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The Organization of Political Violence by Insurgencies

Abstract: A range of theories have attempted to explain the variation in civilian abuse of warring parties. Most of these theories have been focused on the strategic environment in which these acts take place. Less attention is devoted to the perpetrators of these human right abuses themselves: the armed groups. This study tries to fill this niche by using the organizational process theory in which it is assumed that armed groups, like every organization, struggles for survival. The leader tries to ensure the maintenance of her armed group by increasing her control over her troops. The relationship between the level of control and the perpetrated civilian abuse is examined with a new dataset on the internal structure of more than 70 different armed groups around the world. With the help of a Bayesian Ordered Probit model, this new dataset on civilian abuse is analyzed. The results show that especially particular incentives play an important role.

Keywords: civilian abuse, armed groups, organizational approach

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1 Introduction

Armed groups, whether state or nonstate, occupy the center stage of violent conflict in the world. They have killed and harmed millions of innocent civilians in their quests. Yet, warring parties exhibit markedly different patterns of behavior in their interaction with noncombatants (Chesterman, 2001). Those studies that have attempted to explain this variation have primarily assumed that civilian abuse is a deliberate strategic choice by a political actor (Crenshaw, 1987). Although I do not deny the explanatory power of this perspective, it fails to recognize the role of the armed groups and how differences between them influence this variation in civilian abuse.

A theory that permits us to make these differentiations is the so-called organizational process theory (Crenshaw, 1987). This theory places the internal organizational processes within the armed group in the center of analysis. According to this perspective, civilian abuse is explained as the result of an organization's struggle for survival (often in a competitive environment). In this struggle for survival, leaders try to ensure the maintenance of the armed group by increasing their control over the members. The mechanisms that the leader can employ to increase his or her level of control has not only influence on the nature of the organization but also on its external behavior, i.e. the amount of civilian victimization. How the struggle of survival of armed groups relates to their perpetrated level of civilian abuse is examined with a unique dataset on the internal structure of more than 70 armed groups across the world.

2 The Organizational Approach to the Study of Civilian Abuse

Most studies on the occurrence of civilian abuse have reasoned from an instrumental approach. Although this approach is relatively undemanding in terms of information requirements (i.e., the intentions of the armed groups are inferred from their behavior according to logical rules), it is not able to explain how the preferences of the armed groups are determined and more importantly, it does not permit us to distinguish among armed groups and how these differences effect their external behavior.

An important approach that allows researchers to differentiate is the organizational process theory (Crenshaw, 1987). At the core of this theory is the idea that armed groups function like firms, which struggles for survival. Consequently, the end goal of the group is not a priori the ends for which it was formed, but rather the maintenance of the organization itself. In this maintenance, the leader of the armed group plays a crucial role or as Crenshaw (1987: 19) note: "Leaders, in particular, wish to enhance and promote the organization." Since violence directed towards the civilian population (also called one-sided violence) is not beneficial for the armed group in the long run, leaders will attempt to restrain civilian victimization by increasing their amount of control over their troops. Note, however, this organizational approach is closely related to the principal-agent literature. One of the main differences is, however, that the principal-agent literature assumes a discrepancy between the interest of the leader and his or her combatants, while the organizational approach only assumes a fix preference for

the leader (the survival of the armed group) and does not say much about the combatants' preferences.

To ensure the organizations' viability, the leader needs to attract the right recruits for the job. In order to do so, he or she can offer a variety of incentives to potential followers. The first body of research, related to the greed theory of civil war onset, focuses on the provision of private selective incentives, such as wages, alcohol, drugs and the possibility for looting (Collier, 2000). A second body of research, on the other hand, strays out the influence of so-called 'grievance' factors on the decision for joining violent political groups. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) distinguish three such objective social discontent factors: inter-group hatred based on nationality, ideology or ethnicity, political exclusion, and vengeance.

Different types of potential members are attracted by these different kinds of incentives. Weinstein (2007) for example, arguing on the armed group level, states that armed movements arising in resource-poor contexts (in which it is problematic for armed groups to rely on material incentives for attracting recruits) perpetrate far fewer abuses. In resource-rich environments, Weinstein (2007) argues that the lure of short-term opportunities to 'consume' tends to erode to long-term goals of the armed group. This argument can also be found back in the work of Gutiérrez Sanín (2004). He argues, on the level of the combatants, that promoting wars on economic incentives is a poor strategy, because combatants active in these kinds of conflicts are disloyal. Additionally, greedy soldiers make bad fighters. It is, therefore, not surprising that the leader wants to attract those rebels motivated by grievances and social endowments because they have a long-term time horizon and seem to be more loyal and less likely to use violence. This argument can be summarized by the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Armed groups composed out of combatants that are recruited on the basis of social endowments are less likely to exhibit higher level of civilian abuse.

