. First, they had more discipline, a better notion of military tactics, and a clear idea of when to attack and when to retreat. Second, militia members also had much higher combat morale, due to their ideological convictions and their internal discipline. In addition, they gradually hunted down band leaders by careful collection of information and

identification of their hideouts. Here, the sympathy of the population with the militia anti-band struggle played a critical role. Third, and equally importantly, the militias developed techniques of territorial control, such as patrolling, that the bands had never developed.

The contrast between militias and bands, however, should not be taken too far. This, after all, was an urban war. Contrary to the rural guerrillas, the Medellín militias did not have the possibility of radically separating their combatants from the rest of the population, nor of submitting them to a full-fledged re-socialization process. Though militias utilized distinctive paraphernalia (such as black hoods) while patrolling, they lacked the uniforms and insignias that signify both hierarchy and separation in more developed armed structures. Furthermore, since the militias were autonomous vis-à-vis the guerrillas, and never developed a unique overarching structure, they continued to be quite flat units, with only two or three distinct layers of hierarchy between the leadership and the membership.

Militias, in effect, developed three distinct organizational levels: collaborators, who transported weapons and participated in other logistical activities; fighters; and leaders (including founders). Only the leaders were professionals. Most members were part-time youngsters, frequently students or workers, who often were already married. Although membership in the militias was not necessarily full-time, some fighters received an allowance, which was not negligible given conditions prevailing in the barrios. In addition, they received something like an insurance policy covering death or major injury, although it seems that occasionally the organization failed to deliver.

Unlike the rural guerrilla organizations, joining and leaving were not difficult, especially because the military and organizational demands faced by the militias did not allow leaders to reject many aspirants. In sum, the militias were only relatively separated from the rest of the population, thin in numbers, and had a relatively flat organizational structure.

The militias espoused revolutionary ideologies, although they were basically “reddened” from above. Their political indoctrination was patchy, for example, by comparison with the rural guerrillas. Some militias issued an internal bulletin, and promoted ideological meetings and courses. These meetings combined literary and audio-visual material – films from El Salvador and Nicaragua and discourses by Ché Guevara. The militia leaders recognized the deep fracture between their discourse and their military practice. Their ideology maintained that the militias had been created to combat the oligarchy and the state. But their military practice was directed mainly against the bands. Their capacity to fight and evict the bands was an indispensable component of the social support they eventually received.

The link between ideology and military practice was the militias’ claim that the police collaborated with the bands – a weak and flexible link, and one that

did not mean much to the barrio inhabitants or to young recruits.⁴ In the field, the concrete enemy was the band. This did not mean, however, that ideology in the militias was pure eyewash – it created a crucial sense of belonging to an elite body. Discipline, basic organizational routines, and coordination mechanisms were taken from ideological sources. Everyday practice was linked to ideology in indirect yet powerful, ways. For example, militia members were given hoods and other insignias that gave them a distinct feeling of belonging and moral superiority over “common” barrio dwellers.

Literacy was another main difference between the militias and the bands, a difference that also had combat implications. Becoming ideological meant having access to erudite discourses and literacy skills that enabled leaders and cadres to define and solve relatively abstract problems and thus to achieve sophisticated coordination and planning skills. This helped consolidate a distinct sense of militia superiority to the bands – a superiority that was both military and political, and that was perceived not only by the militia members but also by third parties.

Governing the Barrios

After evicting the bands, the militias identified two major tasks: preventing their return, and creating (“rebuilding”) a stable and sustainable communal social, moral, and political order. To achieve both objectives, the militias built a form of governance that was based on three main types of (interrelated) activity. First was the provision of security, fast justice, and protection. Providing these services in turn entailed hitting some members of the barrio hard – actual and potential allies of the bands, or deviants such as drug consumers, rapists, and petty criminals. But the repression of barrio members did not necessarily produce disaffection, not even by the relatives and friends of the victim. If the cost of protection was a bounded amount of repression, it was acceptable, even if it had grim consequences. As a neighbor said: “When those people were not here and we did not even hear about these organizations, there were a lot of robberies, and then, who protected us?” (Jaramillo et al. 1998: 96). In fact, the killing of certain categories of offenders, such as rapists, seems to have received explicit support by broad sectors of the population (Jaramillo et al. 1998).

The second main principle of militia governance was the reconstruction of the social fabric of the *barrios* in the perspective of forging a stable and long-lasting “communal harmony” (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Jaramillo 2003). Forging an imagined traditional and self-contained communal life, free of violent intruders, was a fundamental tenet of militia action. Thus, one of the main targets of the militias was the drug economy in the barrio. They ordered owners of drug

⁴ It is likely that the bands permeated the police. Some of them, however, also collaborated explicitly or tacitly with the militias and with other illegal groups.

distribution centers to terminate their activities and gave them a short time to abandon the barrio. In cases of non-compliance, they would issue several warnings (generally three), after which they would kill the offender. The treatment of drug consumers was more tortuous, as the majority of them were young barrio dwellers who in turn constituted the social base of the militias themselves. However, many of them were also dealt with in a draconian fashion.

The militias not only punished and evicted deviants, they also undertook the re-education of their barrios. They offered a new moral perspective, through both the allocation of disputes and everyday control. Since the militias were the main providers of security, every day they received dozens of complaints and consultations about small economic disputes, relations between sexes and generations, and standards of behavior. During their patrols, and as neighbors, they became aware of many other cases. The majority of these they resolved through mediation. To my knowledge, they never developed a formal jurisprudence, but their activity seems to have been fairly consistent, and they were able to settle even some of the worse disputes among neighbors (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Jaramillo 2003). Through these mediations they also tried to instill basic ideas about good and bad.

According to the narratives of militia members, neighborhood conflict included incest, wife battering, familial disputes, and, of course, homicide. Fathers and foster fathers that preyed upon their daughters were admonished and disciplined, but rarely killed. Abusive behavior against women and minors after consuming alcohol, and other practices – perhaps not generalized, but quite established – were restricted by criticism and warnings from militia members, sometimes in public. Teenagers who engaged in insolent and dissipated behavior were restrained. The militia rules invaded ever-new spheres of life. Laziness and activities that undermined communal morale were also castigated. “Some moms were very happy that the *milicianos*, when they found out that their children were playing video games, forced them to sweep the streets” (Jaramillo et al. 1998: 93).

Militia recommendations and admonitions generally had a miraculous effect – the miracle resting on the underlying threat of the use of violence and the right to kill or evict recidivists and enemies. The threat of such extreme coercion, however, was rarely made explicit, at least at first. According to a militia member, “we come here having in mind a plan of social work and security, not as a vigilante group.”⁵

The militias also promoted the re-activation of community organizations, now under their tutelage. The militias did not have the firepower or monitoring capacity to control every type of civilian activity in their territories, but they did screen the most prominent leaderships and eliminated, sometimes physically, those whom they considered unpalatable or dangerous. Indeed, as their ideology prescribed, they promoted some forms of social control “from

⁵ The expression in Spanish is more radical: “grupo de exterminio.”

below.” The *cabildos abiertos*, a mass community meeting with a long tradition in the country, where allegedly corrupt leaders were denounced and sometimes condemned, is perhaps the main example. The cabildos were supposedly an expression of mass democracy. But to avoid the presence of the police or the bands, they were generally summoned only half an hour in advance. The militias organized them and set their agendas. In these conditions, the cabildos were more an act of ventriloquism than of participatory democracy.

Finally, the militias tried to establish, maintain, and stabilize the frontiers that separated “their” territory from the rest of the city. Critically, this implied clarifying the status of the barrio with respect to other illegal actors. The militias engaged in conversations with band leaders that tried to formalize their surrender or at least force them to recognize the dominant role of the militias in the barrio. They eventually also allowed the presence of thieves, killers, and other delinquents if they guaranteed that they would not operate in the barrio. The policy against the bands consequently was not one of physical destruction, but of achieving pacts from a position of force. On the one hand, the militias strived to preserve their organizational, intellectual, and military superiority over the bands. On the other, they struck peace accords with several of them, especially with the strongest ones: “We spoke with the three strongest bands . . . and stressed our conditions. Nobody steals or kills in the barrio, if somebody commits an offense [*la embarra*] and you think you have to kill him, first speak with us; do not take drugs in front of children; do not rape girls They accepted.”

In addition, leaders of the militias talked with prominent members of the community to obtain their support. Militia activity also obtained the approval of “respectable” networks and agencies that operated in the barrios, especially the *juntas de acción communal*, or neighborhood associations (JAC). This, in turn, may have put limits on the anti-militia activity of the police, which used to have good relations with the JACs, precisely because of their pro-security functions and orientation.

Popular Support and Rent-Seeking

Legitimacy and support opened access to rents. At the outset, as discussed above, the militias had contacts with established rural guerrillas. There is also evidence that some of them maintained links and conversations with Escobar and other narco-traffickers until the bitter end. These conversations were ambiguous. They could be read as standard negotiations to maintain control over the barrio, or even as an implicit or explicit form of cooperation against the state, especially after Escobar declared his war. Escobar may have provided patronage to the militias – economic aid, in exchange for “respect” and local cooperation. However, the relationship never developed into systematic

collaboration. Escobar had his hands full and, besides, he benefited from the very bands that were the main military targets of the militias.⁶

The militias' triumph over the bands linked them to new and important stakeholders. Among these were shopkeepers and both small and large transport entrepreneurs, whose buses had been attacked on a daily basis.⁷ These new stakeholders became fundamental for the expansion of the militias. After arriving in a barrio, "we organized meetings with the grocers and transport entrepreneurs. At the beginning they could not believe [that the militia would be able to defeat the bands]." But success transformed their incredulity into support, expressed in the form of monthly payments to the militia and logistic and operational support. The militias also enjoyed the support of a broad network of neighbors who, though unable or unwilling to make regular cash payments, offered the use of their houses as hideouts for weapons and propaganda.

Both politicians and businessmen returned to the barrios after the militia improved security conditions there. The militias gained the power to decide which politicians could visit the barrio. By conditioning their presence on social investment in the barrios, the militias obtained another powerful source of legitimacy and of rents. Both politicians and businessmen were willing to pay the militias since they guaranteed both a modicum of stability and clarity on the rules of the game, particularly over who would be given physical access to the barrio.

Inevitably, in some barrios, the militias started to discriminate by providing more security to those who paid in cash. The administration of rackets weakened the line of command, resulting in violent internecine tensions and altercations. For example, two militia groups competed for control of a market place (*Plaza la Minorista*). After evicting the bands, these militias started to collect their protection payments. Each market seller had to pay a weekly fee that varied between \$5 and \$20; each loaded truck had to pay \$10. The money allowed each militia to recruit more personnel and buy better hardware. But this triggered a self-sustaining dynamic of inter-militia conflict, because better hardware made it possible to launch other economic actions, such as assaulting banks and kidnapping, that previously had been beyond the scope of either militia. Soon, expanded operations caused conflicts over who controlled which neighborhoods, creating brutal tensions between different militias.

Disputes over rents and survival in the midst of ferocious territorial competition prompted some militias to turn against their original core stakeholders, but also against some of the new ones. In some places they prohibited the entry of certain firms into the barrio. These actions

⁶ The first narco-militia conversations were probably related to mutual complaints about the activities of the bands.

⁷ In many Colombian cities (including Medellín), bus companies were mostly held by big owners, but small owners, operating between one and five buses, also affiliated with the militia.

immediately triggered organized opposition – for example, the creation of a Front of United Activity of Businessmen. The militias also started to harry grocers and lottery sellers that did not pay their contributions on time, and developed military activity that had a disruptive potential over the barrio economy (*El Colombiano* 2000).

UNRAVELING

The militias suffered a gradual transformation. Their capacity to maintain discipline was undermined by three important changes: (i) new patterns of recruitment; (ii) access to new rents; and (iii) new ways of relating to their opponents in urban warfare – bands, guerrillas, narco-traffickers, and municipal authorities.

