

# Wartime Institutions: A Research Agenda

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Understanding the choices of civilians and combatants is crucial to our research on civil war and post-conflict reconstruction. We want to know, for example, why people join rebels and militias, why families decide to flee, why combatants kill, how they expand to new territories, or why locals support or boycott counterinsurgency operations. Even when we ask questions about macro-level outcomes such as the duration of war, the stability of peace agreements, or the effects of peace keeping operations, our capacity to theorize and interpret empirical results depends at least partially on our assumptions about how actors make decisions on the ground.

Despite the general agreement that institutions—understood as rules that structure human interaction—shape behavior, the study of how civilians and combatants make choices in war zones has, for the most part, neglected the role of wartime institutions. Overlooking institutions in the analysis of individual and collective behavior would be astonishing in any field in political science; however, it has endured in civil war studies perhaps because war is assumed to be chaotic and anarchic, as the widespread use of concepts such as failed states (e.g. Ghani and Lockhart 2008) and collapsed governance (e.g. Milliken 2003) suggests.

Yet, the emergence of local institutions in the midst of war makes sense theoretically. To start with, war often brings about, or exacerbates, the collapse of formal state institutions. Different literatures have shown that in contexts where access to effective institutions is lacking, new informal institutions are likely to emerge. For example, rural communities that depend on limited, public natural resources, often develop norms that facilitate collective action (Ostrom, 1990). Illegal markets where property rights and

contracts cannot be enforced by the law also tend to develop their own parallel institutions (e.g. Gambetta, 1996; Skarbek, 2011; Varese, 2001; Volkov, 2000). The emergence of the state itself has been explained as a process whereby one actor offers institutions and protection in exchange for taxation, transforming a situation of anarchy into one where clear norms allow for higher predictability, productive activities, and capital accumulation (e.g. Olson, 1993; Tilly, 1985 skarpedas). Even within contexts where formal institutions do operate, actors often attempt to provide private orderings to “realign incentives and embed transactions in more protective governance structures” (Williamson, 2002; see also Dixit, 2007). These insights suggest that as pre-war institutions collapse in war zones, some sort of new institutions are likely to emerge.

The existence of wartime institutions should not surprise us for another simple reason: the warring sides have incentives to create them. First, as Tilly (1978) suggests, in order to overcome their competitors, the warring sides try to monopolize the means of violence, extract resources from local inhabitants and, at the same time, promote capital accumulation. Even though Tilly was referring to a long historical process, armed actors fighting civil wars are likely to learn that in order to advance their cause, they need to create a sustainable system of resource extraction to fund their operations. Such system, in turn, requires some security and limited taxation for civilians to engage in productive activities (Olson 1993)—in other words, it requires institutions.<sup>2</sup>

A second reason why armed groups are likely to create institutions has to do with the kind of warfare they engage in. Most contemporary civil wars are characterized by

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<sup>2</sup> Armed groups that can rely on natural resources or funds provided by an international ally may not have these incentives to create institutions (Weinstein 2007), but they may still have other incentives as I argue below.

irregular warfare—that is, a contest “entailing an asymmetric rebel challenge launched from the country’s rural periphery” (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). In such wars, rebels’ modus operandi entails seizing control over pockets of territory, creating a growing challenge to the state. Although violence is a key means to achieve and maintain such control (Kalyvas, 2006), creating institutions to rule local populations is essential as well (Arjona, 2013). The mere creation of order facilitates population monitoring and increases the odds of voluntary cooperation, which is essential for maintaining control (Guevara Brian Loveman, and Thomas M. Davies, 1985; Kalyvas, 2006; Mao, 1978). In addition, specific institutions allow rebels to shape economic, political, and social affairs in ways that benefit their organization. Such institutions may, for example, facilitate recruitment, provide access to political networks, allow for the accumulation of material resources, and even put in practice their ideology by implementing promised reforms (Arjona, Kasfir, & Mampilly, 2014; Arjona, 2013; Mampilly, 2011).

Empirical evidence on civil wars across the globe supports these theoretical priors. Some form of order often emerges in war zones, where norms are clear and enforced. Since these norms can vary greatly, the institutional arrangements that operate in war zones can be quite diverse.

In this paper I argue that such contexts need to be incorporated in our study of civil war, and propose a research agenda on local wartime institutions. I focus on the locality because war often segments territory, making localities the key locus of choice. To advance this research agenda, I first show that there is, indeed, great variation in wartime local institutions by relying on systematic, quantitative and qualitative original data on Colombia. Second, I propose a way to conceptualize the set of norms and arrangements

that structure political, economic, and social interactions in war zones; for this purpose, I introduce the concept of *wartime social order*, present a typology, and assess its quality both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, I argue that the typology identifies a variation that is relevant: we have reasons to inquire about its causes, and we can expect it to influence other important phenomena both during wartime and in its aftermath. Empirically, I use cluster analysis to show that the typology identifies distinct types—that is, they are internally homogenous but differ drastically from each other. I also argue that the typology is parsimonious because it identifies only three types but still has great descriptive and explanatory potential. Finally, I discuss how this typology could advance our understanding of different wartime and postwar phenomena and make a plea for incorporating institutions to our study of micro-, meso- and macro-level outcomes. My goal is not to provide a theory of wartime institutions<sup>3</sup>; rather, this paper seeks to show that different institutional arrangements emerge in war zones, argue that they warrant attention, and offer a way to conceptualize them.

I proceed as follows. In the first section I discuss why we need a research agenda on wartime local institutions. In the second section I present data on wartime local institutions in Colombia to give the reader a sense of the phenomenon we are to conceptualize, and the scope of its variation. In the third section I introduce the concept of wartime social order and the typology, and assess its quality. In the fourth section I conclude by discussing specific ways in which this approach can contribute to our study of civil war.

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<sup>3</sup> I pursue this task elsewhere (Arjona 2013).

## **1. Why study local wartime institutions?**

Studies of civil war focus on research questions at different levels: at the macro level, they seek to identify the conditions under which civil wars start, end, and resume; why some produce greater deaths than others; or how particular ways of ending a conflict shape post-conflict paths (e.g. Fortna 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Downes 2008).<sup>4</sup> At the micro-level, recent research has focused mostly on the causes of killings (Kalyvas 2006; Balcells 2010, Metelits 2010), sexual violence (Wood 2008), and displacement (Steele 2010; Ibañez and Vélez 2008); the determinants of participation, mobilization, and recruitment (Arjona & Kalyvas, 2007; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008; Parkinson, 2013; Petersen, 2001; Wood, 2003); and the individual-level effects of interventions to foster reintegration, reconciliation, and development (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007; Gilligan et. al 2011).

Either explicitly or implicitly, studies at both levels rely on assumptions about the ways in which civilians and combatants make choices on the ground. This is obvious when we think of questions like recruitment or collaboration: we are inquiring directly about a decision of an individual. But even when we ask about macro-level outcomes, our theories tend to rely on some assumption about why people behave in the way they do. For example, theories of civil war onset rely on assumptions about why people launch rebel movements and why others decide to join them. True, a theory might start with the wrong assumptions and still get the general causal link right; when it comes to deriving implications, however, micro-foundations and mechanisms can make a stark difference as false assumptions may lead to wrong theoretical deductions and policy recommendations. Here is where the

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<sup>4</sup> See Blatman and Miguel (2009) for a review of the literature.

locality becomes crucial: if we want to model decision-making—either because our question *is* about a choice or because we need to make assumptions about it—we need to rely on a realistic understanding of the context in which that choice is being made. In most civil wars, such context is the locality.

Civil war has a tremendous capacity to segment space (Kalyvas 2006:88, McColl 1969; Thompson 1983). While a town lives under full control of the national army, the town up the hill lives under rebel control, and the one down in the valley is under dispute. In the blooming literature on the micro-level dynamics of war, scholars have started to take into account the role that local-level factors play in shaping different outcomes, like how pre-war local elections shape wartime violence (Balcells 2010) and displacement (Steele 2010; Balcells and Steele 2012); how state repression shapes civilian support for the rebels (Wood 2003; Petersen 2001; Lyall 2009); and how territorial control shapes violence and collaboration (Kalyvas 2006). However, few authors have attempted to conceptualize, systematically describe, and theorize those different local realities that emerge amidst war, in which actors live and interact.

Some recent studies give clues about how those local realities might look like. The work of anthropologists on wartime governance (e.g. Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004; Lubekman 2008; Förster 2012) depicts daily life in areas where rebels, incumbents, and international actors interact with civilians. Wood's (2008:539) analysis of the transformation of social processes in war makes a key contribution by highlighting different ways in which “social actors, structures, norms, and practices” are transformed by war. (Arjona, 2009) discusses the coexistence of different local orders in war zones, showing evidence of variation in who rules, in what domains, with what enforcement

mechanisms, and establishing what kind of relation with the local population. Staniland (2012) focuses on the different relations between states and insurgents—which he conceptualizes as wartime political orders—bringing to the fore the different ways in which power can be allocated between incumbents and insurgents. An emerging field on rebel governance identifies and theorizes variation in rebels’ ruling strategies (Arjona et al., 2014; Kasfir, 2005; Mampilly, 2011; Metelits, 2010; Weinstein, 2007).