The incentives that armed organizations provide for its members are critical to its survival. However, like any other political organizations, armed groups must aim to target their incentives at a specific audience to become more 'effective' (Oots, 1989: 143). Taylor (1988), for example, state that recruiting members of the same social network has some major advantages. For instance, preexisting social ties makes mobilization more likely. More importantly, recruiting from one particular social network affects the behavior of the armed group (Taylor, 1988). It determines not only *what* these recruits want, but also *how* they acquire it.

For example, members that are connected by language, norms, and/or values, raise the likelihood of within-group coordination and hence increase the group's ability to engage in planned collective action (see also Habyarimana et al., 2009). At the same time, it is this within-group coordination which makes it easier for the leader to detect behavior that goes against his or her interest, such as the use of violence against the civilian population. This idea is captured in the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: More social dense armed movements are more likely to exhibit a lower level of civilian abuse.

The above hypothesis only assumes that 'informal' ties (such as language, ethnicity, and shared norms and values) between combatants have influence on the behavior of the entire armed group towards the civilian population. However, in addition to these more informal ties, armed group members are also tied together by more formal ties, i.e. their positions within the armed group. Crenshaw (1987: 20), for example, notes that relationships within armed groups are often highly authoritarian, and often reflect a hierarchical organizational structure, i.e. each position within an armed group is made subordinate to some other position. This particular structure has then also a strong agenda-setting capacity, because communication flows directly from the leader (the focal point). Choices are then also made most exclusively at high levels and unquestioning acceptance of top-level decisions is expected (Hutch and Cunliffe, 2006: 114). When a group, on the other hand, is more loosely structured, when positions are not as fixed, when the membership is fluid and norms of conduct are underdeveloped, it becomes more difficult for leaders alike to enforce standards of conduct and to develop enforcement mechanisms (Zahar 2001, 55). These considerations motivate the formulation of the third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: More hierarchical armed movements are less likely to exhibit a higher level of civilian abuse.

An important role of the leader lies in avoiding splintering. Without commitment among its members, factionalization or splintering often occurs. It is, therefore, no wonder that leaders need to "stress commitment to collective goals and solidarity" (Crenshaw 1987, 23). In other words, they have to create attachment to the armed group and attract committed members. Organizational commitment refers to the attachment to the employing organization, including its goals and

values. Hence, affective organizational committed combatants are fighters, who strongly believe in and accept the goals and values of the armed group and are prepared to exert considerable effort on the behalf of the group. They remain with the armed group because they want to, not because they need to or they ought to (e.g., Porter et al., 1974). Organizational committed members are then also more likely to follow leaders' orders. This result in the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Armed groups composed of highly committed combatants are less likely to exhibit higher level of civilian abuse.

3 Research Design

The dependent variable, *civilian abuse*, is measured by counting the number of civilians killed by each armed group, based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) One-Sided Violence Dataset, covering 1989-2010 (Eck and Hultman, 2007). For this application, I aggregated these numbers, resulting in a general death count per group across their active years.

One of the main reasons why the organizational approach towards the study of political violence has not often been empirically applied is because data on the internal structure of armed groups is hard to obtain. Consequently, for this study a Web survey was developed and sent to more than 400 experts of 80 rebel groups. Due to response issues, only 71 armed groups are covered in the survey. In this survey, several questions were asked about each independent variable. For the variable *grievance*, I relied on four questions, each measuring the importance of different grievance factors (political repression and/or political exclusion; inter-ethnic and/or inter-religious hatred; revenge; and discontent about existing economic inequality). These items were used to construct a simple additive index. See Table 1 for more descriptive statistics on this variable and other variables. For measuring the importance of *greed*, I used 3 questions; whether the recruit is offered material benefits, whether the group is involved in plundering, and whether this is promoted by the commanders. Again a simple additive index was created. To examine whether *social dense networks* has influence on violence against civilians, I tapped the importance of ethnic and/or religious backgrounds of the potential members for the decision to recruit them. Measuring the level of *hierarchy* was done by transforming Pugh's (2003[1973]) measurement of organizational structure into several questions. To measure the level of *commitment*, I

made use of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Porter et al., 1974). 8 questions were asked to the experts of the different armed movements, each of them measuring a particular element of commitment; loyalty, proud, fate, whether they have contacts with people from outside the group, whether they can leave the group, whether they join voluntarily or not. The answers were also transformed into an index.