As the militias expanded and gained broad support, they started to absorb new members, both from the bands and from the barrio youth. The militias' military victory over the bands had raised the question of what to do with their members. Many of these were simply killed. Indeed, having the scalp of a band member was an important criterion of prestige within the militias (Jaramillo et al. 1998). But what to do with the survivors? Eventually, some of them were incorporated. They had good fighting experience, although they performed miserably in “social and communal work.” Thus, a tension appeared between the elite spirit stressing discipline that the militias had cultivated during the struggle against the bands, and a growing criminal/narco influence that undermined it.

The other source of new members was youngsters in the barrios where the militias became dominant. The new milicianos had much less ideological training than the old ones. Indeed, the first generation of milicianos had received only a relatively short and thin formation, but even then the cadre-to-rookie proportion was not that unfavorable. However, during the process of expansion, tens of new recruits without any political or military schooling joined the group, while the number of cadres remained stable or even fell. Additionally, a generational gap opened. As militia leaders aged – and they were not that young to begin with – they increasingly felt skeptical and fearful of their own subordinates (Jaramillo et al. 1998: 78). When they adopted broader time horizons and started to discount their future less heavily, they started to turn away from urban warfare.

In part because of this, and in part because of its own dynamics, the program of moral re-education – welcomed at first by broad sectors of the barrios, even by many who had been attacked by it as a civilizational improvement – became tarnished by continuous excesses. Killing small-time thieves, petty drug consumers, or simply persons that had been denounced by neighbors as deviants or snitches, was a necessary part of the program. Thus, “excesses” were structural in the sense that the legitimacy of this type of governance was based on the delivery of expeditious coercion and “justice.” Furthermore,

neighbors had no way of exercising any form of control over their “protectors.” A barrio dweller explains this with the utmost clarity: “Everybody abuses. The difference is that a policeman or a soldier you can accuse, but a militia member ... how do you expose him? In front of whom?” (Jaramillo et al. 1998: 91).

The competition for rents became another source of disarray within the militias. As seen above, they created rackets because they had support, but still had to fight for their control, often through violent means. Eventually, some militia leaders and members started to capture rents for personal benefit. Economic competition destroyed cohesion and hierarchies.

Third, and last, the Medellín underworld and the city’s urban warfare evolved, and the militias failed to adapt. Escobar, the Medellín Cartel boss, was killed in 1993. In the new conditions, armed struggle and illegal associations restructured and flourished. The barrios simply did not have the carrying capacity to support so many actors. The rural guerrillas had always aspired to establish a bridgehead in the city, but the militias squeezed them out. With the critical weakening of the autonomous militias, the guerrillas felt that the time to create their own urban groups had come.⁸

On the other hand, the bands learnt from the militia’s experience. After the defeat of the first generation of bands where the militias were active, new criminal entities, given the centrality of drug trafficking in the city, inevitably appeared. They were aware that lack of self-restriction could trigger a strong reaction against them.

They discovered that killing deviants, of whom the epitome of the despicable was the rapist, and supporting community activities would yield political support. A new generation of bands, which knew how dangerous a militia-type reaction could be, learnt to articulate political, anti-repressive motives at the local level. For example, the Trianas, a band that eventually linked with the paramilitaries, told me that they had obtained popular support by demanding freedom for small consumers and provision of security without meddling in strictly individual affairs (interview, 2002).

Bands also discovered the “other state” beyond police and jails. Thus, for example, some mayors promoted micro-pacts in which delinquents, militias, and other actors acquired the commitment of not committing offenses in a specified barrio or a set of barrios (Jaramillo et al. 1998: 132). The municipal administration also created the Office for Peace and Living-together (*Oficina de Paz y Convivencia*), one function of which was to promote pacts of non-aggression and co-existence with and between petty armed groups. In practice, this meant maintaining the militia practice of demanding a “not in my backyard” attitude from criminals, but now with the sanction of the

⁸ This is a simplification. Autonomous, non-guerrilla militias, such as the Comandos Armados Populares (CAP), operated in the city until the late 1990s, even later. However, they lacked the political allure and prowess of their predecessors and were overshadowed by other actors.

state.⁹ One of the main objectives of such pacts was to commit delinquents not to steal, and more generally not to commit offenses in their own territories. This policy was not very far from the solution originally crafted by the militias, which in turn had refined the practices of the most sophisticated bands.

Divided and demoralized by adversaries that had learnt from their practices and from confronting new state policies, the most important militias engaged in a peace process with the Medellín municipality. It came to fruition in 1994. One of the core points of the accord provided that the militias would become a legal supplier of security. A security cooperative, COOSERCOM (*Cooperativa de Seguridad y Servicio a la Comunidad*: Cooperative of Security and Service to the Community), was created under state auspices, but the militia rank and file continued interacting with illegal agents and ended by killing each other almost to the last member (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Jaramillo 2004). COOSERCOM never played a significant role. It lacked what the illegal militias offered: the capacity to provide expeditious (and possibly lethal) responses to specific transgressions.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE

At this point, it is clear that the militias could defeat the bands due to two main factors: on the one hand, an opportunity structure, and, on the other, a small set of very specific organizational characteristics. The opportunity structure was provided by the proliferation of powerful illegal agencies and networks, the creation of a market of specialists in violence and of weapons, and the crisis of the state, which dedicated a substantial part of its attention to big organizations and major crimes, leaving the barrios under the arbitrary and violent domination of the bands. The militias were created to put the bands on their knees. They were able to do it because they were organized and systematic, they had ideological cadres (in this context, being ideological entails having access to key organizational skills), they had high combat morale, and they relied on information by the barrio dwellers (many of them were simply young neighbors).

A central issue for the militias, as for other insurgent experiences needing popular support, was to build an organization simultaneously able to use unrestricted force and exercise rigorous self-control in dealing with residents in the neighborhood.¹⁰ The governance structures developed by the militias

⁹ On a more sinister note, it has been established beyond reasonable doubt that members of the state security agencies exercised lethal violence to achieve strategic objectives, such as taking away the water from the fish, or simply opportunistic violence to achieve individual goals, such as stealing or raping. Nevertheless, these state agents did not have the authority to inflict the typical militia “penalty” of death.

¹⁰ See Mao Tse-Tung’s classical statement of the guerrillas as “fish” and the people as “water” – without doubt one of the most famous war metaphors ever coined (1961: 93).

depended very much on the ability of, on the one hand, delivering expeditious “justice” and coercion against external and internal threats, and, on the other, exercising self-control vis-à-vis the people (in this case, their barrios). Respect for the people, and for an imagined traditional way of life without violent intruders, was a fundamental tenet of militia action.

This combination of delivery of violence and self-control was fundamental for the three main forms of militia government discussed above. The militia moralizing activity oriented toward forging “community harmony” was based on the acceptance by the population of “just” decisions and “advanced” criteria whenever counseling and mediating did not achieve the desired result (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Jaramillo 2003).¹¹ As seen above, in the initial stages, the rough but consistent justice delivered by militias was broadly accepted. Even close relatives of the victims of militia executions tolerated them on the grounds that the victims could not have been rehabilitated. But the militias did not have a semblance of checks and balances, and barrio residents did not have any credible way to check their abuses. Furthermore, their ideological agenda pushed them in the direction of invading ever-new spheres of activity, from the regulation of private life to the undercutting of autonomous, or hostile, social organizations.

Self-control was also key to guarantee some kind of settlement with the bands. As one militia member put it, the militia policy against the bands was “control yourself or you die” (Salazar 1993: 59). This implied arriving at pacts with the bands, but at the same time maintaining the right to shoot against young barrio dope consumers and deviants: “We want to hang around, but in a liberated zone. If bandits hold some Medellín barrios, and the people do not give them away, and sometimes even sympathize with them, why shouldn’t we – who have political and military training – do the same?”

What governance did to the militias was weaken the key mechanism of self-control, diluting the characteristics that had allowed them to achieve their decisive superiority over the bands. Their regulation of communal life increasingly resorted to a violence that was exposed to no external control and that created new resentments on an everyday basis. They threatened young barrio residents who were in part their own social base. When they grew, they absorbed a batch of band members, but in the meantime their cadre base did not expand but, rather, shrank. They got access to new rents, but these caused internecine conflict. And their new stakeholders supported anti-band activity and probably even a working and predictable racket, but not the revolutionary discourse. Ironically, the reinsertion process may have weakened the militias even more, by preventing them the use of violence “at the proper level.”

¹¹ Please note that occasionally these decisions could be characterized as genuinely advanced (criticisms or prevention of wife battering). The point here is that the influence of the militias on the private life of barrio residents rested on the credible threat of the use of violence against the transgressor.

DISCUSSION

In the beginning there was crime. The bands did not constitute a direct target in the two global wars that the Colombian state was waging at that moment (one against subversion and the other against drug trafficking), so they fell below the radar of the authorities. Thus, the barrios were left on their own to fend off the threat of the bands. The militias filled the vacuum through their provision of security and justice in territories temporarily abandoned by the state.

The original ideological and literate core of the militias held important military and political advantages vis-à-vis the bands. Military, because rules of behavior and organizational blueprints taken from rural guerrillas, other revolutionary experiences, and insurgent canonical texts allowed them to establish internal discipline, lines of command, superior coordination, and much better organization. This had major political implications because the ability to evict the bands, provide security and justice, and create ("re-create," in their own version) a communal order became a key source of legitimacy.

But precisely because of this, militia governance had to be built over the promise of fast and overwhelming action against offenders. The efficacy of militia provision of security – indeed, its perceived superiority over the inefficient, slow, and corrupt alternative presented by the state – depended on its ability to impose order by its expeditiousness and its willingness to deliver capital punishment. The militias would not have received this amount and type of support had they lacked the capacity and readiness to kill civilians. This counterfactual is based on the miserable failure of the state's *legal* provision of security through COOSERCOM a few years later.

Expeditious justice, the core of the militia model of governance, was attractive enough to trigger rapid expansion. But growth and expansion changed both the models of recruitment and rent capture. The militias, whose ideologically oriented personnel had always been a thin stratum, expanded by incorporating many youth and ex-band members, who were suddenly put in a position to decide matters of life and death. Their recruitment triggered a wave of abuses. Certainly, abuses had appeared from the beginning. Establishing order had meant fighting not only external actors, but also barrio members. What to do with recidivists, trouble makers, and people who did not obey *friendly* suggestions?

Abuses were unavoidable, given the circumstances. First, the nature of the justice delivered by the militias was the factor that made them attractive. Second, there were no internal mechanisms of control within the militias. Unlike the state, the militias had poor monitoring systems, lacking even a semblance of checks and balances.¹² Third, militia members knew there was

¹² The militias probably could not have developed them. Besides, they had no reason to do so, since the superiority of their provision of security by comparison to the state lay in their expeditiousness and their capacity to carry out their threats.

no credible threat to retaliate in cases of abuse because of both collective action and time-horizon issues. Even so, a substantial number of neighborhoods accepted this type of governance, because it was much more predictable than any available alternative: “Under the militias, we lived at least under a single rule, the rule of the militias; before, each block had its own rules, and we did not know whom to obey” (Jaramillo et al. 1998: 147).

From the beginning, the militia code and sense of justice were draconian. They consisted of a short menu of punishments for increasingly serious transgressions – admonition, denunciation, exile, and killing. But when their enforcement eventually fell into the hands of the new personnel, the crucial quality of predictability seriously deteriorated. Very soon, scandals proliferated over the assassination of inoffensive drunkards, noisy but not criminal neighbors, malicious use of organized force to advance individual interests, or simply people who had put the authority of the militias into question.