These studies have certainly improved our mental image of conflict areas. However, we need ways to conceptualize the overall institutional contexts in which actors live. In as much as these local realities are the locus of key choices, we need to conceptualize them, theorize their origins, how they function, and how they might shape decision-making. It is useful to think of such realities as “regimes”: if there is something like local regimes in war zones, we need to incorporate them in our analyses.

Before proposing a concept and a typology that can move us forward in this direction, I present evidence of the existence of wartime local institutions and their variation.

## **2. Local wartime institutions: evidence on Colombia**

Localities in conflict areas often become microcosms with their own political, social, and economic institutions. By institutions I mean the set of rules that structure human interaction in a given community. In conflict areas these are rarely formal, to be sure, but people tend to know them quite well as rebels (and counter-rebels) often strictly enforce them. In this section I present data from what I believe is the first systematic dataset on wartime local institutions. I collected the data in 2010 and 2012 on random samples of



Colombian localities where guerrilla or paramilitary groups have been present for at least six months since 1970. The goal of presenting this data is twofold: first, I aim to show that institutions do exist in war zones; and second, that they vary greatly over time and space, across and within armed actors, and across and within localities. I start with a brief overview of the Colombian conflict; I then describe the method for gathering the data; I then present evidence on economic, political, and social institutions operating in conflict zones.

### *A brief overview of the Colombian conflict*

The ongoing Colombian conflict started in the 1960s, right after a previous bloody war had ended. Several leftist guerrilla groups were formed, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). Both groups described themselves as popular liberation movements seeking to bring about social justice and communism.

The conflict had a low intensity for several years; in the 1970s, however, the guerrillas began to expand into new areas of the country. They moved from poor and isolated places to areas that were closer to the center and had higher incomes and resources (Vélez 1999; Echandía 1999). They engaged in extortion, kidnapping, taxation, and drug cultivation and trafficking, which provided abundant resources. This growth, both in terms of geographical expansion and scope of activities, affected the interests of local elites in several regions of the country, particularly in the north. During this decade the FARC became the largest and most powerful of the guerrilla groups, followed by the ELN. Both groups were (and still are) highly disciplined. According to available estimates, by the late

1990s about three fourths of all Colombian municipalities had some form of presence of either of these organizations (Echandía 1999).

In part reacting to the threats that the guerillas posed to them, and in part responding to national-level changes such as decentralization, local elites began to form paramilitary forces. Although a few were self-defense groups organized by peasants, most were set up by landowners, cattle-raisers, emerald-traders, and drug traffickers (Romero 2003). At first, these paramilitary groups operated separately in different areas of the country. They financed their operations with a combination of taxes on economic activities in areas under their control, voluntary and forced regular payments by locals, and drug trafficking. Even though the state did not create these groups directly, there is substantial evidence of collusion as well as of silent toleration, including negligence in stopping instances of massive victimization of civilians.<sup>5</sup> In addition, these groups managed to create very strong ties with local and regional political figures, which are now well documented by journalists and academics.<sup>6</sup> In 1997 most paramilitary groups united under an umbrella organization called the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). Although some of the operations of the blocs were planned at the level of the AUC, each bloc preserved a high degree of independence. Overall, paramilitary groups were less disciplined than their guerrilla counterparts.

Due to the growth of the guerrillas and the emergence and expansion of the paramilitaries, the armed conflict escalated throughout the 1980s, and reached a peak in

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<sup>5</sup> Several military commanders of the National Army have been found guilty due to either negligence or active participation in cases of massacres of civilians in several regions of the country.

<sup>6</sup> See López (2011).

the late 1990s. However, according to most sources, the amount of violence decreased in the mid-2000s (Security and Democracy Foundation 2006).

Different peace negotiations and demobilization processes have taken place during the last two decades. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several leftist guerrilla groups demobilized collectively and were given amnesty (like the M-19 and the Quintin Lame). Under the Uribe government (2002-2010), thousands of individual members of the FARC and the ELN deserted, but both groups are still active. Most paramilitary groups negotiated with the government and demobilized their members, although new groups quickly emerged and are now active in many regions of the country, mostly dedicated to drug trafficking and illegal mining. Although guerrilla groups are weakened, they are still active and have intensified their operations as a new peace process with the government is currently underway.

The Colombian conflict differs from many others in its duration: it is one of the longest internal armed conflicts that are still ongoing. This could raise doubts about the generalizability of the dynamics that we can find in this case. However, while some regions have coexisted with armed groups for forty years, others became war zones only recently. In addition, the country exhibits internal variation in almost every dimension that one might expect to matter in an investigation of wartime institutions: some armed groups have been operating for decades, while others were formed in recent years; some regions have valuable legal natural resources like gold, others have coca leaves, and others lack any of such goods; ethnicity varies across and within regions; both left-wing and right-wing groups operate; and state capacity varies greatly over time and space. Hence, despite its

uniqueness as a long conflict, the Colombian case is well suited for investigating many aspects of the conduct of war.

### ***Measuring wartime local institutions***

Although the importance of informal institutions has been largely acknowledged (e.g. Dasgupta and Sergaldin 2000, Helmke and Levitsky 2001), methods to measure them are surprisingly scarce. Measuring informal institutions *during conflict* makes the task even harder. Using a novel approach, I gathered detailed data on wartime institutions in 57 communities throughout Colombia in 2010 and 2012. In what follows, I briefly describe the sampling strategy and the data gathering approach.

I selected a set of municipalities where at least one armed group had been present in the past four decades, stratified by region to ensure geographical variation. These regions included 27 of the 33 departments of the country (the equivalent to US states). I excluded five departments located in the Amazonian region, which are under-populated and where the armed conflict has only recently arrived.<sup>7</sup> In total, the two samples include 30 municipalities throughout Colombia. The sample is quite diverse along several dimensions, including location, ethnicity, economic activities, abundance of legal and illegal natural resources, the structure of land tenure, and historical patron-client relations. By virtue of the geographical variation, the sample also includes very different conflict dynamics: some municipalities were strongholds of the FARC since the 1970s, while others have only experienced rebel presence since the 2000s. Likewise, some municipalities were bastions

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<sup>7</sup> The excluded departments are: Vichada, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaupés, and Amazonas, as well as San Andres and Providencia.

of paramilitary groups between in 1990s, while others encountered these organizations much later. Patterns of violence also vary greatly across municipalities, as do patterns of counterinsurgency and anti-narcotics policy. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of proxies of ethnic composition, state presence, social conditions, infrastructure, natural resources, and violence.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of sampled municipalities**