Next to these main independent variables, I included a batch of control variables. One possible intervening variable is the size of the rebel group. *Group size* makes it more difficult for the principal to control her agents (Baker, 1993). The best estimate of this size is taken from the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset. Another important control variable is the age of the armed group (which highly correlates with the duration of the civil war). *Organizational age* is often positively linked to their lethality and effectiveness. To control for the strategic environment on the battlefield, I included also a variable, measuring the *number of groups* that are active at the same time and location as the rebel group. Multiple armed groups can create a process of intragroup competition for civilian support, which in turn might affect their use of violence (Hultman, 2007). I used the UCDP Armed Conflict Dataset to construct this variable. In addition to this variable, I also included a variable capturing the number of *battle-related deaths*. For this I used the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset. The last added control variable, captures the average *population size* in millions of the country where the armed group was active at that time, assuming that the more people live in a country, the more likely violence occurs. This measure is based on the World Bank Indicators. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of all these control variables.

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Civilian Abuse	71	1.13	0.65	0	4
Greed	71	7.75	3.41	0	15
Grievance	71	12.46	4.58	0	20
Social density	68	3.91	0.99	1	5
Hierarchy	71	4	1.84	0	7
Commitment	71	21.99	7.29	1	34
Rebel group size	46	12302.13	20756.06	100	120000
Organizational age	71	18.75	13.10	1	62
No of actors	52	5.02	8.51	1	40
Battle-related deaths	50	7382.64	10424.17	35	57168
Population size	46	212.38	409.25	2.1	1216.2

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

4 Preliminary findings

To analyze the relationships, I use a Bayesian Ordered Probit model. This model is applied because the used dataset has a small number of observations (max. 71 armed groups). Table 2 shows the mean, the standard deviation, and the credible interval of every parameter of the preliminary results. Both coefficients are to some extent similar in interpretation of the coefficient and standard deviation in standard regression analyses. However, unlike the standard frequentist approach, the results allow for a probabilistic interpretation. It is important to note that the asterisk in the table do not indicate statistical significance, but rather that there is a 95%, 90% or 85% probability that the credible interval contain the mean of the parameter.

The second column of Table 2 shows the effect of greed, grievances and social density on the perpetrated level of civilian abuse, without controlling for other possible influential factors. The hypothesized negative link between grievances and civilian killings (and the positive link between greedy armed groups and civilian abuse) is confirmed by the analysis. In other words, armed groups consisting of combatants primarily motivated by material incentives are more likely to kill civilians than those that are motivated by grievances or social endowments. In the same column, one can also find the effect of social cohesion on civilian abuse. It was hypothesized that more social dense armed movements are more likely to exhibit a lower level of civilian victimization. However, although the coefficient is positive, it is not statistical reliable. Therefore, finite conclusions on the role of social cohesion and how this affects the external behavior of the armed movement towards the civilian population is not possible to make. In the third column of the table, the batch of control variables is included together with the three independent variables, resulting in an increase of the effect of both recruitment variables (greed and grievances). All included control variables are statistical reliable, indicating that the environment in which these acts against human rights are perpetrated plays an important role on the behavior of these armed groups towards the civilian population. For example, the amount of armed groups that are active at the same time in the same location (country) is positively related to the amount of civilian killing, i.e. the more armed groups are present in the same country, the more likely a bargaining situation occurs in which the fight over the support of the civilian population. This bargaining situation highly likely results in the killing of civilians.

