# Pro-Government Militias and the Institutionalized Enemy

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**Abstract**:
Why do pro-government militias (PGMs) mobilize in some civil conflicts and not in others? Though non-state militia groups have been active in over two-thirds of all civil conflicts since 1989, there is a dearth of scholarly research on the causes of their emergence. I argue that a shift in control of localized institutional structures from the state to an opposition rebel group triggers the emergence of PGMs. I conceptualize institutional control within spatial, socio-ethnic, and economic dimensions. PGMs can use tactics similar to rebel groups, including violence against civilians, due to their greater mobility and fewer political constraints. For this reason, I contend that they are particularly effective at uprooting and replacing subnational rebel institutions where the state is absent. In one of the first global studies of PGM emergence, I employ a logistic regression to analyze all civil conflict-years between 1981 and 2007. I find support for my hypotheses that PGMs emerge when rebel groups control territory and when they recruit from the same ethnic group as the government. Militias are also more likely to become active in protracted wars, but are less likely to emerge if the government is receiving support from a foreign democracy. The findings suggest that both rebel tactics and international political forces affect the likelihood of PGM mobilization.

**Introduction**

Since the early 2000s, the Janjaweed in Sudan have terrorized Darfur, killing thousands and displacing millions (Mitchell, Cary, and Butler 2014). While rebel groups like the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army have fought the government in Darfur and elsewhere, the Sudanese government has sponsored the Janjaweed horseman to fight back (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013; Mitchell, Carey, and Butler 2014; Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe 2012). Similarly, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have been so successful in establishing and maintaining localized institutional authority throughout the country that they have only recently made peace with the Colombian government after one of the longest continuous civil conflicts in history. In order to counteract FARC influence where the government was weak, numerous elite-sponsored paramilitary groups united to become the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). While the group's primary purpose was to defend against the FARC, the AUC also targeted civilians, resulting in over 1,000 civilian deaths (Eck and Hultman 2007).

Counterinsurgency militias have directly or indirectly aided the state government in two-thirds of all civil wars since 1989 (Stanton 2015). Despite the prevalence of these pro-government militias (PGMs) in civil conflicts throughout the world, there is an unfortunate dearth of research on the emergence of these groups (Eck 2015). Many of these militias have devastated civilian populations by committing innumerable human rights atrocities, further increasing the human costs of war. Moreover, given the strategic importance of PGMs to status quo-defenders in civil conflict, further investigation into the emergence of these groups is necessary in order to better understand the dynamics of civil conflict. Understanding what makes

these groups "tick" is instrumental to reducing casualties, predicting conflict outcomes, and creating foreign policy toward countries entrenched in intrastate war.

The central proposition of this paper is that PGMs emerge as a direct result of a change in institutional control from the state to a rebel group. PGMs share a number of characteristics with rebel groups in terms of mobility and tactics. They also have fewer constraints than governments, which are often held to the expectations and rules of the international community. Whether as a direct tool of the state or an organized resistance to a rebel movement by elites, PGMs emerge as a reaction to rebel groups that have established localized institutions in place of the state. PGMs can then use non-state tactics to uproot these rebel institutions where the government cannot and even serve as the enforcers of a temporary institutional order at the local level during wartime. In order to test this theory, I hypothesize that PGMs are more likely to emerge and remain active when a rebel group controls territory; the government and rebel group(s) recruit from the same ethnic pool; and lootable resources such as gemstones or drugs are present in the warring country. More generally, the hypotheses address the spatial, socio-cultural, and economic aspects of institutional control.

The next section synthesizes existing literature on rebel institutions, pro-government militias, and the underlying dynamics and incentive structures present in civil conflict. The following section develops a theory on PGM emergence. The proposed methodology and operationalization of variables are subsequently presented, followed by a brief discussion of the implications and limitations of this project.

**Literature Review**

A recent surge in civil war literature has sought to explain the multiparty dynamics of civil conflict, relaxing the assumption that the state fights against a unitary rebel movement.

These studies address frequently occurring yet understudied processes and events relating to conflicts with multiple rebel groups, including bargaining processes (Cunningham 2006; Cunningham 2011; 2013; Driscoll 2012), inter-rebel alliances (Christia 2012; Bapat and Bond 2012; Akcinaroglu 2012), violence between anti-government rebel groups (Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour 2012; Fjelde and Nilsson 2012), rebel group fractionalization (Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour 2012; Cunningham 2013; Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour 2012), and how the emergence of new rebel groups contributes to greater violence against civilians (Fjelde and Hultman 2013; Wood and Kathman 2015). Though scholars have begun to disaggregate rebel movements, few have specifically disaggregated the state during civil war (Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger 2015). Many governments are joined by and sponsor non-state, pro-government militias, which can be used (explicitly or tacitly) as a strategic weapon against rebel groups.