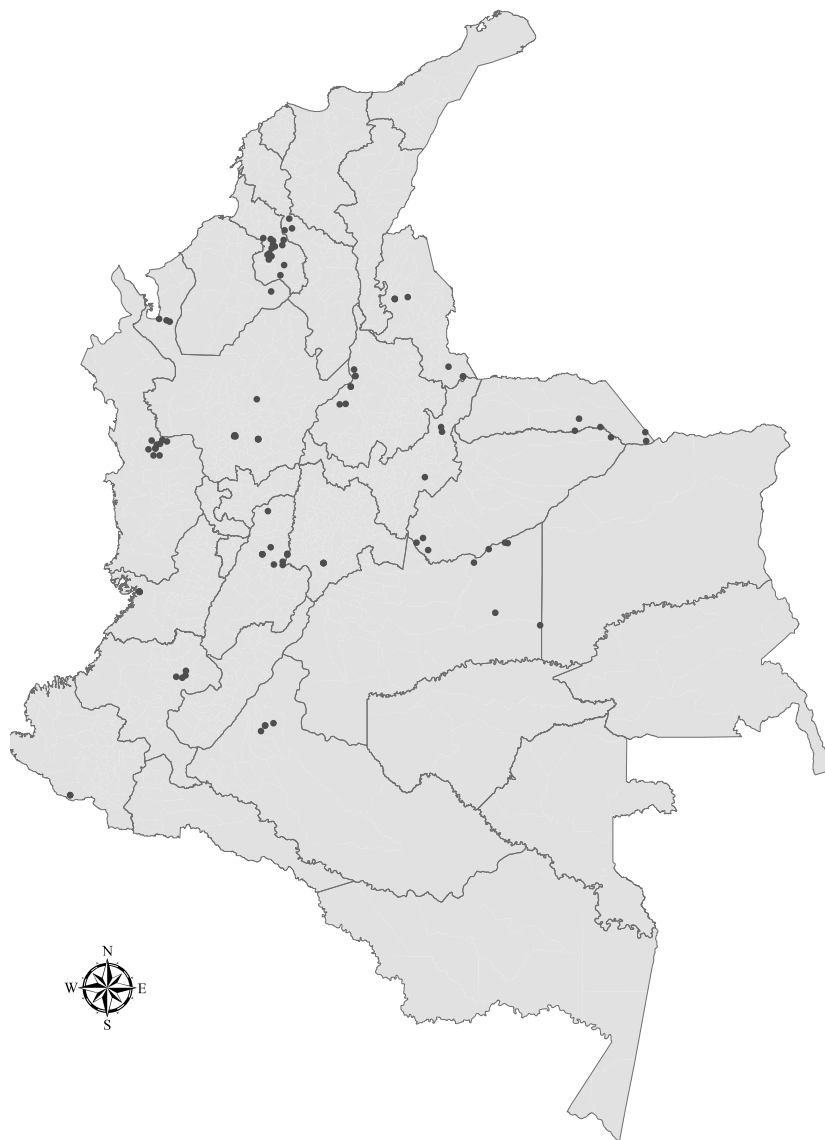
Municipality	Department	% Indigenous 2005	% Afro Colombian 2005	% Poor 2005	Roads index 1985	% Households with electricity	Coca crops 2000	Oil, gold, coal or emeralds 2006	Average homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants 1988-2010
Apartadó	Antioquia	0.6%	40.2%	52.4%	70	97.88	0	0	8.4
Carolina	Antioquia	0.0%	0.6%	41.6%	56	99.15	0	0	3.3
Itagüí	Antioquia	0.0%	6.1%	23.1%	100	92.29	0	0	3.5
Cravo Norte	Arauca	0.6%	0.0%	68.9%	0	0.28	0	0	33.7
Magangué	Bolívar	0.0%	15.3%	73.0%	71	78.3	0	0	3.9
Aquitania	Boyacá	0.0%	0.1%	67.0%	97	100	0	0	3.0
La Uvita	Boyacá	0.0%	0.1%	66.2%	54	99.51	0	0	2.6
Manizales	Caldas	0.2%	0.9%	29.6%	100	26.37	0	0	1.7
Puerto Rico	Caquetá	2.1%	5.8%	73.3%	77	67.11	1	0	13.6
Hato Corozal	Casanare	12.2%	0.2%	79.9%	49	0.96	0	0	9.5
Villanueva	Casanare	0.3%	3.0%	53.9%	44		0	0	19.7
Silvia	Cauca	79.6%	0.2%	77.7%	49	92.69	0	0	2.7
Medio Atrato	Chocó	4.8%	60.2%	100.0%	0	0.93	0	1	4.3
Pasca	Cundinamarca	0.0%	0.0%	59.2%	89	91.72	0	0	1.6
Ricaurte	Cundinamarca	0.0%	93.7%	54.3%	87	0.41	0	0	1.6
Puerto Gaitán	Meta	35.2%	0.8%	80.5%	0	85.07	1	0	16.6
Cumbal	Nariño	87.8%	0.0%	70.6%	57	89.95	0	0	1.7
La Playa	Norte de Santander	0.0%	0.0%	82.3%	49	0.76	1	0	6.7
Toledo	Norte de Santander	3.1%	0.5%	74.2%	54	98.59	1	0	2.3
Santuario	Risaralda	0.6%	3.0%	62.7%	79	92.43	0	0	3.5
Barrancabermeja	Santander	0.2%	16.2%	43.3%	100	93.26	1	0	13.8
Puerto Parra	Santander	0.0%	18.9%	73.8%	61	74.1	1	0	6.7
Caimito	Sucre	0.4%	4.5%	87.7%	55	43.41	0	0	2.0
El Roble	Sucre	0.1%	10.3%	88.7%	0	0.36	0	0	1.5
San Benito Abad	Sucre	3.7%	69.9%	90.9%	53	94.44	0	0	4.6
Ibagué	Tolima	0.7%	1.2%	35.0%	100	98.21	0	0	2.4
Casabianca	Tolima	0.1%	1.2%	76.6%	50	0.94	0	0	9.0
Coello	Tolima	0.2%	0.0%	78.5%	54	95.53	0	0	2.4
Buenaventura	Valle del Cauca	0.8%	83.6%	66.5%	0	0.14	1	1	3.8
Municipal average		7.3%	9.3%	0.0%	57	88.97	17%	1.8%	7.6

**Sources**

Demographic	Census, 2005
% Poor	National Planning Department (DNP), Colombia, based on census data
Roads index	Social Foundation, 1985
% Households with electricity	Census, 2005
Coca crops (dummy)	SIMCI, 2000
Gold, oil, coal or emeralds (dummy)	IGAC
Average homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants	National Police, 1988-2010

Once the municipalities had been selected, I relied on a short survey with a heterogeneous group of key informants to map out variation in armed groups' involvement in local institutions. I then stratified localities according to this measure, and randomly selected between two and four communities in each municipality. Map 1 shows the final sample of localities.<sup>8</sup>

**Map 1.**  
**Sample of Colombian localities with presence of non-state armed groups**



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<sup>8</sup> Additional details on the sampling strategy are given in Appendix 1, which is available online.

In each selected community, my research team relied on focus groups to create time-lines and identify key events to help respondents recall past events. Participants also collectively identified how a set of institutions changed over time. We then conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant to gather more detailed evidence on the history of several local institutions, state presence, community organization, and the interaction between communities and armed actors over time. Participants were selected from heterogeneous groups and almost always included a teacher, a local leader, a merchant, and an elderly person. Women were present in all workshops. Using both the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the field, I created a dataset with a rich, detailed description of how armed groups penetrated local communities, how civilians responded, and what kind of institutions operated over time.<sup>9</sup>

In what follows I present some of the results to illustrate the range of variation in wartime institutions. Given that in some localities several armed groups were present at the same time—sometimes establishing different institutions—the unit of analysis is not the locality-year, but the locality-armed group-year. Structuring the data in this way allows for assessing what different armed groups did when operating at the same time and location.<sup>10</sup>

### *Wartime institutions under guerrillas and paramilitaries*

The sample includes 1,328 observations on 90 dyads made up of 71 communities and 11 armed groups that interacted for at least six months, between 1970 and 2012. Since this is

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<sup>9</sup> There are issues with memory, to be sure, but given the lack of archives or any other source where such changes have been registered for a few communities—let alone for a representative sample—we have to rely on oral testimonies. The combination of focus groups, interviews and secondary sources allows for triangulating sources and decreasing measurement problems. For further details, please see the online methodological appendix.

<sup>10</sup> All descriptive statistics use this unit of analysis, unless where noticed. Sampling weights are used in all figures.

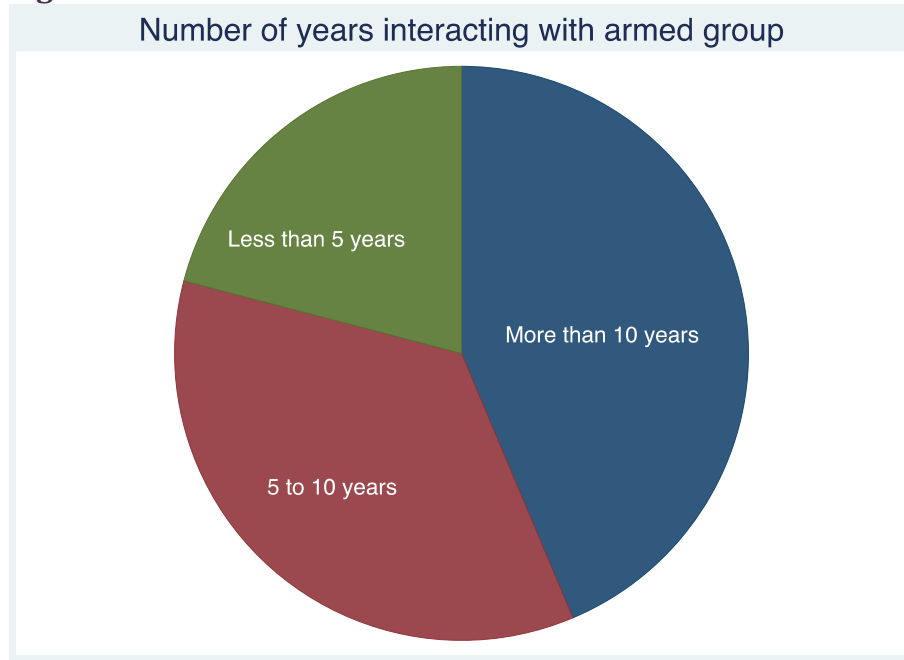
a study of wartime institutions, the panel only includes localities where at least one non-state armed group was present at any point in time. Given that some communities interacted with armed groups for thirty years while others did so for a few years, the panel is unbalanced.

Institutions vary greatly across and within armed groups, across and within localities, and over time. To simplify, I present the data aggregating all locality-group dyads over time. In most cases, I show separate descriptive statistics for guerrillas and paramilitaries.