The security offered by the militias had not only been a tool that could be used to extort and obtain individual advantages for the fighters, it also gave incentives to neighbors to direct militia justice against their personal enemies by, for example, denouncing people with whom they had fallen out as informants or deviants. Influential stakeholders were in an especially good position to manipulate militia punishment. But considering that the entire population had been encouraged to provide information in this governance model, anyone could engage in this practice.

Militia expansion derailed the neat differentiation between them and other illegal actors. Note that bands also changed. It is not that militias became like the bands. It is the case that all actors evolved, in complex forms. The militias thus found themselves in a trap. Their governance – based on security and justice provision, civilizational improvement of mores, and allocation of disputes – relied on a last-resort threat of imposing capital punishment or exile on people who did not obey. Governance was based on a set of rules that, though rough, was predictable. Thus, broad sectors of the population found it acceptable, given the alternatives. However, its predictability relied on the cohesion of the organization and on the capacity for self-control of its members. In the absence of institutional devices or credible threats there was no limit to arbitrary governance. Success and expansion pushed the militias to unpredictable conduct and internecine conflict, dooming their project. Falling into such a trap is not a logical necessity for rebel groups. But it flags the complicated trade-offs that rebel group leaders always face. Recruitment and access to resources shape violence and governance, but their causal relations are not linear and static. Understanding rebel behavior requires addressing these complex relations carefully by questioning existing theory and developing good, focused empirical data.

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Predatory Rebellions and Governance: The National Patriotic Front of Liberia, 1989–1992

William Reno

ABSTRACT

Rebels focused on profit sometimes provide civilian governance, contrary to the expectations of political economy and “new war” analysts. But the governance that these rebellions supply differs considerably from that of insurgents trying to win the hearts and minds of non-combatants. Charles Taylor’s NPFL controlled most of Liberia between 1990 and 1992. The chaotic environment that it created would appear to help substantiate that a “greed” approach means rebels do not govern. In fact, it was integral to maintaining a distinctive political regime. Its war was not “new” and the spaces it controlled were not “ungoverned.” Violence and patronage were integral to the NPFL regime. In both respects NPFL leaders extended political practices they had learned in prewar Liberia, especially from President Samuel Doe’s regime. Violence served accumulation. Maintaining insecurity facilitated personal loyalty to political leaders and military commanders. Profits from commercial ventures went into the pockets of leaders and commanders. The veneer of a government administration, legislature, and courts was constructed primarily for an unsuccessful effort to gain international recognition and for additional opportunities to collect bribes.

INTRODUCTION

Do profit-focused insurgents create rebel governance? Many conventional analysts and more journalists think of such rebellions as so focused on plunder and so willing to use violence that they would not bother with rebel governance. Indeed, they sometimes suggest that such rebellions lack the capacity. According to their accounts, predatory rebels are criminal bandits preying on civilians and using violence to hold their own fighters together. Such rebellions, they suggest, represent a new kind of warfare, the outcome of a

profound degree of state failure. The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) under Charles Taylor's leadership has often been portrayed as one of those groups.

This chapter shows why those arguments are mistaken, particularly in the case of the NPFL. Instead, the NPFL and rebels like them supply governance, but not to help civilians. They create it for their own purposes – to further their interest in profits and to take over the state. Thus, they have an expressly political objective. In addition, their styles of governance are not new. They develop out of the prior experience of political elites who had been politicians in the states against which they now rebel. In short, predatory rebellions practice rebel governance according to a logic and a history peculiar to their circumstances.

This kind of rebel war is also found in Congo (DRC), Somalia, Nigeria's Delta region, and wherever else rebels capture substantial resource rents. They pay little heed to setting up administrative institutions to govern non-combatants. These rebels instead rely upon natural resource rents, looting, and extortion to keep equipped from the war's start. Their situations fit Jeremy Weinstein's expectation that: "Where economic resources are available to meet the start-up costs of rebellion, the extended process of shaping identities, mobilizing networks, and building ideologies is often cut short" (2007: 52). These conflicts are also described as "new wars" that involve

a blurring of the distinctions between war (usually defined as violence between states or organized political groups for political motives), organized crime (violence undertaken by privately organized groups for private purposes, usually financial gain) and large-scale violations of human rights (violence undertaken by states or politically organized groups against individuals). (Kaldor 2001: 2)

My approach differs from the political economy and new wars approaches by positing a different logic at work. Political economy emphasizes the agency of the individual and therefore tends to stress the "greed" of these rebel leaders. Calling these conflicts "new wars" implies that they represent a distinct break with the history of the societies in which they occur. Instead, I focus on the pre-existing political and economic modalities of rule and the broader political environment within which a particular insurgency is embedded.

In the accounts put forward by Weinstein and Kaldor, the causal mechanism specifies the opportunistic behavior among certain rebel leaders who are portrayed as apolitical and motivated by mere criminality. It should be at its strongest in this period in Liberia's wartime history. Facing numerous violent and capable rivals, Charles Taylor needed to pay particular attention to shoring up his own authority. Stephen Ellis recounts Taylor's efforts to kill even his own subordinates at the first sign that they had become effective and popular leaders, just the sort of cadres who could have carried out popular mobilization and administer liberated zones (1999: 80–81). It is not difficult to collect information

that illustrates the wanton destructiveness of the NPFL's behavior, that makes this period in Liberia's history a good "hard case" to test whether other logics, such as a more exclusive focus on personal aggrandizement, operated alongside or even prevailed within the NPFL.

Close examination of the NPFL's behavior vis-à-vis non-combatants needs to consider the possibility that the rebel group might administer non-combatants in unconventional ways that would be missed if one took a narrow institutional view of what counts as governance. Rather than measure rebel performance against twenty-first century global ideals of state administration, this search for evidence of NPFL efforts to govern non-combatants needs a broad definition of governance that allows for different ways of exercising political authority.

Evidence of odious behavior that analyses of "new wars" and opportunistic rebellions associated with personal aggrandizement may instead be evidence of a non-bureaucratic form of rebel governance. Moreover, Stathis Kalyvas points out that odious behavior has been a feature of wars throughout history, but improved communications and the advent of new international norms brought this behavior to wider attention (2000). Thus, the task here is inquire as to how odious (including predatory) behavior may be related to a process of governance, rather than how these practices deviate from international standards. Such an approach allows for diverse logics of governance, including uses of novel means to control people or the delivery of suspect benefits, such as the pre-2001 Afghan Taliban's Ministry of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice.

Though some NPFL leaders were able to accumulate personal wealth, the argument in this chapter is that getting rich was only one element in support of Taylor's broader aim to seize Liberia's capital and become the internationally recognized president of Liberia. Taylor and his NPFL rebels operated in the context of a system of political authority that had long pre-dated this conflict. This system was based upon the personal capacity of rulers to control other people's access to economic opportunities, including in markets beyond the frontiers of Liberia, in return for political support.

Bureaucratic institutions play a subordinate role in this type of governance, occasionally functioning as channels for the distribution of patronage but more often as tools in the hands of politically favored individuals to extract resources from those who occupied subordinate positions in this political order. External diplomatic recognition of these institutions as the administration of a sovereign state gave its rulers an incentive to prop up bureaucracies as a façade to draw in external resources and to create more entrepreneurial opportunities for supporters. To actually use these bureaucratic institutions to provide services to populations or to provide meaningful salaries to lower-level workers would be a drain on resources that were needed to manage this patronage network. Taylor's own bid for power followed this well-trodden path, and it is through this

lens that the relationship between private accumulation, rebel administration, and the political strategy of the NPFL should be understood.

Taylor's situation differed from that of the pre-conflict political elite, however, in that he faced intense competition in a much more competitive and unpredictable political environment. His suspicions that signs of popularity or military prowess among NPFL commanders could develop into challenges to his personal control were well founded. Amid factional competition and high levels of personal insecurity, failure to control subordinates or to prevail over rivals could result in one's death, and delegating authority to NPFL members to run effective administrative agencies would have been extremely risky. Popular or effective administrators would then have been in positions to use institutions to channel resources toward their own bids for power.

Taylor's political strategy thus was geared toward exercising authority through his personal control over natural resources and other economic opportunities. This system of rule rested on Taylor's ability to manipulate other people's access to these opportunities in ways that enhanced his personal power. The use of violence against such targets as popular commanders actually strengthened Taylor's personal authority, as those who were not targeted needed to display loyalty to benefit from his protection. This political logic goes a long way toward explaining the failure of Taylor and his NPFL to set up administrative structures with any real public legitimacy. This failure left many commercial operators in rebel territory exposed to arbitrary demands for "taxes" to support Taylor's associates as they struggled to come to accommodations with the NPFL. Since many fighters were allowed to extract resources from unfortunate non-combatants, this situation posed dire challenges to business enterprises.

This approach to the relationship of rebel administration to NPFL political strategy provides a more nuanced interpretation of Taylor's aims and the NPFL's behavior. His seemingly arbitrary use of violence and pursuit of resources did not necessarily mean that he was fighting "for the purpose of plunder more than for any geostrategic quest for power and political calculations" (Gberie 2005: 184). Predatory behavior played a big role in the insurgency's internal organization and its relations with non-combatants, but this is best understood in the broader context of the group's bid to seize power in a highly risky environment populated with multiple factions in a state in which prewar rulers had used patronage instead of bureaucratic institutions as their main tool for exercising authority.

This analysis focuses on the first three years of the NPFL's operation in Liberia, from its invasion of Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire on December 24, 1989 to its failed October 1992 "Operation Octopus" effort to capture Monrovia (Liberia's capital) and install Taylor as Liberia's president. Within the first three months of the invasion, Taylor's second in command refused to take orders, and instead set up a rival rebel group. Other factions began to

appear in 1991 as Taylor hastened to eliminate potential rivals from within his own ranks. This examination of a particularly contentious period in Liberia's fourteen-year war draws upon internal documents of the NPFL and its transactions with partners during this time, as well as upon observations of outsiders present in areas of NPFL operation.

REBEL GOVERNANCE AND PREDATORY REBELLIONS

The logic of rebel governance for predatory insurgencies differs greatly from the conventional notion that when insurgents provide governance, they intend to benefit civilians to help the insurgents win. In this latter view, two core elements of governance are public order, and explicit rules or a shared moral code that binds the rebel group and non-combatants.

Public order could be understood as the rebel group's capacity to control its members in order to protect at least some non-combatants from violence or predation by their own fighters and setting up some sort of civil administration. Rules and shared moral codes, in this view, would involve the willingness of insurgents to respond to non-combatants' claims against the rebel group, for example by correcting a wrong that involved disciplining a fighter.

Predatory rebellions organize governance for their own immediate benefit at the expense of civilians. The insurgents assert their political authority over an area by using largely unpredictable violence, but do not create a meaningful civil administration. Control over violence is also required to sustain patronage. Sustained commerce requires rebel commanders to control their fighters to prevent wanton looting so that at least some business enterprises can operate. These rebellions create political offices with standard names, even including legislatures, but they are intended to achieve outside recognition, not serve local inhabitants. It is in this sense that the NPFL governed at the same time that it faced major incentives to pursue short-term opportunistic interests.

SOURCES OF NPFL GOVERNANCE

NPFL authority was a more chaotic and violent version of the system of personal rule and patronage politics that characterized Liberia's prewar government (a path dependency also seen in Hoffmann, [Chapter 8](#), and Barter, [Chapter 11](#), this volume). Taylor was familiar with this earlier system, having served as an official in the administration of President Samuel Doe (1980–1990), the man that he set out to overthrow. As head of a procurement agency in the early 1980s, Taylor allegedly embezzled about \$900,000 while in the United States to work for the Liberian Government (“In the Matter of the Extradition” 1986). Doe's government asked U.S. authorities to extradite Taylor to Liberia for this crime. Doe's

interest in Taylor was not so much to punish him for theft as for his association with Thomas Quiwonkpa, another former Doe associate who made a failed attempt to overthrow Doe in 1985.