The concept of PGMs is not new. Just as militias were an integral part of the American Revolution, they continue to provide support to the governments of states in civil war throughout the world. Though the explicitness of sponsorship by the government may vary, their emergence relies on overcoming the same collective action problems as other non-state groups, especially those that fight against the government. Furthermore, in order to better understand militias and their emergence, it is important to contextualize their usage and characteristics within the growth and sustainability strategies commonly used by other violent non-state groups.

Civil conflict, by definition, only occurs when a rebel group (or groups) has emerged and fighting occurs between the group(s) and the government. Though the goals of violent non-state groups vary greatly, groups and individuals must overcome the collective action problem of joining a conflict (or beginning a new one) (Lichbach 1995). For this reason, the greed versus

grievance debate has fueled much of the research on civil conflict onset and rebel group sustainability (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Lootable resources such as diamonds, gemstones, and drugs have been found to increase the likelihood of civil war onset because they offer a means to finance a rebel movement (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Lujala 2009; Le Billon 2001; Ross 2004). On the other hand, grievances provide a reason to change the status quo, which may also contribute to violent collective action (Gurr 1970). Violence may result, then, from differences between the status quo of a group and their expectations (Gurr 1970), ethnic fractionalization combined with differences in wealth among groups (Fearon and Laitin 2003), or social polarization (Posen 2003; Østby 2008). Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) take an elitist approach to testing the grievance hypothesis. They find that many of the commonly identified grievance-based predictors, such as poverty, low education, and alienation, lead to both insurgency and non-state counterinsurgency group emergence because aggrieved individuals are easier for elites to manipulate (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Justino 2009).

Regardless, the origins of rebel groups and almost all other non-state violent groups are inherently reactionary, occurring because of perceived threats, prospects for future gains (financial, social, or political), or avoidance of future losses. PGMs operate either to defend the status quo (protecting against a perceived threat), advance their own interests in the long-term by augmenting their power and status in the short-term (Staniland 2014), or for financial gains like many of the quasi-professional paramilitary groups hired by elites in Colombia (Eck 2015; Arjona 2014; Jentzsch, Kalyvas, Schubiger 2015).

The emergence of all violent groups in civil war is a function of the prospects for their future sustainability. Without a means of financing and growing a rebellion, an opposition group will collapse, quickly fail against the government, or not emerge as a violent group at all

(Weinstein 2007). Lootable goods provide resources to buy weapons or can serve as selective incentives for recruiting new soldiers from the population. Grievances can foster cohesion between an existing group and the local population, which may lead to popular sympathy for the group or a provision of resources to advance the "common cause." Both have the potential to sustain a rebellion, but only if the means to channel these resources exist (Mampilly 2011; Arjona 2014; Staniland 2014).

Arjona (2014) and Mampilly (2011) argue that rebel groups create "rebelocracies" in times of war. These rebelocracies are sets of institutions that arise in rebel controlled territories that allow the rebel groups to extract local resources, promote capital accumulation through taxation, and maintain a monopoly on violence in the area (Arjona 2014). Furthermore, when state institutions have broken down because of protracted conflict, non-state groups that control territory also control the rules of the game in that locale.

Once a group has attained control of a specific territory, it can choose to be violent against the civilian population or serve as a protector and provider of benefits to the locals (Mampilly 2011). Hezbollah in Lebanon, the EPLF and TPLF in Eritrea, FRELIMO in Mozambique, and the NRA in Uganda have all attempted to gain popular support by providing social goods like health care and education (Mampilly 2011; Arjona 2014; Kasfir 2005). Other groups have cared less about support from the public, such as the SPLA in Sudan and various groups in Somalia, and frequently commit violent atrocities against civilians (Kasfir 2005; Mampilly 2011; Arjona 2014; Weinstein 2007). Either tactic can be useful to maintain order in within a territory and acquire material and human resources, but insurgent groups tend to be more selective in their violent acts when it is more difficult to procure resources (Weinstein 2007). Whether violent or mutually supportive, interaction with local populations is tantamount

to the sustainability of a rebellion. Thus, without the potential for institutional interaction, violent non-state groups will likely not emerge.