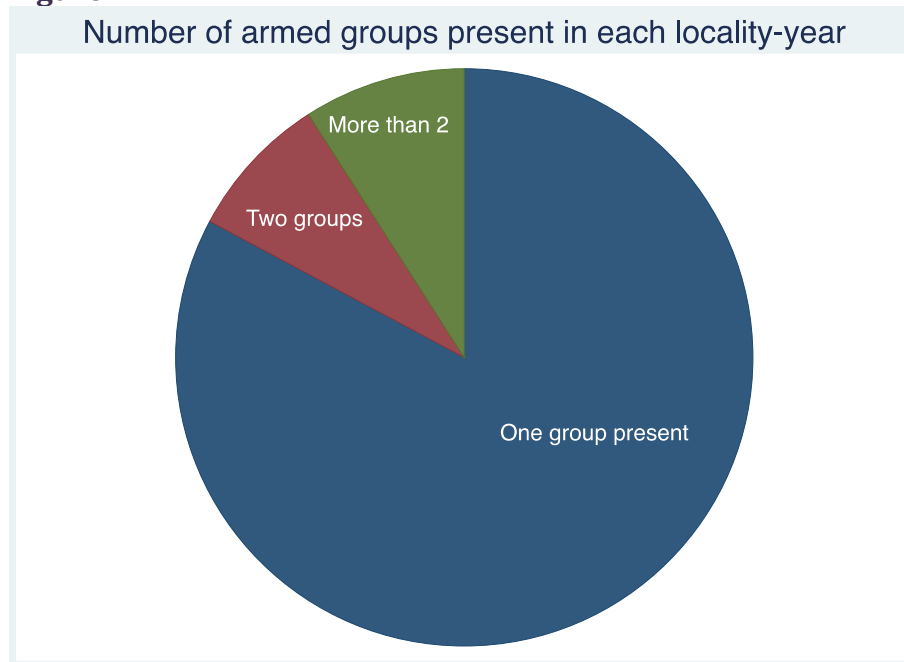
I start with a general description of these conflict zones. About 44% of all communities interacted with at least one non-state armed group during more than ten years between 1968 and 2012; in 33% of the cases, armed groups were present between 5 and 10 years; and in 23% of the cases, presence lasted less than five years (Figure 1). This means that the sample includes communities that have interacted with armed actors for many years, as well as communities where such actors were present only for a few years. In some communities only one group was present throughout the years, whereas in others many groups coexisted (Figure 2). For the most part, however, communities interacted with one group at a time (80% of all locality-years), while periods with two or more groups were far less common (20%). When more than one group was present, in about a third of the cases they were fighting each other; in the rest of the cases, they coexisted peacefully under some deal.



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

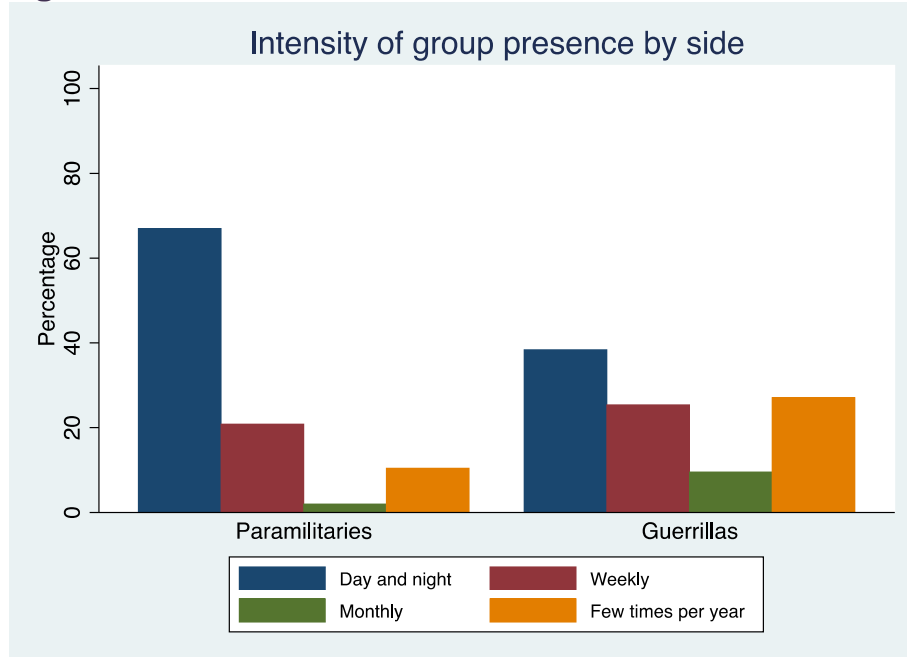


\*Note: in this figure, the unit of analysis is the locality-year, not the locality-armed group dyad-year.

As Figure 3 shows, in more than half of the cases armed groups were present in the locality all day or weekly. Combatants showed up only once per month or a few times per

year in about 35% of the cases under guerrilla presence, and 20% of those under paramilitary presence.

**Figure 3**



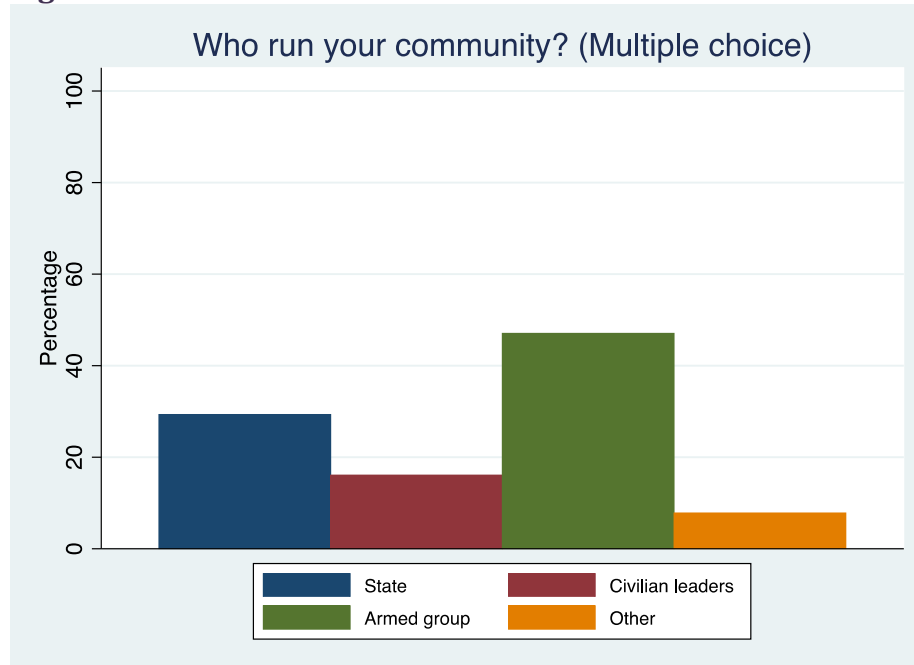
Turning to institutions, civilians describe most of the time they lived under the presence of an armed actor as one where clear rules—either formal or informal—regulated conduct: in 80% of all observations civilians knew what rules they had to follow. Where do these rules come from?

A first way to investigate wartime institutions is by looking at who rules. We asked respondents about who, in general, run their communities at specific points in time, allowing for multiple choices.<sup>11</sup> Armed groups ruled in about 55% of all cases; state authorities such as the police or the mayor ruled in 32% of the cases; civilian leaders like a priest or a civic leader ruled in 18% of the cases, including the indigenous *cabildo* or the

<sup>11</sup> In Spanish the term is “mandar”, which is not only linked to ruling but more generally to imparting orders or being the one who makes decisions.

Afro Colombian *communitary councils* (Figure 4). It is important to stress that neither guerrillas nor paramilitaries ruled in all the localities where they were present; rather, there is substantial variation over time and space in whether or not they became de facto rulers in the areas where they were present.

**Figure 4**

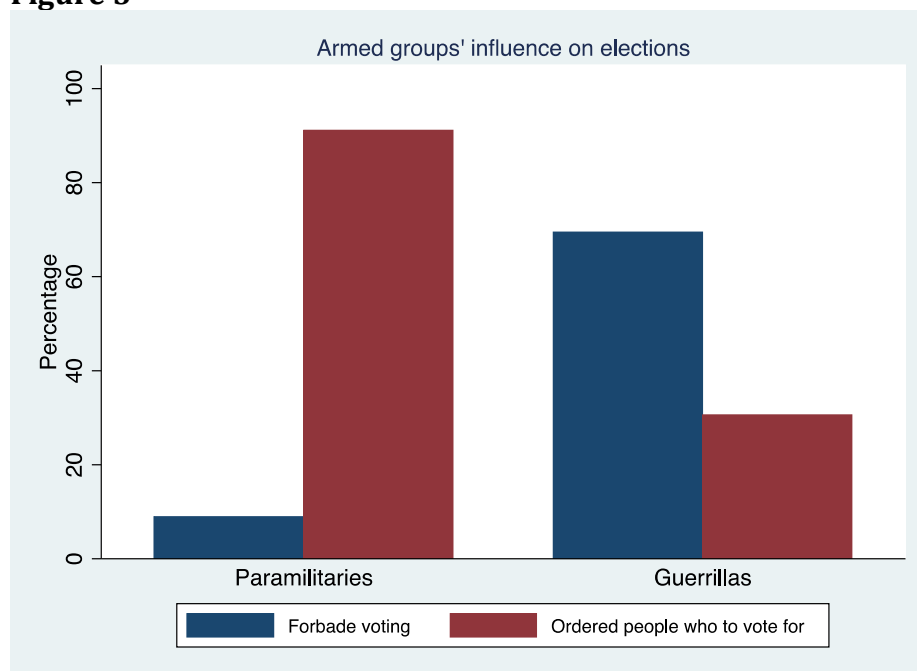


This complex distribution of power brings to the fore an important aspect of wartime local governance: the interplay of state, societal, and rebel forces as creators of institutions. Social actors shape rebel strategy in various ways, as combatants have to react to authority structures, local norms, and social cohesion in their attempt to control civilian behavior (Arjona, 2013; Barter, 2014). The state can also shape wartime institutions in those places where, despite the presence of non-state armed actors, state agencies remain in place. There is great variation in the intensity of state presence in conflict zones: while weak states may be unable to provide any services in peripheral areas under rebel control, in countries with stronger states public agencies may operate

even when rebels own the monopoly over the use of violence, as the cases of India and Colombia indicate. Often, rebels directly seize resources from the coffers of public agencies; sometimes they redirect services and resources to their support base—a practice that Colombian scholars have called *armed clientelism* (Peñate, 1999). The relation between non-state armed groups and the state is quite complex, as the former may influence, coopt, coerce or ally with public servants (Arjona, 2009; Staniland, 2012).