Doe used his position as head of Liberia's government to kill rivals, including associates who became popular and effective leaders, as Taylor eventually did as leader of the NPFL. In the process, Doe created a plethora of armed groups that were under the control of individual commanders who in turn owed their positions to Doe's personal approval. Thus, Doe's security services in the mid-1980s presaged the NPFL's structure in the early 1990s: "Liberia's national security apparatus is a complex web of institutions and individuals, with no clear delineation of responsibility and competing lines of authority ... The heads of the various military, intelligence and police agencies all report directly to the Head of State about their needs and, according to diplomatic observers, about each other" (Berkeley 1986: 31).

Taylor's management of the economy, including illicit enterprises, to benefit regime favorites and to reinforce personal loyalties also resembled Doe's strategies. Doe and the officials and businessmen around him engaged in commerce, especially in timber and mining operations, for personal gain. Like Taylor, Doe recruited foreign business partners who would have a difficult time playing local politics against him and thus were dependent upon his favor for access to economic opportunities. As under the NPFL's rule, the operation of Doe's formal state agencies was subordinate to these considerations of patronage and control. For example: "Like many other major revenue-generating public corporations, the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) operates virtually independently of the Ministry of Finance and other bodies responsible for revenue and fiscal matters" ("Liberia" 1988: 3).

Taylor built a more violent form of the peacetime patronage relationships in which politicians mobilize gangs of youths to fight on behalf of a political faction or for their own benefit. In return, the politician would provide youths with economic opportunities and, in some cases, selective exemption from enforcement of laws as these youths engaged in illicit activities. As in Doe's administration, the opportunist behavior of individual members of the NPFL during 1989–1992 (and later) contributed to a political strategy of control through violence and patronage. Most fighters had immediate needs that they thought joining the NPFL would satisfy – except, of course, the abductees. When this behavior is put in the context of Taylor's overall system of authority, opportunism became a tool that could be manipulated and that contributed to the longer-term goals of subduing opposition. Would-be followers of rivals joined the NPFL to ensure personal survival. This strategy for asserting authority had more to do with the nature of the prewar regime's politics than it did with the presence of natural resources or other rent-seeking opportunities.

PERSONAL SECURITY IN NPFL GOVERNANCE

For insurgents hoping to win the hearts and minds of non-combatants, security is likely to be part of any public order they try to supply. But for predatory rebels, insecurity facilitates governance. Thomas Hobbes regarded the absence of governance – anarchy – not as perpetual chaos but as the ever-present threat of violence that could come at any time (1996: 84–86). Likewise, most non-combatants in Liberia regarded the NPFL as the source of unpredictable violence. The truth is that NPFL violence did reflect a set of rules. Violence played a crucial role in facilitating the accumulation of resources that the rebel group could use to attract fighters and to reward supporters. In addition, this seemingly chaotic environment actually exhibited a set of informal rules that people could follow to minimize the chances of becoming a victim of violence. Learning them offered some protection in people's everyday lives, even though it did not provide the kinds of public goods conventionally associated with government administration.

The NPFL's operations created widespread insecurity and a higher proportion of human rights violations when compared to other armed groups operating in Liberia in the early 1990s. The Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's survey of over 17,000 Liberians after the 2003 end of the war identified the NPFL as responsible for approximately 40 percent of all war related human rights violations. This performance put the group at the top of the twenty-seven rebel groups and perpetrator categories identified in the survey. Forced displacement was cited as the most common violation, followed by killing, assault, abduction, and looting, highlighting the extent to which the strategies of the NPFL and other rebel groups did not include attention to gaining support among non-combatants (Cibeli et al. 2009: 19, 21, 27).

In rebel-held areas there was little in the way of an effective civil administration, even though in July 1990 Taylor had decreed the formation of the National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government (NPRAG) with himself at its head. After fleeing to Monrovia, the deputy minister for defense reported that, "within NPFL-controlled territory, nothing resembling civil administration, a civil service or the functioning of social or public services exists" ("Confusion" 1991: 2103). A foreign journalist reported that NPRAG's base in Gbarnga included numerous ministries, "but often these are little more than one room shacks staffed by untrained and illiterate people" (Noble 1992: A1). There was scant evidence of NPFL provision of social services such as schools, although a community leader who was critical of rebel performance reported that schools were in session in 1992, mostly through the efforts of local communities (Collins 1992).

A consistent feature of the NPFL was the apparent use of arbitrary and unpredictable coercive force by individual rebels to assert their personal control. Numerous reports (including personal accounts) state that fighters

used their weapons to make demands on other people. The “rule of the gun” would be an accurate description of the NPFL’s pattern of authority. The former NPRAG minister reported: “Only its leader Taylor wields some clout. Often NPFL commandos have shown little regard for senior NPFL ministers, some of whom have suffered public humiliation at the hands of commanders” (“Confusion” 1991: 2103). Taylor’s own suspicions of popular commanders and the frequency with which these people disappeared or were killed indicate that even the rebellion’s most senior members faced considerable risk of personal violence.

The recruitment and arbitrary exercises of violence by young fighters against each other and against non-combatants revealed the true nature of NPFL authority. Even members of the American firm hired to represent NPRAG overseas reported on their August 1991 visit to rebel-held parts of Liberia that, “There is no question but that Taylor’s forces are very young. Especially at check-points, the guards are indeed teenagers – we talked to some as young as fourteen” (Hyman 1991: 3). A Nigerian businessman encountered NPFL “small soldiers,” a squad “made up of children between the ages of 5 and 8 years. They were equipped with sophisticated weapons with which they terrorized adults” (Binitie 1997: 107). The journalist Mark Huband saw groups of young fighters, numbering in the hundreds, under NPFL control, who often expressed personal loyalty to Taylor (1998: 74–93). They included female fighters such as “Charley’s Angels,” Taylor’s female bodyguards. To one visitor, adulation for Taylor, almost as a surrogate parent, bonded many young fighters to the insurgent organization (Ogunleye 1995: 62–63).

Eyewitness reports point to the personal authority of commanders who provided for and exercised control over these fighters. The American representatives of NPRAG noted: “Taylor is responsible for [teenage fighters’] housing (often abandoned buildings or old schools) and for feeding them” (Hyman 1991: 4). Taylor, as head of the NPFL, assumed the role of protector of children who had joined his rebel group, forming the “Small Boys Unit,” which included children as young as nine (Aboagye 1999: 51).¹

The leadership sometimes displayed concern about the behavior of their fighters. But its responses only reinforced the suspicion that violence and selective insecurity were central to the maintenance of the NPFL’s authority. For example, Taylor held an “All Liberia Conference” in mid-1992 at his Gbarnga headquarters that included community leaders from across Liberia. Instead of acclaiming the rebellion’s record, delegates complained of “senior NPFL soldiers and enlisted men of other parties who are in the constant habit of harassment . . . meted out to citizens” (“Report” 1992: 7–8).

¹ Photographs of NPFL child soldiers can be found in Gabriel Umoden, ed., *The Liberian Crisis: A Photographic Expedition* (Lagos: Gabumo Publishing Co., Ltd., 1992).

They added: “commanders and their subordinates are in the habit of harassing and brutalizing peaceful citizens.” One delegation complained that the NPFL reneged on promises to prosecute its commanders who had murdered people in their hometown. The delegation left the conference, “because three of the accused, purportedly incarcerated, were seen on the streets of Gbarnga,” headquarters of the NPFL and the venue for the meeting (“Why” 1992: 1, 6). In fact, an NPFL tribunal had acquitted this commander, “C.O. Death.”

Violence against non-combatants was occasionally punished. Reported executions of NPFL members for offences against non-combatants suggest the insurgency sometimes tried to control its members (“Who” 1992). However, such judgments were compatible with the logic of patron–client networks and often geared toward eliminating local commanders that Taylor thought might gain followers and resources to challenge his dominance. In trying Taylor, prosecutors alleged that he systematically eliminated rivals during the NPFL’s 1990 campaign, justifying some executions as punishment for looting (Special Court 2010: 34674–86). Less stringent punishments fitted a pattern of public condemnations of unpopular commanders later exonerated. This strategy reinforced the dependence of commanders on Taylor. Threats of punishment may have lessened the cost of patronage benefits required to keep people bound to the NPFL’s authority.

For survival and security, child soldiers depended on gaining the favor of a powerful patron from among the leadership (Murphy 2003: 61–87). They became important elements of an informal administration that relied on intimidation. The NPFL’s relationship with older recruits also reflected this protective patron–client logic focused on the person of Taylor. A traveler in rebel-held territory in 1990 met numerous NPFL fighters. One had joined to protect his family from the predations of other fighters. “There were others like him,” the traveler reported, “who voluntarily joined the rebel forces so that they and their families would be protected and also benefit from the food rationing Charles Taylor was supplying to his men. A rebel of Charles Taylor was entitled to free accommodation, food, medical treatment and other incentives” (Yaidoo 2008: 31).

A post-war survey of fighters found that about 35 percent cited the need to protect their families as their primary reason for joining (Pugel 2007: 36). About 20 percent reported that they joined because they were scared to do otherwise, and about 18 percent reported that they were abducted. Many also reported that they received pecuniary incentives such as money, food, and jobs.

Senior members of the NPFL who protected them appeared to exercise enough control to discipline lower ranking fighters for abuses. But for non-combatants, lodging complaints was highly risky. “If someone did something to you and you want to follow up on it, there are many stumbling blocks. You have to be part of the cliques – the tribe, the soldiers” (Africa Watch 1991: 7). Abuses

against higher-ranking members or against people who had been given their protection appeared more likely to result in sanctions against perpetrators. Indeed, license to abuse non-combatants could be construed as a reward to loyal fighters: “A young woman could be subjected to all sorts of indecent treatment or captured to render services to the rebels. They could take her for a wife if they wished” (Yaidoo 2008: 22).

Despite local cultural norms of patronage and protection, recruitment and disciplining of child soldiers could be highly coercive. A Liberian social worker explained:

Boys from both factions have told us that there were initiation procedures when they joined in which they were forced to kill or rape someone or perform some other atrocity, like throwing someone down a well, or into a river. This was supposed to demonstrate that they were brave enough to be soldiers. Anyway, they were told that they would be shot if they didn’t do it. (Human Rights Watch 1994: 36)

Travelers reported that NPFL roadblocks inhibited people’s movement and severely hindered trade. These roadblocks offered fighters opportunities to extort bribes from people whom they then allowed to proceed, with the effect of hindering commerce and driving up food prices in rebel territory (Momoh 1991: 1204–05; Ogunleye 1995: 139–41). These checkpoints were lethal. The U.S. Embassy in Monrovia estimated that more than 2,000 people were killed at the NPFL checkpoint “No Return” during 1990 (Ellis 1999: 89). Clearly, large numbers of Liberians concluded that rebel-held territory was an undesirable place to live and instead chose uncertain lives as refugees and displaced persons.

COMMERCE AND SECURITY IN NPFL GOVERNANCE

The leaders of Africa’s anti-colonial rebel groups and those who fought Ethiopia’s government through the 1970s and 1980s devoted valuable personnel and resources to manage economic activities and provide goods and services to non-combatants. Predatory groups, on the other hand, were primarily interested in their personal and group fortunes, with little or no sustained attention to pursuing a broader political project among people living in areas they controlled. Non-combatants were important for the rent-seeking opportunities that they provided, mostly as sources of loot and targets for extortion.

Despite their violent and predatory behavior toward most non-combatants, the NPFL’s presence proved surprisingly profitable for the commercial activities of its leaders. A U.S. diplomat estimated that from 1990 to 1994 Liberia annually exported diamonds valued at \$300 million, timber at \$53 million, and rubber at \$27 million, mostly from territory the NPFL controlled (Twaddell 1996: 12). He estimated that about \$75 million passed through Taylor’s own hands during this time. While not enormous, this sum was

comparable to the annual government revenues in neighboring Sierra Leone, a country with twice the population that, despite massive corruption and mismanagement, sustained a rudimentary provincial administration and provided salaries to teachers and other civil servants. The NPFL made no pretense of paying regular salaries to civil servants, nor did it provide much in the way of services to non-combatants.