In the fourth column two other strategies are highlighted; the influence of hierarchy and commitment. The positive coefficient of the hierarchy variable, 0.103, indicates that there is a positive linkage between hierarchy and civilian abuse, i.e. the more hierarchical an armed movement is structured, the more

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Constant	2.1402*** (0.8495)	-0.7729*** (0.0032)	2.0758*** (0.6020)	4.513*** (1.4390)	2.1591*** (0.9034)
Greed	0.0523 (0.0492)	1.5736*** (0.0427)			0.0543 (0.0523)
Grievance	-0.0863*** (0.0377)	-0.5629*** (0.0152)			-0.0792*** (0.0405)
Social cohe- sion	0.0690 (0.1712)	0.4551 (0.0518)			0.1011 (0.1757)
Hierarchy			0.1030 (0.1034)	0.4736*** (0.2333)	0.0844 (0.1107)
Commitment			-0.0356 (0.0266)	-0.1499*** (0.0064)	-0.0246 (0.0307)
Rebel group size		0.0001*** (0.000)		0.0000 (0.0000)	
Organizatio- nal age		0.0679*** (0.0039)		-0.0002 (0.0021)	
No of actors		0.1722*** (0.0081)		-0.0004 (0.0030)	
Battle-rela- ted deaths		0.0002*** (0.0000)		0.0000** (0.0000)	
Population		0.0025* (0.0002)		-0.0004 (0.0030)	
Gamma 2	3.0382*** (0.3367)	20.4199*** (0.0047)	2.9605*** (0.3181)	5.5780*** (1.1070)	3.1200*** (0.3505)
Gamma 3	3.7259*** (0.4111)	21.0441*** (0.0047)	3.5671*** (0.3727)	6.0600*** (1.1220)	3.8134*** (0.4239)
Gamma 4	4.1408*** (0.4754)	21.5280*** (0.0047)	3.9521*** (0.4368)	6.5210*** (1.1530)	4.2404*** (0.4890)
N	72	72	72	72	72

Table 2: Parameter estimation results

Note: The presented coefficients are produced by Bayesian Ordered Probit, using the using the data augmentation approach of Cowles (1996). * the credible interval of 85% does not include a 0; ** the credible interval of 90% does not include a 0; *** the credible interval of 95% does not include a 0.

likely it resorts to civilian abuse. This contradicts the stated hypothesis. However, the analyses show that this linkage, although positive, is not statistically reliable. Strong conclusions can, therefore, not be made. The same holds for the influence of the commitment variable. It was hypothesized that armed groups composed

of highly committed combatants are less likely to exhibit higher level of civilian abuse than those armed groups that are composed of less committed combatants. Although, there is indeed a negative coefficient, it is again not statistically reliable. When entering the batch of control variables, both the effect of hierarchy as well as that of commitment becomes statistical reliable, i.e. the more hierarchical an armed group is structure, the more civilians are intentionally targeted and the more highly committed members are attracted by the armed group the less civilians are killed. These results disconfirm hypothesis 3 and confirms hypothesis 4. Note, however, that some of the entered control variables are not statically reliable (size, age number of actors and the size of the population).

In the last column of the table, the effect of all variables together is examined. This model is primarily used as a robustness check. Including all four strategies in one model, decreases the statistical reliable effect of each of the strategies. This is no surprise given the fact that these strategies are theoretically not always completely independent from each other. Notwithstanding, the direction of each strategy remains robust.

5 Conclusion

This study is a first attempt to look at the internal structure of armed groups and how this relates to their behavior towards the civilian population. Based on the organizational model of violence, as proposed by Crenshaw (1987), the relationship between incentives, social density, hierarchy, commitment and civilian abuse is examined. The preliminary results indicate that those armed groups composed of combatants that are motivated by material rewards rather than by social endowments, such as ideology, are more likely to perpetrate civilian abuse. Additionally, those armed groups composed primarily out of highly committed civilians and those groups are more hierarchical structured, are less inclined to abuse the civilian population. The relationship between social cohesion and the amount of perpetrated civilian abuse is, however, not statistically confirmed.

Further research should not only be focused on increasing the number of observations, gathering more detailed information on the internal structure of armed groups, fine-tuning the operationalization of the different concepts such as hierarchy and commitment, including measures capturing the possible expert's bias, but it might also be interesting to examine more in depth the direction of causality. The organizational approach describes relatively clear how the internal structure sometimes facilitates violence. However, it might be highly likely that perpetrating violence influence the armed group' structure. To examine this in

more depth, time-series data on the internal structure of armed groups is necessary, but so far, not yet available.

Although, these results are preliminary and future research should determine its generalizability, the analyses suggest some important recommendation for the policy community, especially for the development of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs and for the general conflict prevention programs. The results, for example, suggest that material incentives might prevent potential combatants to join armed groups, being committed to the goals of the armed group might not always be a negative thing as is often described by current DDR initiatives, and that hierarchy in armed groups is something that induces civilian abuse. This latter result might suggest that preemptive removing the armed group leader is an effective strategy to prevent civilian killings.

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