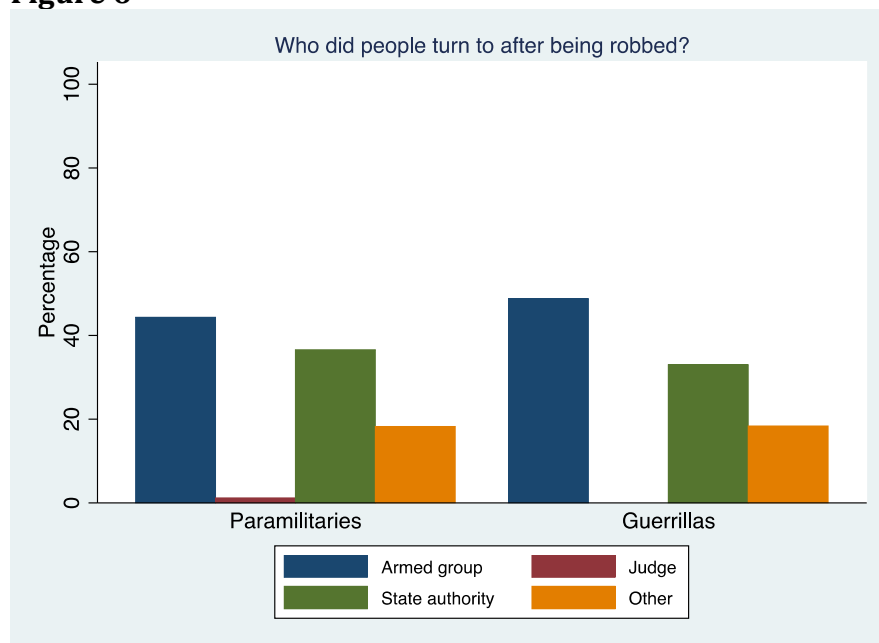
The complexity of these relationships can be illustrated by looking at national elections, which in Colombia have been held for years despite the ongoing war. Guerrillas usually forced people not to vote, and paramilitaries mostly told them who to vote for (Figure 10). In local elections, however, both groups often vetoed who could run for office, chose a candidate to support, and mobilized or coerced people to vote for that candidate. At the same time, in some territories none of the groups intervened in elections despite being present there.

**Figure 5**



How do these social, state, and rebel actors rule? Preserving public order is a key concern, and all three established norms and enforcement mechanisms to regulate certain conducts. Those in charge usually forbade stealing, killing, and raping. Again, there is great variation in who becomes the authority figure in charge of these issues: in about 50% of the cases, civilians turned to combatants to solve problems related to public order; in about 40%, they turned to the local government (the mayor or the police), and in about 20% locals relied on civic leaders or informal mechanisms. Very few sought the local courts (Figure 6).

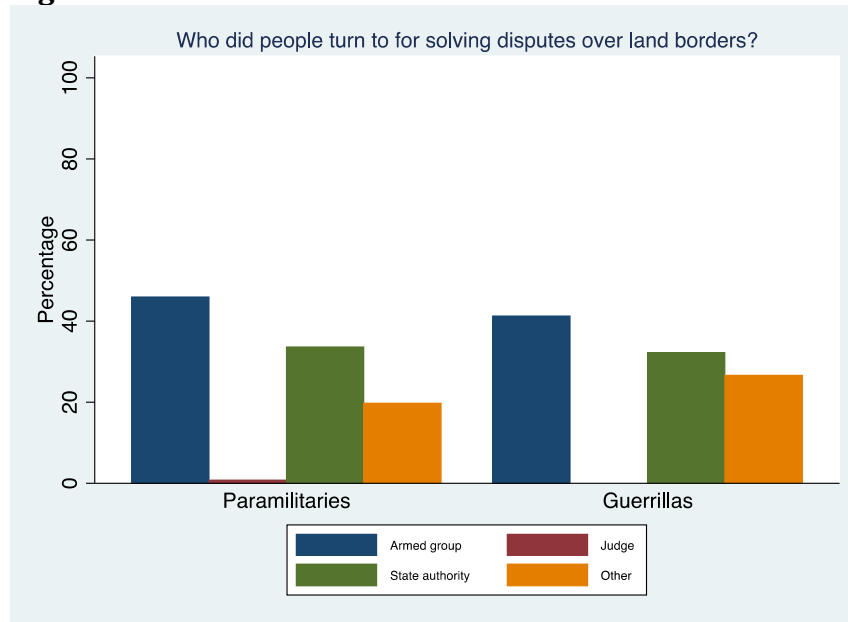
**Figure 6**



Civilians also relied on different kinds of institutions to solve interpersonal conflicts. When confronting a problem over a land border, about half of the communities usually turned to the armed actor—either guerrillas or paramilitaries. In the other half, combatants did not become the de facto court; rather, civilians would turn to the mayor or

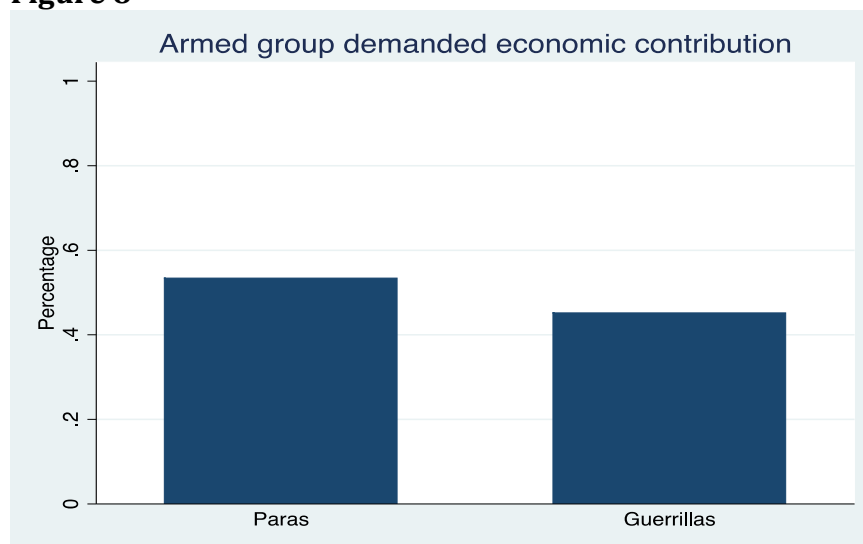
the police (40%). A low percentage would resolve the problem in some other way or turn to the courts (Figure 7).

**Figure 7**



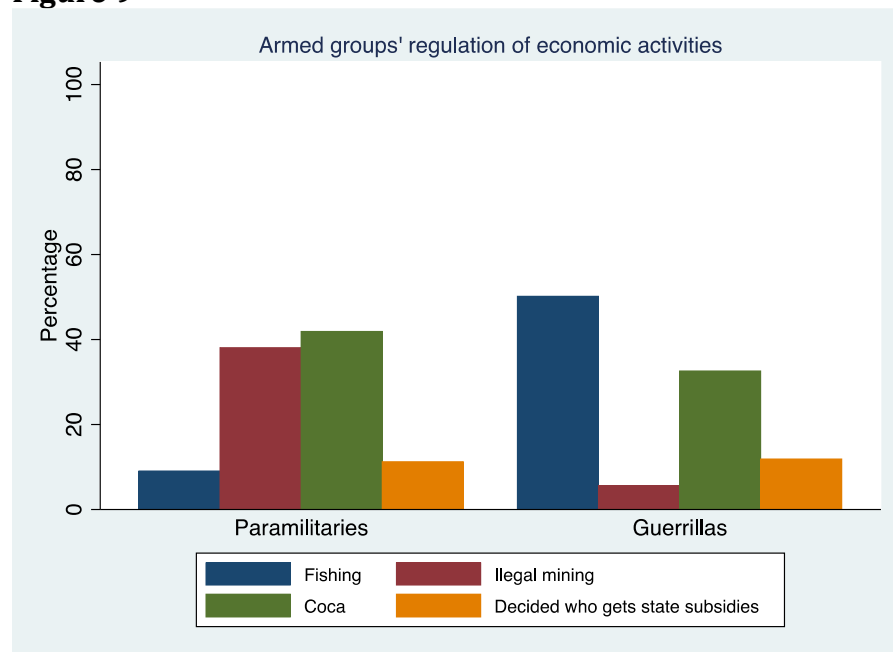
Economic activities are also regulated in different ways in war zones. Mandatory contributions to the armed actors (often called revolutionary taxes) were common in many cases but not all of them. Guerrillas imposed such taxes in about half of the localities where they were present. The rate is slightly higher for paramilitaries (Figure 8).