The few instances in which commanders showed concern for the productivity of people in the territories that they controlled can be explained within the framework of personal authority and patron–client relationships operating behind a veneer of bureaucratic administration.

Like all rebel groups, the NPFL required a stream of revenues with which to buy weapons and support high-ranking members. Consequently, the leadership tried to protect some commercial operators. For much of the time, they aimed at improving short-term rent-seeking opportunities that they had exploited during their invasion and battle with government forces in late 1989 and early 1990, tumultuous months that had convinced a lot of foreign and Liberian-owned firms to abandon their local assets. Companies with insurance policies could claim compensation if they could convince underwriters to accept their claims of *force majeure*.

Luring such firms back to Liberia would require the rebel leadership to focus on maintaining longer-term relationships with businessmen. This relationship required elements of a predictable bureaucratic administration to limit the violent nature of the patronage network of personal rule. But as violence was the basis of Taylor's authority, the effort to build bureaucratic administration constantly clashed with this core ingredient of NPFL authority.

According to a foreign businessman familiar with the country's trade in timber, the initial rebel strategy in 1990 focused on immediate gains, looting cut timber and seizing the country's gold and diamond trades for foreign currency. At first, rebel agents tried to find foreign buyers for the cut timber that companies had left behind (for example, "Guidelines" 1990). "Now, Liberia being Liberia and nobody trusting Taylor, everybody trying to kill each other, the whole bit, Taylor knew that nobody was going to prepay for the logs prior to them leaving the country" (confidential interview).

Taylor would make deals with businessmen to come to the port to load logs, but then the foreigners would simply disappear without paying: "Everybody he sold a cargo of logs to, they'd take the logs and that was that, they'd never come back," the businessman continued. "And the reason for that was why should they come back? I mean, they'd make 20, 30 million or whatever they were making off a cargo of mahogany logs." The NPFL continued to suffer losses into 1991. Port operators, for example, noted that some traders left ports without paying port fees, and therefore insisted on procedures to identify ships as they arrived at the port to avoid interlopers and require those allowed to dock to prepay for services ("Payment" 1991).

Since this conduct reflected expectations that the rebels would behave in highly opportunistic ways, they tended at first to attract only the most profit-focused business partners. The unsettled situation damaged prospects that the NPFL could convince foreign investors that it would not confiscate any assets within its reach. Without a broader commercial base, the NPFL would not establish a reliable flow of revenues. More trustworthy institutions were needed to convince outsiders that the behavior of its members could be restrained.

By early 1991, financial pressures and a somewhat calmer situation associated with the military stalemate led the NPFL to create the Liberian Trade & Development Corporation and revive the Forestry Development Authority that had existed prior to the war to manage logging agreements with foreigners. Gbarnga hosted at least two banks to handle transactions on rebel-held territory. These agents of the NPFL operated within the NPRAG. Now that Taylor had something that looked like a civil administration, he could ask logging firms to sign agreements to resume control over their concessions.

The NPFL's agents sought out other firms and individuals to act as intermediaries to sell Liberian timber overseas, operate ports, and provide essential services. An agent of NPRAG's Economic Committee (sometimes called Special Economic Committee) met with representatives of logging companies to gauge their willingness to return and invite them to inspect assets that they had left behind. A more ominous goal of this exercise was to "see how much some of these companies owe government" ("Letter" 1990).

Business activity became sufficiently extensive to support a Liberia Timber Association, based across the border in the more stable environment of San Pedro, Côte d'Ivoire. This association enabled foreign firms to communicate their concerns to the NPFL's administration, such as missing assets and distress over rebel roadblocks. As some of these firms set up operations inside rebel-controlled areas, they discovered that they had much more to complain about.

The association protested repeatedly to senior officials about informal and irregular exactions by its security forces and others in addition to established fees and taxes. Many of these complaints focused on the tendency for local commanders to make abrupt demands for the immediate provision of goods and infrastructure for the benefit of local NPFL groups ("FDA" 1992: 6). They also complained about the irregularity of port services and the unavailability of supplies (for example, "Request for Solution" 1991). Some of the businessmen who operated in NPFL-held areas appeared to have suffered significant distress over their personal experiences with violence in connection with their operations (author's observations, early 1990s). Business was lethal for some, including an American who was killed in the course of a commercial dispute that became wrapped up in rebel politics.

Some NPRAG administrators appeared sensitive to the need to control local NPFL demands on the loggers and offered lower tax rates on earnings to entice companies to stay (Correspondence of NPRAG 1991). Even though some NPRAG agents responded to complaints, companies still faced demands from the NPFL for equipment such as vehicles, and the tendency for local authorities to impose new fees and taxes ("Request for Solution" 1991). These demands also came from the higher reaches of the administration, including from regional military commanders, indicating either that Taylor was unable to control his subordinates or that they simply had been given license to make demands on individuals to provide them with resources.²

The overall picture is one in which a few technocrats that Taylor had recruited to run the NPRAG administration vied constantly with NPFL commanders to control resources. The latter usually prevailed as they countermanded or ignored the directives of civil administrators that stood in their way. This situation indicates that rebel leaders did not exercise close control over subordinates, and that even explicit directives from the head of the Economic Committee, also an NPFL Special Forces Commando, to protect businessmen and recruit help from local commanders went unheeded (*Letter from Chairman*).

The NPFL as a whole recognized that there were benefits associated with a bureaucratic administration, but not in the positive sense of preferring a stable, rule-based administration. Instead, they understood well the multitudinous opportunities to exploit bureaucratic rules as tools to require expensive work permits, residence permits, conservation fees, industrialization incentive fees, and so forth to be extracted from what appears to have been an increasingly unhappy and frustrated group of foreign timber operators.

A good example of this sort of administration was a March 1992 demand that firms pay half their local employees' wages and salaries in U.S. dollars at a one-to-one exchange rate with the Liberian dollar when the previous rate that had been imposed on commercial operators valued the U.S. dollar at four Liberian dollars ("Circular notice" 1992).³ Two weeks later the same agency demanded that all payments for local employees, retroactive to six weeks, be made in U.S. dollars at the one-to-one rate ("Circular notice No. 2" 1992). The head of the NPFL's official bank rescinded the order the next day, with more confusion to follow, before settling on the four-to-one rate that had prevailed earlier. The interests in this policy become clearer when one considers that hard currency salaries and wages (with a minimum wage

² Correspondence from Managing Director, Forestry Development Authority, August 15, 1991, requesting payment of \$4,000 "to assist the National Security Agency," and from the same source, November 21, 1991, "requesting you to purchase one Mitsubishi/Nissan/Toyota 4 door pick-up, 4WD engine" against a deduction of future taxes. In addition, correspondence from the Office of the President, November 28, 1991, requesting payment of his associate's hotel bill in Côte d'Ivoire, also against future tax obligations.

³ The market rate at the time was closer to ten Liberian dollars to one U.S. dollar.

mandated by the NPFL at two U.S. dollars a day) were to be paid to rebel-controlled agencies rather than to workers. These events also demonstrated that the few technocrats in the administration were easily and quickly overruled when access to resources was at stake.

While timber was a difficult industry for the rebels to master, rubber production offered more lucrative and sustainable opportunities. Prior to the outbreak of fighting in late 1989, Firestone Tire and Rubber had run one of the world's largest rubber concessions, dating back to 1926. Rubber concessions provided a major source of revenue to Liberia's government. Firestone notified the government of Liberia in August 1990 that the war had created a condition of force majeure and that it could no longer operate. However, an agent representing the company signed an agreement with NPRAG to resume the operation of its rubber plantation ("Memorandum" 1993; "Firestone Timetable" 1992).⁴ This agreement was accompanied by a timetable to restart operations, including the reopening of company-supported schools and a health clinic.

The internationally recognized government based in Monrovia – which also hosted the West African multilateral peacekeeping force – expressed considerable concern that Firestone was allegedly making payments to the NPFL ("Memorandum: GOL" 1993; "Memorandum" to Firestone 1992). Firestone's difficulties with the incumbent government highlighted the limits of the NPFL's business strategy without international recognition of NPRAG as the exclusive sovereign rulers of Liberia. The government in Monrovia had access to the courts of foreign countries (such as the home countries of foreign businesses) where it was recognized as a sovereign authority and could demand enforcement of contracts. Without international recognition, NPRAG could not.

Smaller timber companies generally escaped international scrutiny and the attentions of the Monrovia government's legal council and were able to quickly sell logs and pocket the proceeds. But more complex operations with fixed assets such as Firestone ran into not only the grasping hands of local NPFL agents, but also the approbation of governments, investors, and activists who were critical of its dealings with rebels. Many of these companies remained because they had gambled that Taylor would win the war and install himself as president in Monrovia. They lost their bets as they found themselves dealing with what turned out to be an undesirable rebel partner once the Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) intervention stymied Taylor's advance on the capital (interview, U.S. Department of State, April 3, 1996).

NPFL-held Liberia was able to host some commerce, despite the rebels' focus only on business that provided direct benefits to themselves rather than to local producers such as farmers. These transactions paint a picture of governance that

⁴ Another major rubber producer sustained a presence in Liberia during this phase of the war.

looks like the hybrid protection racket and patronage system that characterized the NPFL's provision of security. For many doing business with the rebels, it must have seemed as though their partners belonged to a mafia that wielded violence only for their personal material gain. Predation and violence in business is telling, but it is not incompatible with governance. Russia's "roaring nineties," for example, showed how violent entrepreneurs played a role in the birth of a new economic order and a new cycle of state formation (Volkov 2002).

POLITICAL OFFICES IN NPFL GOVERNANCE

Both predatory and justice-seeking rebels often create elaborate government administrations involving ministries, offices, courts, and assemblies. Rebels who do so use them in an attempt to gain recognition from foreign states. Another reason they may create them is provision of services to civilians or inclusion of them in governing. In this second respect, anti-colonial rebels often differed from predatory rebels. Many of those who fought for independence, or for majority rule, built bureaucratic administrations to educate children and treat illnesses. To some degree their offices operated according to the formal rules they set up – for example, the bureaucratic administration assembled by the anti-colonial rebels in Guinea-Bissau in the 1960s. Predatory rebels, on the other hand, create façades and either ignore them – aside from trying to attract international recognition – or selectively enforce administrative rules to extract bribes. They govern personally and informally.

At first, Taylor intended to overthrow Liberia's government and inherit what remained of the state administrative apparatus. But factional splits and the ECOMOG intervention prevented him from capturing the capital. The protracted stalemate that followed left the NPFL in control of over 90 percent of Liberia's territory throughout most of the period from mid-1990 through 1992. During this time Taylor faced armed opposition from Prince Johnson's Independent National Patriotic Front after he broke with Taylor in early 1990. By 1991, Taylor also faced incursions of new militias from outside Liberia's borders.

Taylor still wanted to convince diplomats and other outsiders that he ought to be recognized as the sovereign ruler. This ambition was reflected in *The Patriot*, a Gbarnga-based journal that carried advertisements hailing "His Excellency, President Charles Taylor" on the occasion of the anniversary of Liberia's independence (Taylor 1992d). Moreover, Taylor called himself "president" in his correspondence (Taylor 1992a, 1992b). He sought inclusion in international negotiations as the rightful government of Liberia, citing "our holding of elections for local government administrators and assemblymen (legislators)" and control of the bulk of Liberia's territory ("Statement" 1992: 2). His opening speech at the All-Liberia Conference included criticism of foreign efforts to block his rise to power, particularly the

intervention of the ECOMOG and its infringement on Liberia's sovereignty (Taylor 1992c).