**Figure 8**



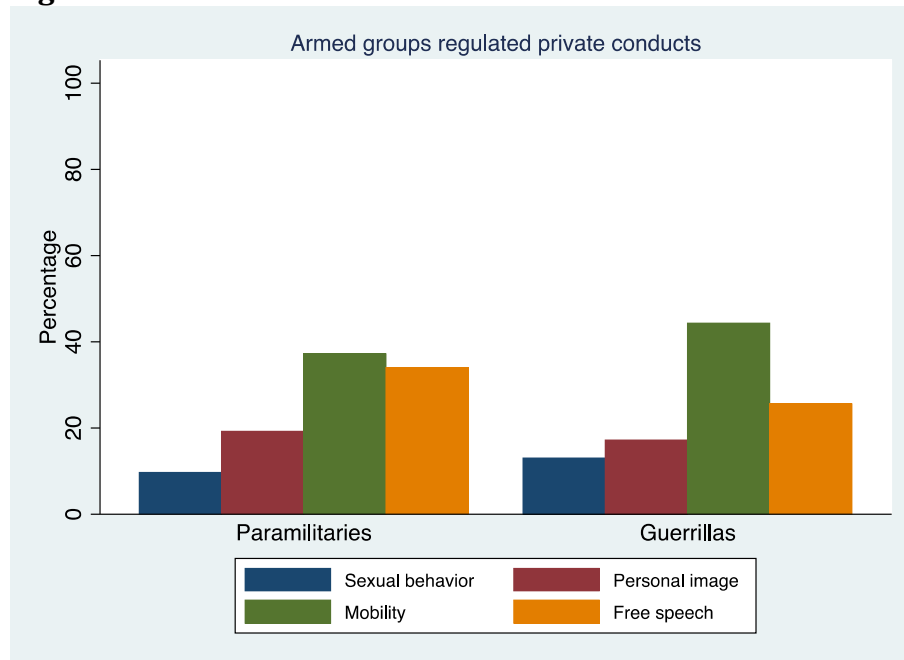
Armed groups regulated legal and illegal economic activities in some localities but not all. Fishing, hunting, and wood extraction were regulated mostly by the guerrillas, whereas paramilitaries were more likely to regulate illegal mining. Both armed actors regulated the cultivation of coca leaves, and in a small percentage of communities had a say on who would receive state subsidies (Figure 9).

**Figure 9**



In some places, guerrillas and paramilitaries created norms to regulate private conduct. The patterns are quite similar across guerrillas and paramilitaries: they regulated mobility and free speech in about half of the localities where they were present; they regulated personal image (like the use of skirts by women or earrings by men) and sexual behavior (like homosexual relations and prostitution) in about 20% of these places (Figure 10). There is variation within a single community over time as well, as some communities lived under these rules in some periods but not others.

**Figure 10**



Institutions established by the armed groups were more or less formal depending on the armed group and the territory. In about half of the communities where a guerrilla group was present, the commander discussed at meetings the specific rules that everyone had to follow; paramilitaries did so in about two thirds of all the localities where they were present. In others, these were made clear in more subtle ways, for example through interventions by militiamen.

### **3. Conceptualizing variation**

As the data shows, institutions vary greatly: across different spheres of local life, within and across armed groups, and over time and space. As with any phenomenon, there are many ways in which we could conceptualize this variation, and several typologies to capture it. Following Gerring (2001:380), “the utility of a concept is enhanced by its ability to ‘bundle’ characteristics. The greater the number of properties shared by the phenomena



in the extension, the greater the *depth* of a concept.” I propose to conceptualize these local realities as the particular form of social order that operates at a given time and location. The term *social order* has been used to refer to different phenomena. It has been defined as the existence of predictability and as the emergence of cooperation. Disorder can thus have different meanings: one related to situations of chaos or lack of predictability, and another to instances where cooperation fails. In sociology, social order is often used to denote the particular set of shared norms that regulate the interaction among members of a given community.

The concept that I propose captures both the existence of predictability, and the particular institutions that structure human interaction in a locality at a given time. Since the focus of the analysis is on the ways in which war triggers the emergence of new institutions, I am not concerned about social order broadly conceived, but rather about how it is affected by the presence and behavior of non-state armed groups. Hence, I define wartime social order as the existence—or lack thereof—of predictability of civilian and combatant behavior, and the norms that sustain it. Hence, the concept aims to capture the particular ways in which local institutions are shaped by war in any realm of private and public life.

Social order in a war zone can vary across multiple dimensions. I propose a typology on the basis of two dimensions (Table 2).

**Table 2. A typology of wartime social orders**

		Scope of armed groups' intervention in civilian affairs	
		Narrow	Broad
Social contract between armed groups and local population	Yes	Aliocracy	Rebelocracy
	No	Disorder	

First, whether a social contract has been established between the armed groups and the local community, by which I mean that both sides have obligations towards each other. To be sure, this contract is seldom spelled out; yet, every social order relies on an implicit notion of what the duties or commitments of both the ruler and the ruled are. This dimension can be operationalized as the existence of norms of behavior for both armed groups and civilians.<sup>12</sup>

If there is no social contract between the local community and the armed groups that are present in the area, the latter do not commit to abide by any rule. This unconstrained power leaves civilians with few solid beliefs about what the likely outcomes of alternative choices are. Although civilian behavior might be strictly controlled, the absence of limits for those in power lead to high levels of unpredictability. A parallel with an impulsive dictator or the state of exception in a democracy serves to illustrate this situation: the government in power has a tight control over the population, and at the same time displays unpredictable behavior. I refer to this situation as *disorder*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Other authors have approached the relation between armed actors and local populations by focusing on whether or not a social contract is established (Wickham-Crowley 1987; Metelits 2010). However, they only look at whether a contract exists or not, overlooking variation in institutions.

<sup>13</sup> There is variation, of course, in the level of abuse armed groups may display when they fail to establish clear terms for their interaction with civilians. *Disorder* is defined as situations where armed groups do not commit to respect specific rules, but it does not imply that combatants behave randomly, or that internal

When a social contract between the local population and the armed group does exist, the form of social order varies depending on the scope of the group's intervention in local institutions, which can be broad or narrow.

Armed groups' broad intervention entails regulating local life beyond security and material subsistence, including spheres of life such as the administration of local resources, politics, economic activities, and private behavior such as religious practices and sexual conduct. I use the term *rebelocracy*—or the rule of rebels—to denote situations where an armed group establishes a social contract with a local population in which the former becomes the de facto ruler in this broad sense. The specific domains over which the armed group rules can vary, but for rebelocracy to exist, intervention has to go beyond the maintenance of public order and the collection of material contributions. The channels through which the group rules can vary as well: in some places, it relies on combatants who are permanently deployed in the locality and exert a direct form of rule; in others, it relies on militiamen, who are part-time members of the organization, within the community (and often are members of it), and report directly to a commander; in other cases, the group rules through a pre-existing political party that is allied with the armed group, or through organizations that freely support it or that have been widely infiltrated, co-opted, or even created by the armed actor—like unions, boards, cooperatives, or even the formal local government.

Narrow intervention entails any situation in which the group only regulates behaviors linked to security (such as providing information to the enemy), and to civilians' material contribution to the group (usually the provision of food or regular payments). Within this

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rules that constrain their behavior towards civilians disappear. Some scholars may find that disaggregating disorder is useful to study a particular research question.

social contract, the role of combatants resembles that of a minimal state, as their regulatory role does not go beyond the spheres of security and taxation. Civilians, on their part, are expected to follow the rules that the group imposes regarding security and taxation, but are free to otherwise manage their own affairs. I refer to this form of social order as *aliocracy*, or the rule of others.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Assessing the quality of the typology***

How good is this typology? Although there is no consensus on the criteria to evaluate concepts and typologies (Gerring 1999; Doty and Glick 1994), a good typology has to meet at least three conditions, beyond internal consistency: (i) it should identify variation that matters either because we have reasons to inquire about its causes, or because we can expect it to shape relevant phenomena; (ii) it should identify types where within-group variation is minimized, and between-group variation is maximized; and (iii) it should be parsimonious: it should identify as few types as possible while having the greatest descriptive and explanatory potential. In the remaining of this section I show that this typology is parsimonious in the sense of being simple and, yet, having great descriptive potential. I also show that it yields distinct types that are internally homogeneous. In the next section I discuss the relevance of the concept as both a dependent variable and an explanatory factor in our study of other phenomena.

The first way to assess whether the typology captures types that exist on the ground is by looking at actual cases (i.e. war zones or conflict areas) in very different contexts and see if we find disorder, aliocracy and rebelocracy. Although systematic data on wartime

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<sup>14</sup> From the Latin word *alio*, which means “other”.

local institutions is hard to find, there is plenty of detailed, qualitative evidence on armed groups and conflict zones around the world. A survey of this literature suggests that, indeed, the typology captures three ideal types that are often found on the ground.<sup>15</sup>

Accounts of armed groups bringing about disorder when occupying territories abound. The groups fighting in Sierra Leone and Liberia, for example, are best known for their predatory strategies and limited observance of rules (e.g. Weinstein 2007; Ellis 1998; Johnston 2004). However, even those groups that are known for ruling civilians often display this type of unconstrained behavior, especially when trying to take over a territory for the first time, or when defending it from their enemies.

Situations of order—that is, where clear rules regulate conduct—are quite common, despite the widespread association of war and anarchy. Some authors actually describe the change brought by war as the emergence of a new order (e.g. Weber 1981; Lubkemann 2008; and Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004). What are the foundations of this new order? Case studies from very different civil wars provide evidence of both alioocracy and rebelocracy.