The NPFL used NPRAG to present the appearance of regular rules of governance, on paper at least, to argue that it was the real sovereign authority in Liberia by virtue of *de facto* control. Rule-making bodies included an elected Assembly (though no elections were held) that also was to include representatives from political parties and interest groups, numerous committees, councils, task forces, and the promise that courts and a police force would resume operations (Minister of Justice 1991: 12–13). The NPRAG also had an agent in Gaithersburg, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, DC, to address activities of the international community, issue statements, and communicate with the UN Security Council and U.S. officials, in the fashion of accredited diplomats. As noted earlier, NPRAG also engaged a Washington-based firm to present its case for recognition as a sovereign government and to represent its interests overseas. The interim government in Monrovia was careful to counter NPFL claims by providing its own accounts of insurgent behavior to support its claim that the NPRAG should not be considered a government (Ministry of State 1993).

As in the administrative realm, the legal system in rebel-held territory existed on paper to a degree not matched on the ground. A September 1991 agreement between the Interim Government in Monrovia and the NPFL produced a common list of Supreme Court nominees. Rebel representatives accepted the principle that the prewar system of magistrates and justices of the peace should be revived (Lawyers Committee 1991: 9, 21). According to one report, a rough-and-ready system was in operation: "Courts are open for those who wish to obtain redress and culprits are jailed. Killers are executed after tribunal trials in life-for-life retributive justice" (Momoh 1991: 1205). But the reality was that the formal state judicial system had ceased functioning by mid-1990.

NPFL and NPRAG agents issued documents such as receipts for payments, residence permits for foreigners, drivers' licenses, and, apparently, passports (interviews, 1991–1992). These documents did not protect their bearers from blackmail and threats of violence from fighters. The actual rules guiding authority continued Taylor's pattern of claiming the personal right to control resources and people and to allocate them to individuals. According to one traveler, fighters told fishermen that, "Every fish in the sea belongs to the CIC" (Commander in Chief, Charles Taylor) (Ellis 1999: 92).

Even amidst this exercise of authority within a patronage system, the NPFL arguably did provide a set of formal rules by which non-combatants and others who were not members could figure out how to improve their situations or avoid harm. These rules certainly were not those that appeared in NPRAG's documents. The actual rules instead revolved around personal relationships that provided mutual benefit to the individuals involved. Foreign businessmen, for example, were promised protection from physical harm and access to

economic opportunities that in turn gave Taylor and his top commanders access to more resources to distribute to supporters on the basis of loyalty.

These relationships were not accountable to formal institutional procedures such as courts or the oversight of elected officials. Instead, they served to promote the personal welfare and power of Taylor, and remained subordinate to his objectives. Participation in this system required that individuals provide some sort of benefit to patrons, such as an ability to act as a commercial intermediary or a capacity and willingness to fight. The great majority of Liberians did not possess these capabilities and thus received little benefit from NPFL protection or resources.

NPFL leaders, especially Taylor, had good reasons not to take seriously the administration they created. To do so would have undermined their personal authority over clients, as it would have required a degree of delegation that could have empowered rivals to use their offices to build their own powerbases. It would waste resources that could more effectively be used to manage clients. Moreover, providing security as a public good would undermine incentives for individuals to seek protection from patrons (as in Förster, [Chapter 10](#), and Gutierrez, [Chapter 12](#), this volume).

CONCLUSION

The prosecution's indictment of Taylor for crimes against humanity and war crimes in the Special Court for Sierra Leone referred to his pursuit of power as a "joint criminal enterprise" (Prosecutor [2003](#), paragraphs 24, 25). But the depiction of this behavior as a purely criminal enterprise does not take into account that it was part of Taylor's strategy to assert his authority as arbiter of disputes and source of favors, nor do analyses that insist "greed" is the primary motive for rebellions like the NPFL.

Despite this rebel strategy of asserting political authority, some observers have characterized this kind of insurgent group as "gangs" that "don't have a central ideology or a comprehensive political program, and don't represent, protect, or enrich anybody but their members" (Robb [2007](#): 331). They see threats in what they call "ungoverned spaces" that are created as rebels tear apart the weak institutions of states. This, they fear, will provide bases for foreign terrorists who will exploit this vacuum of authority. As it turns out, Taylor allegedly included Al Qaeda associates in his diamond deals (Farah [2005](#)). But as the evidence shows, these rebels do not create voids of authority.

Instead, it is essential to place NPFL behavior in its political setting and its political history. Rebel leaders such as Taylor first emerged as politicians in the patronage-driven politics of prewar Liberia. Patronage, protection, and violence were basic features of this system. The bulk of NPFL-generated benefits appeared closely tied to those who counted themselves as clients of its leadership. Within this harsh kind of patronage system, the promotion of

insecurity had a functional purpose for the rebellion, driving those who were qualified as fighters to affiliate with the rebels for personal protection and upward mobility.

This relationship resembled a protection racket more than a government, since the main incentive for individuals to seek out rebels for protection came from the general insecurity that they created. Protection in this context derives from the personal relationship of a client to a patron within the rebel group. This form of authority does not require that predatory groups set up and administer liberated zones to provide security to the wider population or care a great deal about their standing in popular opinion. Insofar as these rebellions offer protection, their authority could be characterized as real governance in the sense of providing a limited public good. Still, the protection they offer seems more like a private syndicate that recruits members by offering to secure them from the harm the syndicate creates.

International interventions against this kind of rebel group often stress the need for careful efforts to win over non-combatants so as to separate the rebels from the population. Prescriptions focus on state-building through implementing reforms, constructing infrastructure, training police forces, and so forth to out-govern the rebels and create popular support for the government. The problem with this approach is that the NPFL's strategies for imposing its authority in Liberia had little to do with winning over non-combatants as a whole to the rebel cause. Evidence shows that most non-combatants wanted to have as little to do with the rebels as possible. Absent the old fashioned strategies of building liberated zones or presenting people with some vision of how rebels would create a better future society or even solve people's immediate problems, the NPFL and rebel groups like them held little popular appeal.

The absence of a population-focused strategy among rebels suggests that it may be easier to isolate rebels in these situations. Although reforms and foreign assistance to rebuild states would be welcome for all sorts of reasons, it is not evident that anti-rebel forces have to try hard to out-govern rebels that put little effort into conventional administrative tasks. The reason for this is evident to most Liberians: the rebels made people more insecure and exposed people to the threat of arbitrary violence. Most people appear to be grateful that this situation has come to an end and appreciate their more secure environment.

The NPFL engaged in rebel governance, contrary to the thrust of prominent arguments from the political economy literature on rebel groups operating in resource-rich environments. But predatory rebellions follow a different logic of governance from other kinds of rebels. Rebel groups, such as the NPFL, created distinctly different political and administrative structures from anti-colonial rebels, as well as from other insurgents who sought to build mass popular support. The NPFL depended on violence and patronage, learned from prewar Liberian political practice. Its leaders, Taylor in particular, cultivated

insecurity and personal profit. Its government offices amounted to little more than a façade when office-holders could claim bribes by choosing not to enforce the rules.

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Conclusion

Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly

Governance by non-state actors is emerging as an important arena of inquiry for a variety of disciplines (Risse 2011). In a shifting global order, state-centric understandings have proven inadequate for comprehending the diverse ways in which governance appears in the contemporary period. Rebel governance, as this volume demonstrates, is a particularly fruitful subject worthy of further analysis for its pervasiveness as well as its absence from studies of governments. It is a field that promises fresh insight into conflicts both contemporary and historical, from Syria and Libya today to the American and Haitian civil wars of the past.

Though the insights provided in these chapters resist easy summary, this conclusion reflects what we have learned from them and, most importantly, how, collectively, they advance our understanding of this emerging field. As the chapters demonstrate, insurgents initiate a wide array of activities when they establish rebel governance or sanction existing civilian institutions. While scholars have explored these activities individually, the approach taken in this book is to bring together these diverse activities under the rubric of “rebel governance,” enabling meaningful comparisons across and within cases.

Discussing these activities together must be approached with caution. No author in this book has made an effort to describe all the activities that rebel organizations deploy to govern civilians. Rather, they discuss only those governance activities that illuminate the specific arguments they make about the causes or effects of particular features of rebel governance. Since the cases discussed here were not selected systematically, any generalizations can only be tentative.

A necessary step toward theorizing rebel governance is categorizing its variation. Our authors offer two approaches. Kasfir suggests differentiating rebel patterns of rule by the substantive governance activities insurgents organize – that is, whether they concentrate their energies on one of three sets

of activities, or some combination of all three. First, do the rebels encourage civilian political input such as popular assemblies or elections of local residents? Second, do they provide administrative services including education, health, and dispute resolution? And third, do they organize or regulate commercial production ranging from the activities of local traders to the machinations of multinational firms?

Arjona proposes a somewhat simpler scheme. She divides rebel governance into two categories: cases where rebels intervene minimally into civilian affairs (“aliocracy”) and cases where they intrude comprehensively (“rebelocracy”). In the first, she suggests rebels attend only to the maintenance of public order and taxation; in the latter they also regulate political, economic, and social conduct. The distinction clearly applies to the differences in governance styles that Kalyvas draws in the first phase of the Greek civil war between the two rebel factions. Barter’s discussion of the expansion of GAM’s governance in Aceh suggests that a specific rebel group can sometimes move from aliocracy to rebelocracy. Rebels can establish both rebelocracies and aliocracies at the same time in different spaces, as the evidence presented by Arjona shows for the FARC in Colombia. Though neither classificatory approach covers all the activities discussed in the book, they provide useful typologies for future comparative analysis.

The contributors identify a range of offices and policies introduced by the rebel organizations they studied. In general, all the rebel groups discussed adopt the basic activities that maintain public order – a security force, military and sometimes police, and some kind of taxation, including the collection of food for combatants. Yet, there are great differences in how they organize these activities. Most rebels establish a security force, which they claim serves all civilians who live in territories they control. But as Suykens points out for the NSCN-IM and Hoffmann for the Mai Mai, rebels who base their governance on ethnic identity deliberately exclude many local residents. Rebels often insist on a monopoly of force for the maintenance of public order, usually fearing the creation of an additional rival. But, as Förster shows for Korhogo in northern Côte d’Ivoire, rebels keen to demonstrate their support for local culture may choose to delegate part of the policing effort to a specialist civilian association already accepted by non-combatants.

Rebels commonly controlled judicial activities directly, either by establishing new procedures or by taking over those previously set up by the state. Several set up courts to help settle disputes. Yet, as with security, in some cases they decided to delegate this role. Kalyvas argues that political identity led the more conservative rebel faction in the first phase of the Greek civil war to leave dispute settlement to local officials and notables, while the rival communist faction created new popular courts that it controlled clandestinely.

Several of the insurgencies discussed here also tried to enforce social norms and establish ideological training. Rebels as disparate as Greek communists,

Mai Mai insurgents, GAM separatists, and militia both in Medellín and throughout the countryside in Colombia devoted considerable energy to regulating personal behavior and social relations, often engaging in violent “social cleansing.” They differ, however, in how formally and how intrusively they organized these efforts.

Rebels also engaged in fiscal policies within their territories through the levying of taxes and fees on non-combatants. While most rebels tax civilians, others hope to gain political advantage by abolishing taxes imposed by the state. As Wickham-Crowley points out, pre-1970 Latin American rebel groups generally did not tax civilians in order to gain support from peasants. Contrary to the assumption that rebel taxation is necessarily extortion, Förster shows that rebel fiscal strategies are sometimes considered legitimate. He relates the desire of traders in Korhogo for rebels to establish predictable fees at checkpoints in order to control their costs. Similarly, Reno describes rebels’ attempts to regulate the activities of foreign commercial actors working in Liberia.