Several descriptions fit with the definition of alioocracy. In these cases, rebel groups control a territory and behave like a minimal state, dealing only with public order and taxation. Other spheres of life are regulated by norms that come from various sources, including the state, traditional authorities, and local leaders. Cases in which a group establishes an indirect form of rule fall into this category: an underlying agreement between the armed group and the community—or its ruler—leads the group not to interfere in civilians' affairs, as far as locals meet a set of obligations. Renamo in most occupied

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<sup>15</sup> In this paper I only provide a few examples to illustrate the applicability of the typology beyond Colombia. For a more comprehensive discussion of these and other cases see Arjona (2013).

territories in Mozambique established this form of presence. Traditional chiefs, known as *regulos*, ruled civilian affairs, but they had to ensure food provision to Renamo, as well as civilians' abidance to a set of norms (Young 1997b; Weinstein 2007; Geffray 1990). Similarly, accounts of the interaction between the SPLM in Sudan and local communities in Tei Town portray the relation between the SPLM and civilians as a tense agreement, in which local chiefs assured some minimal compliance in exchange for greater safety of the community (e.g. Johnson 1998).

The existence of a social order of rebelocracy in war zones has received little attention—often, even experts on civil wars doubt they exist at all. The emerging literature on rebel governance mentioned in the introduction has helped to counter this omission, especially by showing that armed groups often provide public goods. In an effort to show that rebelocracies are indeed common and warrant attention, I mention a few cases across the globe.

In Africa, descriptions of rebels providing public goods and creating new institutions abound. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), for example, provided health care, education, and dispute-resolution schemes. They also implemented land reform, and created a formal system of taxation and political councils (Pool 2001; Barnabas and Zwi 1997; Connell 2001; Cliffe 1984). The Tigray's People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Ethiopia is also known for its provision of services and implementation of land reform (Young 1997a, 1998:42). The National Resistance Army (NRA) and the Rwenzururu Kingdom Government in Uganda have also been described as insurgencies engaged with ruling civilians comprehensively (Kasfir 2005; Weinstein 2007).

Insurgencies in Latin America have also established rebelocracies. Wickham-Crowley (1987, 1991b) provides a comprehensive list of insurgent groups from the 1950s to the 1970s that behaved as rulers in areas where they operated—including both well-known cases, like Cuba and Nicaragua, and more obscure ones, like Venezuela. In Cuba, the creation of administrative councils to deal with public health, the collection of taxes, and the enactment of new laws has been described by Guevara (1997) himself, as well as by others (McColl 1969).

Asia and Europe are not an exception. The Liberation Tamil Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka ruled civilian affairs in a comprehensive fashion. Mampilly (2011) and Stokke (2006) offer a detailed account of their effective civil administration, which included education and health systems, a legal code with its corresponding judiciary, a police force, and even a bank. The Maoist Rebels of Nepal also created institutions to distribute land and food, and set up courts to solve disputes (Kattel 2003). The resistance groups that fought against Soviet occupation in Afghanistan developed a bureaucracy that, while not sophisticated, was in charge of several regulatory tasks in local territories (Sinno 2008:126-7; Rubin 2002). The Taliban also engaged early on in state-like activities in areas where they were present in Afghanistan (Sinno 2008). Mao's Chinese People Liberation Army was also known for engaging with civilian rule. Provision of public goods and institutions by rebels in Europe was also documented in the case of Greece (Kalyvas, 2013; McColl, 1969).

Evidence on militias and counterinsurgent irregular groups is more difficult to find, as these groups are understudied. However, some case studies suggest that they often establish rebelocracies. For example, in the different armed conflicts that Afghanistan has

endured over the last decades, several non-state armed groups often became the de facto guarantors of local order, provided public goods, and co-opted or eliminated other sources of authority in their areas of influence. Warlords' organizations like Massoud's and Wahdat—two of the many that were competing for power after the Najib regime collapsed in 1992—created and developed civilian institutions in some of the territories under their influence (Sinno 2008:193, 217).

This evidence suggests that, indeed, the typology I propose captures variation that we see in war zones. Yet, it is a very simple typology that classifies rebels' influence on institutions, when institutions do exist, into two discrete categories. Are rebelocracy and aliocracy capturing two distinct realities?

Since this typology was developed in 2009, before collecting the data, a good test of its parsimony is inspecting the data to see if the typology captures “natural” groups. Using k-means cluster analysis we can calculate the Euclidean distance between observations on the basis of measures of the dimension the typology is trying to capture, to wit, armed groups' influence on local institutions. Based on this distance, we can identify two groups or clusters that are homogeneous—that is, each cluster contains elements that are as close as possible to the other elements in the cluster.

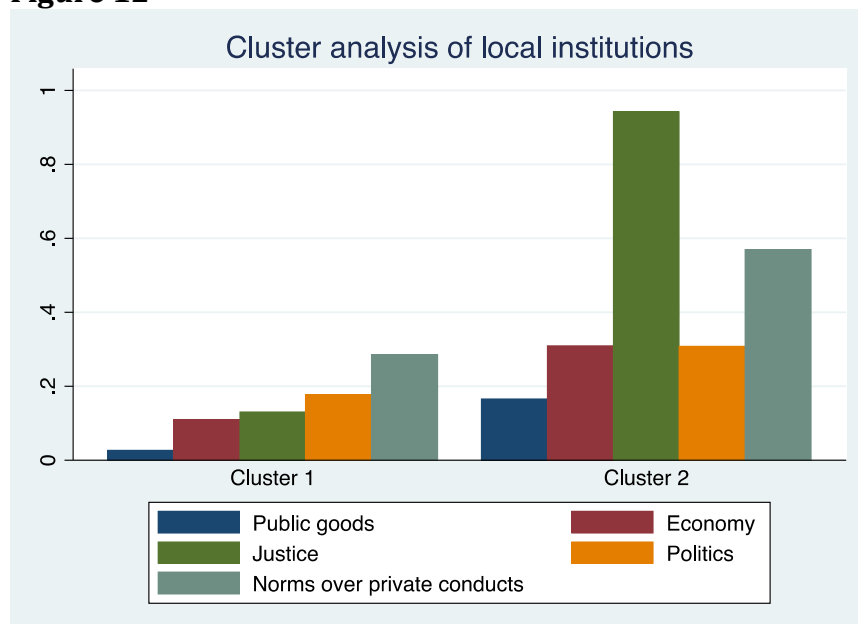
I use five indicators of armed groups' influence in local institutions. Each is an index ranging from 0 to 1, measuring armed groups' influence on a domain of local life based on a series of variables. “Public goods” measures whether the group provided education, health or infrastructure either directly or by pressing the local authorities; “economy” measures whether the group regulated different legal or illegal economic activities in the locality; “justice” measures whether the group became the de facto court—that is, if people



turned to it to solve conflicts; “politics” measures whether the group intervened in locals’ decision to vote and for whom; “norms over private conduct” measures whether the group established norms to regulate sexual practices, personal image, mobility, free speech, or domestic violence.

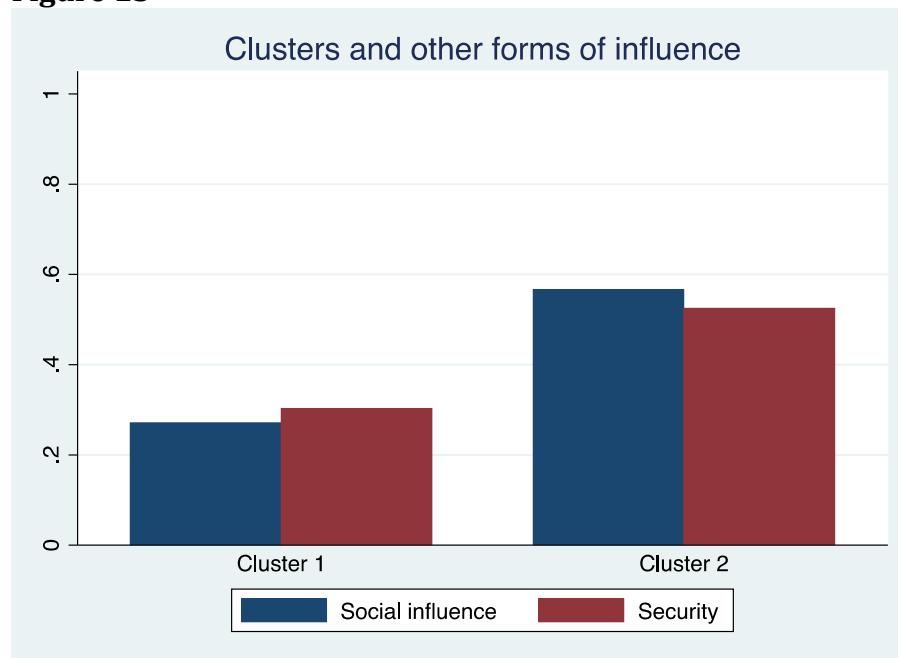
If we graph the mean of the different proxies of armed groups’ influence on local institutions by cluster, we can get a sense of how similar the elements in cluster 1 are to each other, and how different they are from the elements in cluster 2. I find that there is, indeed, a strong positive correlation between all the different indexes within each cluster, and a strong, negative correlation between all indexes across both clusters. This means that armed groups’ intervention in local institutions tends to be either broad or narrow, regardless which sphere of local life we look at. This result suggests that the simple, minimalist typology presented in the previous section does a good job at capturing two very distinct types whose elements share many attributes. The results of the cluster analysis are not sensitive to adding or dropping variables or changing the seed.

**Figure 12**



If we look at other variables that capture additional kinds of intervention by armed groups on local life, the results remain unchanged. In Figure 13 I include “social”, which refers to whether combatants participated in social events like soccer games, drinking beer with locals, or attending parties; I also include “security”, which captures whether the group protected civilians from other groups and whether people felt very secure at that time. Still, cluster 1 shows low levels of intervention and cluster 2 shows high levels.

**Figure 13**



In sum, armed groups’ intervention in different spheres of life tends to co-vary; that is, in most cases, when a guerrilla or paramilitary group intervenes in politics, it also intervenes in economic activities and social relations. Likewise, when a group abstains from intervening in one sphere, it tends to also neglect other domains of life.

#### **4. Discussion: the explanatory power of wartime institutions**

The evidence I have provided shows that institutions do operate in many conflict areas, and that the level of influence that armed groups have on those institutions varies greatly. If we know—from political science, sociology, and economics—that norms shape behavior, why do we dismiss their relevance when studying decision-making in the midst of war?

My theoretical prior is that in wartime—as in peacetime—institutions can shape available alternatives and payoffs, beliefs, and preferences via different mechanisms. They can also transform the nature of civilian-combatant relations, which can in turn have different effects on actors' choices. In this section I illustrate the explanatory power of wartime institutions by giving a few examples of how different types of wartime social order may shape phenomena at the micro- and macro-level, as well as our strategies to investigate them.

The first way in which taking into account wartime social orders can illuminate our study of civil war is by questioning the validity of common assumptions in theories of different phenomena. Macro-level theories usually assume that civilians have little agency—they are either politically supportive of rebels or coerced by them—and even micro-level theories that take agency into account tend to theorize choices within institutional vacuums. Similarly, armed groups are thought to rely only on violence to achieve their ends, leaving many strategies—like transforming local institutions—out of the analysis. In as far as armed actors strategically shape institutions, and such institutions influence actors' choices, the premises on which many theories are built should be reconsidered.

Incorporating institutions in our analysis of the conduct of war can improve theory building in at least three ways. First, armed groups' strategies might be explained at least partially by their desire to establish certain institutions; second, once in place, those institutions condition combatants' choices; and third, those institutions also shape civilians' decision-making. I illustrate the potential insights that can come from investigating these causal links with a few examples.

Violence could be better understood if we consider the institutional context in which it is used. Kalyvas (2006) has convincingly argued that selective violence against non-combatants at the local level is shaped by the distribution of territorial control between the warring sides. Following this theory, violence should be higher in areas where two or more armed groups fight for control (unless control is evenly shared), because civilians have higher incentives to share information on defectors, which in turn leads to selective violence. Yet, local institutions may shape civilians' decision to share information with armed actors; communities living in rebelocracy might be more likely to share information than communities that preserve their institutions. If some communities are more likely to deny information on defectors to all armed groups, selective violence can be less likely, whereas indiscriminate violence can be more common. Hence, the logic of violence can vary within disputed or controlled territories depending on wartime local institutions.

Furthermore, violence can serve other purposes beyond punishing and preventing collaboration with the enemy: it may be used to bring about a particular form of social order, and also to preserve it. Violence is thus not just a way to deter defection to the enemy (Kalyvas 2006) or a by-product of poor recruitment (Weinstein 2007), but a tool to enforce

all new institutions. Understanding the use of violence in these cases requires treating it as a means for governing and creating a particular type of social order.

Institutions can also be crucial to our understanding of armed groups' capacity to expand. It might be that controlling a territory is a function of the group's capacity to bring about rebelocracy: norms on economic, political, and social affairs can shape local dynamics in ways that allow armed groups to get goods, information, and support. Understanding the conditions under which armed groups are able to set up the institutions they want can give us clues about where they expand, how they do it, and why they succeed or fail.

Investigating wartime social orders can also illuminate our study of civilian choice in war zones. A parallel between the existence of distinct social orders and regime types is useful to think about the effects that such variation may have on civilian behavior. As with any regime—like democracy or dictatorship—the specific characteristics of these social orders have far-reaching consequences on their inhabitants. They determine the set of forbidden behaviors and individual rights; the actor or organization that they seek for solving their conflicts; the persons and institutions they have to obey; the existence of channels to communicate with those who command them; and the availability of procedures to defend themselves when accused of misconduct. Even their private life—how they dress, what their sexual choices are—can be subjected to strict regulation.

One of the shortcomings of the literature on civilian choices in civil war has been abstracting the institutional contexts in which such choices are made. This neglect is consequential for our study of key phenomena like civilian collaboration, recruitment, and displacement. Whether a social contract exists between a community and a group, and what specific behaviors the group adopts, should be taken into account when trying to understand

why civilians behave in the way they do in war zones. Furthermore, understanding civilian choice requires carefully theorizing how armed groups' influence in so many aspects of local life can transform shared beliefs, create new sets of available alternatives, awaken emotions that change preferences, and create new ways of reading the local (and national) status quo. Taking into account how the combination of violent and non-violent conducts transforms local and individual life is essential to better understand how civilians experience war, and how they go about making choices.

Institutions can also be crucial as mediators of the effects of conflict. Research on the consequences of war on health, education or economic wellbeing need to take into account the ways in which wartime institutions may catalyze or ameliorate the effects of war. Similarly, studies on the political and social legacies of conflict need to consider the role of local institutions. Recent studies have found that violence increases collective action (e.g. e.g. Blattman and Annan 2009; Bellows and Miguel 2009; Gilligan et al. 2010); however, a thorough understanding of the ways in which social order is transformed by war is essential to identify causal paths.

Finally, the existence of wartime social orders also has implications on the validity of measures that are commonly used in studies of the micro-dynamics of civil war. Scholars use different proxies of armed groups' presence to investigate rebel behavior or war outcomes; those proxies often rely on simplistic assumptions about local order in conflict areas. For example, inferring that violence is a good proxy of presence (e.g. Acemoglu et. al 2009) may lead to excluding precisely those places where armed groups have permeated institutions and local life to such extent that little violence is needed and, if used, is unlikely to be denounced.

Turning to the macro-level, there are many ways in which understanding the role of local institutions can advance our understanding of the conduct of war at an aggregate level. To start with, advances in our study of individuals' choices illuminate questions on macro-level outcomes. As I mentioned before, all claims about the onset, conduct, and termination of war rely to some extent on assumptions about how actors react on the ground. The better our theories on individual choices, the stronger the foundations of our theories on macro-level outcomes.

More directly, inquiring about wartime institutions can give us clues about how war evolves over time. If transforming local institutions and establishing rebelocracy is essential for holding territorial control over the long run, only certain rebel groups may be able to fight long wars. Clearly, rebelocracy is not equally likely everywhere; the more fertile the ground for rebel rule, the more likely it is that rebels keep their strongholds, as combating a group that has managed to rule populations tightly across the country is more difficult than confronting one that has only achieved military control. If correct, this line of reasoning could shed light onto the conditions for the onset and duration of civil war.

Another implication has to do with democracy in contexts of civil war. If non-state armed groups are likely to co-opt or capture existing authorities and elections can be manipulated by combatants, serious questions arise about the workings of democracy in contexts of civil war. On one hand, the capture of democracy leads to all sorts of normative questions about the push for democracy in civil war. On the other hand, it raises issues related to the strategic use that armed groups can make of democracy as a means to acquire both power and legitimacy. What is the effect of democracy on rebels' strength or bargaining power? How does democracy alter the odds of success of alternative means to end conflict?

Research on local institutions can also make a tremendous contribution to the study of counterinsurgency. The debate about how “to drain the water in which the fish swim” has taken armies around the world to try indiscriminate violence, selective violence, and civic-military operations. The U.S. has recently embraced an approach that makes great emphasis on the provision of infrastructure and both private and public goods. If institutions shape civilian collaboration and, therefore, armed groups’ capacity to preserve territorial control, counterinsurgency should pay greater attention to institutions. Furthermore, recipes that work well in some contexts may fail in others precisely due to institutional changes brought by war. Assuming that wartime interventions operate in an institutional vacuum hinders our capacity to identify the effects of alternative policies.

Turning to post-conflict studies, by identifying variation in civilians’ experience of war, this study calls for a more disaggregated approach to post-conflict outcomes. The presence of armed groups brings about profound changes to local communities, shaping not only how the war affects them (as victims), but also how they react (as agents). Variation in wartime social order is, therefore, likely to transcend the war, creating challenges and opportunities for reconciliation, reconstruction, and development.

More generally, different kinds of institutions, including those coming from state agencies and traditional authorities, can be deeply transformed by the rules that operate during war. If fostering trust on the state, recovering the authority of traditional institutions, or promoting community cohesion are among the challenges that post-war societies face, understanding the ways in which war transforms social order is a necessary step.

Finally, the importance of wartime institutions is not merely their potential explanatory power of other wartime or post-war phenomena. Variation in local institutions



during war is itself a phenomenon that warrants explanation. Understanding why order emerges in war zones and what form it takes is an important question as it relates to civilians' experiences of war, armed groups' strategies, and wartime transformation of a key aspect of society. Even more, the question on why rebels—or counter-rebels—manage to rule communities or fail to do so is essentially a question about how order is created, preserved, and destroyed.

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