In most cases, rebel groups directly provided a variety of social services: literacy campaigns, schools, clinics, agricultural cooperatives, development schemes, and land reform. Yet not all chose to devote their limited resources to these purposes. As Arjona reports for the Colombian case, some organizations preferred to influence existing state administrative services, such as health and education, rather than providing their own.

Finally, rebels frequently tended to the symbolic aspects of governance, as Coggins, Mampilly, and Hoffmann demonstrate. Whether engaging in international diplomacy, developing a repertoire of symbolic practices that reinforce their authority, or catering to the perceived spiritual and cosmological needs of the population, the chapters cover a range of symbolic activities that rebel groups frequently deploy.

As this brief overview suggests, rebel governance varies greatly in type and scope. In the remainder of this conclusion, we assess how the chapters relate to one another thematically, their common conclusions, and, where relevant, their points of contention. We also take the opportunity to ask related questions not addressed by the contributors regarding the key themes of the book. In the [final section](#), we identify several promising areas for future research about rebel governance that remain largely absent from the analyses in this book.

FACTORS AFFECTING REBEL GOVERNANCE

By synthesizing the contributions from different chapters, this section discusses factors that shape the attributes of rebel governance. We classify them into four broad themes in order to address questions already posed in the [Introduction](#). First, contributors emphasize *pre-conflict factors* that help explain how groups engage in governance. The chapters suggest that historical factors have a

constitutive impact on the attributes of rebel governance as it emerges. Second, contributors examine the effect of *wartime contextual factors* in shaping the scope and effectiveness of rebel governance initiatives. In particular, they probe the roles that natural resources and the capacity of the incumbent state play in shaping rebel governance.

Third, the chapters look inside insurgencies to examine the impact of *rebel attributes and behavior* on civilian governance. Going beyond previous studies, contributors develop the implications of rebel ideology and goals, exploring their consequences for civilian governance. Finally, the chapters examine the *responses of civilians* to rebel governance. In particular, contributors examine the ways in which non-combatants influence the emergence, performance, and decline of rebel governance. In what follows, we discuss how this volume contributes to our understanding of each of these sets of factors influencing rebel governance. We also identify lingering questions that deserve further attention.

Pre-conflict Factors

Determining how rebels devote resources to governance is a significant question. Several authors find that the prewar history of local and national state and society shapes patterns of rebel governance. There are, indeed, clear continuities between the prewar period and wartime rebel governance in many of the cases examined in this volume. This association challenges the tendency, present in many cross-national studies, to understand civil wars as if they unfolded upon a blank slate, decontextualized and dehistoricized. In contrast, several contributors in this book emphasize continuities that occur across time and bridge the gap between pre-conflict and conflict periods. Some of these continuities come from norms, beliefs, values, and, more generally, culture. Local societies have a history that does not disappear when the war breaks out, and such histories shape rebel governance in many ways. Other continuities are derived from political practices of the state before the eruption of war.

The prewar period shapes rebel governance along three specific paths: the behavior and experiences of the rebels, of the local community, and of the incumbent government. To start with, rebels come to war with a particular history. Their views, expectations, and decision-making are shaped by the realities in which they have lived – even as they rebel against them. Although they may intend to break away from past customs, they often repeat practices, beliefs, and values because their views are inescapably shaped by their own prewar experiences. It is in this sense that Kasfir and Hoffman argue that cultural beliefs and social values may influence rebel governance more deeply than rebels themselves may realize. Similarly, Förster finds that shared norms and values brought together different actors (rebel and civilian) that provided governance in Korhogo, after rebels discovered they

could rule civilians more effectively by relying on traditional hunters' associations.

Yet, rebels' views are malleable, not fixed, and evolve in response to the dynamics of the conflict and the needs, real or perceived, of the insurgency. This aspect requires an appreciation of the pre-conflict history of local societies and how it shapes their response to armed groups. As Hoffmann argues, rebels often formulate their worldviews strategically in order to facilitate rebel-civilian relations and foster collaboration. Likewise, Mampilly contends that identification between civilians and combatants should not be taken for granted. It is more likely to result when armed groups successfully craft their messages to evoke historical sentiments that boost their legitimacy and foster civilian collaboration. Taken together, these chapters question the utility of approaches that assume values and strategy to be mutually exclusive in driving rebel behavior. But in suggesting that they are complementary, these analysts open the question of understanding why and how they combine.

Finally, several chapters highlight the impact of prior modes of governance on wartime governance. Reno focuses on the modalities of political and economic power prior to the onset of civil war and argues that they deeply shape the character of rebel governance. In prewar Liberia, power was distributed through patronage networks. During wartime, rebel leaders embraced these patterns of governance with the explicit intention of increasing their control of such networks. Reno finds that rebels often imitated the practices of the very regime they were trying to depose because these established routines were well-known means to achieve and maintain power. Similarly, Gutiérrez-Sanín finds significant continuities between prewar and wartime Colombia with regard to the different ruling practices of various actors. Förster also calls attention to the willingness of the rebels in Côte d'Ivoire to imitate state procedures.

Yet not all authors agree that the consistencies between the prewar and the conflict periods are as durable as they may appear, finding instead radical discontinuities. Kalyvas notices that while the Greek conservative rebels replicated existing state political practices, the communist insurgents explicitly sought to break from the past. Latin American cases, in particular, present the formation of novel political and social orders that reverse existing governance modalities. Wickham-Crowley argues that weak state capacity prior to civil war favors more extensive rebel governance. Similarly, Arjona contends that rebels are more likely to rule comprehensively in areas where prewar state institutions were poor. In these accounts, rather than mimic prewar politics, rebel governance reacts to its absences and failures.

Wartime Contextual Factors

Though the forms rebel governance may take are often shaped by the past, it is also a product of wartime influences. Indeed, rebel governance frequently

evolves in relation to a variety of factors that only emerge during the conflict itself. Understanding these factors and the impact they have on the scope and performance of a rebel government is a vital concern. The chapters suggest that wartime dynamics, including the military capacity of the incumbent and the broader political economy of the war, have powerful effects on rebel behavior in forming civilian governance.

Contributors agree that the degree of territorial control is a substantive factor in determining the nature of rebel governance. As Kasfir argues in the [opening chapter](#), territorial control is an essential condition for the emergence of rebel governance. Kalyvas goes further. Examining the Greek civil war, he finds that the level of control an armed group has over a territory not only determines whether rebel governance emerges, but also certain aspects of its character. Rebels become more coercive as their territorial control decreases, which, in the last phase of the Greek civil war, led to a reduction in civilian support for the communists.

Similarly, Wickham-Crowley finds that the advent of insecurity undermines the authority relationship between rebel governments and civilians in Latin America. Suykens observes the same in India. Yet, Wickham-Crowley reminds us that the effects of violence are not identical across cases and usually depend on who is the perpetrator. In his account, state violence mobilizes civilians in support of the rebels, facilitating the emergence of rebel governments.

Contributors also emphasize the political economy of war and its impact on governance. Arguing against the perception that rebellions that focus on commercial enterprises care little for governance, Reno discusses the role of transnational actors and their alliances with rebels in Liberia to obtain profits and direct access to power-holders. He reminds us that governance frequently entails complex and often fraught negotiations with commercial actors. While rebel attempts to negotiate with and regulate commercial actors rarely produce positive outcomes for civilians, they still represent an essential aspect of rebel governance and not its absence, as other analyses suggest (e.g., Collier and Hoeffler 2004).

Despite these contributions, the ways in which the incumbent state shapes the governance practices of groups with which it engages in battle needs to be further theorized and investigated empirically, both intellectually as well as for its potential policy implications. The construction of infrastructure and other attempts to provide material well-being to civilians in rebel-controlled areas has been, and still is, a common feature of counterinsurgency. In this volume, Wickham-Crowley discusses the importance of civic-military campaigns in winning peasant support in several cases, but much more should be said. Similarly, macrosocial changes such as the expansion of democracy, redistributive policies, and even economic development influence rebels, civilians, elites and the state itself, transforming rebel governance. Future

research should investigate the effect of such interventions and shocks not only on the resilience of rebel governance, but also on its attributes.

Rebels' Attributes and Behavior

Scholars frequently suggest that the ideology, beliefs, and political identity of an armed group are epiphenomenal and do not determine the substance of wartime rebel–civilian relations (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2014). However, the chapters in this book take these factors seriously, in particular suggesting they shape combatants' approaches to governing civilians. Contributors claim that the identity of the rebels – who they are and how they choose to project their beliefs – have a powerful effect on rebel governance.

Several authors find rebels' political goals and doctrines to be consequential for their governance of civilians. In his analysis of insurgencies in India, Suykens finds that rebels govern differently depending on whether they share a pre-existing identity with civilians or whether they aim to transform civilians' beliefs. In a similar vein, Kalyvas finds that rebels' political identities have a substantive impact on civilian governance. Communist insurgencies are more likely to engage in governance involving greater social administration and other interventions than groups espousing conservative social beliefs.

Contributors also explore the ways in which specific rebel choices regarding symbolic projections of power shape governance. A running theme through several chapters has to do with the nuanced relationship between symbolic and ideological formulations and their impact in bolstering the authority of the rebel government. Several authors discuss the many ways in which symbols help incorporate the political culture of a people into a rebel government, boosting its legitimacy. Hoffmann suggests that the adoption of a complex mythico-cultural cosmology was central to the construction of authority by rebels in eastern Congo. He notes that local residents conferred charismatic authority on Padiri, the Mai Mai leader in North Kivu, because they shared the syncretic values joining customary beliefs and Christian principles. More broadly, Mampilly contends that rebel deployment of familiar symbols of statehood signals a strong coercive capability that facilitates civilian compliance. Rebel governance often operates more effectively when rebels devote resources to what Mampilly calls “symbolic repertoires.”

Rebels also engage in a different kind of symbolic governance through their engagement in international diplomacy. Coggins examines this possibility, arguing that the scope for outsiders to engage politically with violent insurgencies is greater than commonly thought. She argues that rebels have incentives to involve third parties, the international community, and even the very states they fight – and they often do. Such diplomacy may lead to decreased international support for the incumbent government. External political support

for the rebellion also bolsters its ability to provide public goods. Insurgent diplomacy may even influence the policies that third parties adopt. At the aggregate level, the study of rebel diplomacy may provide other new insights about rebel strategy. For example, it may help us understand the conditions under which rebels are likely to change their discourse, engage in talks with the state government, and form alliances with third parties.

Even though different chapters offer important insights about how ideas may matter, many questions remain to be explored. Theoretically, we need to address how strategy and doctrine interact – that is, how rebels with different doctrines respond to organizational logistical challenges. Likewise, we need systematic comparisons of rebel governance among insurgent groups that exhibit variation in their doctrines – for example, groups seeking to introduce democracy, communism, or Islam as the basis of the state.

Building on the volume's discussion of the importance of the ideational domain, we should also ask about the kinds of messages that resonate with a population shaped by a particular history and worldview and, at the same time, confronted with the promise of change by a revolutionary movement. Which kinds of messages work and which do not? What kind of discourse do rebels adopt at specific times in their struggle? Can a better understanding of the symbolic and performative dimensions of rebel behavior illuminate our theories of wartime politics? Paying greater attention to the values, perceptions, and preferences of both civilians and combatants can illuminate our understanding of a myriad of wartime phenomena, such as: With whom do rebels ally? Why do they articulate their message and struggle in the ways that they do? And to whom does it appeal?

Furthermore, the ways in which specific articulations of symbols and ideas can transform population groups and entire societies during and after war also demands attention. War – both external and internal – often entails the mobilization of existing identities as well as the creation of new ones. How rebels shape that process and, in turn, their host societies, are basic questions that need to be explored if we are to understand the complex legacies of war.

Civilian Responses

Recent scholarship often overlooks the role of civilians in shaping rebel behavior, including both organized and unorganized sectors of society such as local leaders, merchants, and religious groups. Top-down narratives in which rebel leaders face few, if any, constraints from the bottom up tend to prevail.¹ Yet several authors examine the ways in which rebels interact with a wide variety of unarmed societal forces and find them consequential in how

¹ Rebel leaders are commonly depicted as catering to the needs of foreign governments or transnational commercial actors. See, for example, Weinstein (2007); Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood (2014).

they develop governance systems. The crucial questions are when, how, and why civilians engage rebel governance initiatives. Their willingness and enthusiasm may be important indicators of whether they accept rebel claims to rule them legitimately. In addition, contributors suggest that specific societal actors often have a decisive impact on the nature and scope of rebel governance.

In war zones, non-combatants are frequently organized into and operate within a variety of existing social networks and organizations that mediate their relations with insurgent governments. They include religious orders, trading networks, ethnic groups, and civil society organizations. These local actors often bargain and ally with rebel groups in an effort to obtain benefits including security, power, economic opportunities, and even the possibility of implementing policies that reflect their political beliefs. Rebels often change their behavior in order to bring on board allies whose backing is instrumental for achieving broad popular support.

Contributors illustrate these different kinds of civilian-combatant negotiations with evidence drawn from several cases. Some address the essential roles that societal actors can play in the establishment and legitimization of rebel governance. As Förster relates for Korhogo, the rebels were able to work out an arrangement with the ritually pure hunters' associations so that both shared the provision of security. Barter describes the modification in rebel governance that resulted when rebels in Aceh cooperated with religious leaders and urban activists. He finds that the legitimacy of GAM rose when members of the *ulama* became judges in the rebel organization, because many civilians shared their faith and felt they held unbiased hearings.

Several authors provide insights into the determinants of civilian support for rebel groups. Civilians' preference for predictability is evident in several cases discussed in this book. Gutiérrez-Sanín, Wickham-Crowley, Förster, Kasfir, and Arjona all suggest that rebels reap benefits when they are able to establish a predictable political and social order. Similarly, they lose legitimacy when they are no longer able to do so. As Gutiérrez-Sanín says, civilians in the Medellín *barrios* supported the militias at first because they appreciated their "rough but consistent justice." They found it "much more predictable" than the lawless behavior of the gangs the militias had displaced. Similarly, Wickham-Crowley stresses "the macrosocial exchanges" that resulted from rebel regulations to reduce criminal behavior. He points out that in response to benefits provided by insurgents, peasants acquired feelings of duty that legitimized rebel authority in several Latin American countries.

Other authors found similar responses to rebel enforcement of the moral norms of the community. As Gutiérrez-Sanín observes, local residents accepted the authority of the militias in Medellín, not only because the militias rid the barrios of predatory gangs, but also because local residents approved of the instant justice that the militia meted out to those the community regarded as

deviants. That also led residents to accept militia members as mediators in their disputes. Förster describes a similar case in Korhogo in which civilians were relieved that the rebels apparently dealt summarily with a man whom the community thought had murdered a young woman.

Conversely, authors find that civilians withdraw their support when rebels use their newly acquired authority for material or status rewards, leading to instability. Gutiérrez-Sanín describes how militia leaders violated the moral code that had given them support throughout the barrios by demanding rents and recruiting undisciplined followers – “the crucial quality of predictability seriously deteriorated.” Similarly, Hoffmann depicts rising civilian withdrawal of legitimacy from the Mai Mai, as fighters became more erratic, arbitrarily attacking civilians in personal disputes and transgressing the social code that had engaged the loyalty of civilians in the first place. Wickham-Crowley points out that rebels’ failure to protect civilians from regime violence and destroying their means of earning a living undermined their authority.

In some cases, civilians actively resist rebel rule, occasionally even forcing rebels to change their behavior in response. Arjona argues that civilian resistance can determine whether rebels become interventionist or minimalist governors – or even lose their territory altogether. She recounts incidents in which civilians were able to persuade rebels to modify some of their more draconian practices, such as killing drug addicts or setting a tax on beer to pay schoolteachers’ salaries. Förster found a pattern of consultation, part of what he calls *dialogue direct*, in which rebels introduced controls on their soldiers in response to civilian requests.

The discussion of civilian resistance to rebel governance initiatives raises questions about the creation and destruction of order in rebel territory, as Arjona notes in her chapter. Kasfir builds on Weber’s notion of political order as “orderly domination” (Weber 1978, II: 901) to identify the conditions under which rebel governance becomes rebel political order. Both Kasfir and Förster argue that the achievement of such order depends on regular reciprocal relations between rebels and civilians. Arjona identifies two distinct forms that rebel political order can take depending on the terms of those reciprocal relations. In general, these authors agree that if rebel governance is to become rebel political order, insurgents must be assured that civilians will comply with their rules. They also stress that civilians must have confidence that the rules and punishments for violations will not change. Neither alone is a sufficient determinant of a stable political order. Establishing the conditions in which rebel political order is likely to emerge is a useful line for future research (Arjona 2014).

This book also discusses the processes through which alliances and negotiations with societal actors transform rebel groups. Research should continue to investigate the ways in which different local, regional, and national actors change rebel behavior in general, and modify their styles of

governance in particular. Furthermore, as rebel governance varies over time and space within a single country, how does such variation impact the insurgent group's overall organizational structure and behavior?

At the same time, rebels obviously influence the civilians who live under their rule. Future research should investigate this transformative capacity of rebel governance. To what extent do political practices change? Do civilians learn to expect different kinds of governance? Do values and norms change? When and how? Do changes in local economies lead to changes in practices and expectations?

More subtle questions on the inner workings of rebel governance also cry out for an explanation. For example, what are the effects of civilian participation on rebel governance? Put differently, is wartime local democracy possible and, if so, does it translate into better living conditions for civilians? What are the economic gains of rebel governance, both for rebels and civilians? How do rebel and civilian revenue vary across forms of rebel governance?

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Since we initiated this collaborative effort in 2008, there have been many advances in the study of governance by rebel organizations – some by us, others by different scholars and research teams – an outcome we are pleased to see.² But many questions remain unanswered, rendering the study of rebel governance an important and evolving concern. With this in mind, we propose several areas that deserve greater attention, both theoretical and empirical, that were not addressed in this volume.

First, a more comprehensive process of data collection on insurgent governance practices is necessary. In particular, authors should rely on clearly defined concepts and transparent measurements in order to allow for comparisons across and within cases.³ Studies of the subject too often rely on speculative or unsubstantiated accounts. Assessing governance performance by insurgents requires substantive empirical evidence of specific insurgent initiatives as well as accounts from beneficiaries regarding their perceptions of particular insurgent governments. Both are extraordinarily difficult to access and require research that may be dangerous to conduct. However, governance performance cannot be adequately measured using other proxies for civilian welfare such as casualty or displacement figures, as these

² There is a growing literature on the subject and related areas. A selected list would include Metelits (2010), Arjona (2014, forthcoming), Keister (2011), Mampilly (2011a), Risse (2011), and Barter (2014).

³ The database Kasfir is creating will provide more systematic comparisons across greatly varying cases of rebel governance. Each rebel group is coded year by year across more than fifty variables that involve both potential causes and outcomes of different characteristics of rebel governance.

may reflect dynamics that have little to do with the patterns of rebel governance. But we are heartened by the increasing scrutiny of insurgent civilian governance practices and hope to see it contribute to better understanding of its variations and causes.

Second, there is a need to recognize that rebel governance requires work at different levels of analysis. Determining what is the appropriate level of analysis for particular questions can be a serious challenge. As governance necessarily requires insurgent organizations to engage not only with local civilians, but also national and international actors in complex and shifting patterns, there is a need for scholars across disciplines to focus on varying levels of political and social action and the links between them. Understanding rebel governance requires an engagement with the micro-politics of rebellion by scholars working in conflict zones around the world. Also necessary is scholarship that adopts a macro-structural approach to probe the relations between insurgent governments and various transnational actors. Research that links micro- and macro-level outcomes is needed to assess how rebel governance might be caused by, and in turn shape, aggregate outcomes.

A number of long-running questions within the literature on civil wars may also be affected through closer attention to the governance practices of insurgents. For example, what role does civilian governance play in recruitment or the deployment of violence? Qualitative and quantitative evidence suggest that the development of insurgent governments can have important effects on recruitment (Arjona forthcoming) and the deployment of violence by insurgents (Mampilly 2011a). Similarly, scholars have demonstrated how the density of social ties between an insurgency and civilians can improve recruitment efforts (Viterna 2013). Since governance by definition entails an increase in the density of civilian–rebel relations, there is a logical connection between the two. Yet, further research is needed to better grasp the ways in which insurgent governance practices affect recruitment, determine the deployment of violence, or impact other civilian–combatant interactions.

Furthermore, how do patterns of rebel governance shape aggregate outcomes such as war duration and termination? Addressing such questions would require putting into conversation findings on micro-level phenomena with broader patterns of war. As the field advances its understanding of rebel behavior and civilian–combatant relations, it has the capacity to provide new insights into questions that have been approached almost exclusively from a macro-level perspective (Arjona 2014).

Turning to the aftermath of war, one of the most fertile areas of inquiry relates to the legacies of governance by armed groups. Civilians are likely to be affected – for better or for worse – by the system of governance in which they live. How does living under rebel rule affect the political identities of civilians after the guns have been quieted? Are these effects long-lasting? In as far as rebels set up new institutions (either formal or informal), how consequential is it

for individuals and communities to have lived under different institutional arrangements during war (Arjona 2014)? In as much as such institutions vary across space within a single country, are there implications for the challenges and opportunities for post-war stability, state-building, and civic participation at the local level?

More work also needs to be done to compare forms of insurgent governance with other modes of governance by non-state actors. Increasingly, analysts have highlighted the importance of non-state formations in studies of governance as other forms of political organization interact with the state in the contemporary international system. In many conflict areas, a bewildering array of networks and actors – including international organizations, private corporations, non-governmental organizations, and armed groups – are ready to step in. What is lacking is a better sense of how these actors affect political and social dynamics unfolding on the ground, and how their actions challenge basic assumptions about the evolution of global order.

Do non-state governors share essential characteristics that distinguish them from state governance? How do modes of non-state governance that are not bolstered by coercive tools differ from those produced by violent actors? Assessing points of convergence and divergence between the varying non-state governance modes is an important concern and connects rebel governance to a significant and increasingly influential reality – the growing relevance of non-state-produced political orders in global affairs.

Finally, turning to normative concerns, both scholars of international relations and policy makers have struggled to comprehend and engage with rebel governments within international society (Mampilly 2011a,b). International law has little to say about the existence of insurgent governments and there is no standard practice for how they should be treated (Sivakumaran 2013), often to the detriment of the civilian populations living within rebel-controlled territories. Scholars of the global system often exhibit a tendency to ignore the existence of rebel-controlled territories due to their failure to conform to powerful norms regarding the division of global territorial space. Yet, it is important to consider rebel governments in relation to broader processes of globalization.

For example, much more needs to be said about how insurgent governments fit into global economic relations, both licit and illicit, a subject that is increasingly recognized as central to the functioning of the international economy (Nordstrom 2007). Rebel governments also play an important role in the distribution (or lack thereof) of aid during humanitarian crises, a subject that deserves far more attention (Branch and Mampilly 2005; Mampilly 2009). Scholarship on these issues and others has the capacity to directly inform policy practice – which remains largely ad hoc and muddled by normative commitments – a testament to the significance and need for greater study of insurgent governance practices.

As scholars, our ambition in putting this book together has been to decipher the precise ways in which civilian–combatant relations play out and shape conflict dynamics. By focusing on insurgent governance practices, this volume seeks to pry open the black box of rebel-controlled territories, filling important lacunae in our understanding of political violence. It is an attempt to begin a conversation and stimulate a broader research program on rebel governance that we believe can offer new insights and approaches to many essential political questions.

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