Staniland's (2014) book, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse,* effectively integrates the institutional model of rebel sustainability with the social origins of non-state groups. His social institutional theory is grounded in the idea that prewar social bases, or "structures of collective action and social interaction in a society," vary in the social resources that it can provide to an insurgent or counterinsurgent group (Staniland 2014, 17). He further argues that the social origins of a rebel group and its institutional ties determine the nature of the group's cohesion and sustainability during war, especially in the face of PGMs or counterinsurgencies (Staniland 2014). The strength of institutions and effectiveness of social networks, however, is broader than the ability of a population to provide resources. A shared grievance among members of a social network enhances the cohesiveness of a potential group, providing fertile ground for its growth as a violent organization (Staniland 2014). On the other hand, highly crosscut societies prevent insurgencies from taking root (Gubler and Selway 2012). Rebel leaders struggle to recruit from populations that are crosscut by socioeconomic class, ethnicity, geography, and religion because fewer potential combatants coincide directly with a rebel leader's specific goals and group identification (Gubler and Selway 2012). Crosscut societies therefore prevent cohesive violent pro and anti-state groups from emerging because non-state actors cannot mobilize efficiently.

PGMs share many characteristics with insurgent groups: their preferences may differ (at least slightly) from those of the state, they often begin as civilian protectors, they seek to control territory, and their emergence is reliant upon the potential for their sustainability (Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger 2015). However, two main characteristics of PGMs make them unique

from other non-state groups. First, and most obviously, their anti-rebel preferences distinguish them from the rebel movement (Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger 2015; Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe 2012). This suggests that they reflect elite interests, or at least those who benefit from the status quo and strongly oppose deviation from it (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Justino 2009). It also implies that militias generally emerge during civil conflict rather than at its impetus (Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger 2015). Second, PGMs are not as reliant upon the population after their initial emergence if governments will sponsor them. Resources can flow from the government rather than from consistent looting. Though a state sacrifices its monopoly on violence when it sponsors a militia to combat a rebellion, militias can serve as an effective tool to weaken these internal enemies to the state. For instance, Lyall (2010) finds that grassroots militias are particularly efficient in gathering local intelligence because they have stronger coethnic networks within the population and can more effectively threaten civilians at the local level against mobilizing an opposition. Eck (2015) utilizes evidence from Myanmar to contend that governments sponsor militias after military purges as a temporary stability mechanism while the state military reorganizes. Militias are also not a direct representative of the state, which means they have more freedom to commit human rights violations without reprimand (Jentzsch Kalyvas, and Schubiger 2015; Eck 2015; Staniland 2015; Mitchell, Carey, and Butler 2014).

Based on these strategies, Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell (2015) argue that weak democracies and states that receive aid from democracies are more likely to ally with PGMs because the government can evade the accountability costs of human rights violations committed by militias while also benefiting from the increase in troop count and possible gains from terrorizing civilians into obedience. PGMs are therefore more likely to emerge in these states because of the additional resources the group can acquire from the state. The level of control a

state has over a militia it sponsors, however, is still disputed in the literature. Stanton (2015)

argues that the state maintains complete control over these militias and makes strategic decisions

regarding whether or not the group will commit violence against civilians. Mitchell, Carey, and

Butler (2014), however, contend that militias have private interests that supersede the orders of

the state. Staniland (2015) suggests that it is not necessarily in a state's best interest to maintain a

monopoly of violence, explaining that the variation in relationships between governments and

militias is a function of the ideology of the regime. It can also be costly long-term for a

government to sponsor a militia within the state's borders because militias may prioritize their

own preferences over those of the state or even turn against the state in the future (Eck 2015).

Other than Staniland (2015) and Eck (2015), much of the extant literature on PGMs does

not explicitly address how PGMs emerge and grow. Recent scholarship implies, however, that

sponsorship is strategic and that militias are utilized to fulfill a specific tactical purpose. PGMs

face many of the same collective action problems as violent anti-government groups and

generally have the same tactical toolbox; however, differing constraints give PGMs greater

freedom in their usage of violence, which can then be used as an indirect tool of the state. While

rebel groups are inherently reactionary to discontent with the status quo, PGMs are reactionary to

opposition to the status quo. PGM emergence is, therefore, explicitly linked to the characteristics

of the opposition to the state (Staniland 2015).

**The Institutionalization of Rebel Groups and the Emergence of Pro-Government Militias**

Why do PGMs emerge in some civil wars and not in others? The primary contention of

this paper is that PGMs emerge in civil wars when the opposition to the state is a strongly

institutionalized group. The role of any state is to maintain control of the rules of the game

throughout its territory, but as Arjona (2014) explains, civil war significantly weakens state

institutions. At the local level, rebel groups attempt to replace these institutions with their own as a means to demonstrate their power and extract resources to sustain the rebellion (Arjona 2014; Mampilly 2011). PGMs emerge because the status quo is more strongly threatened by institutionalized rebel groups than by groups that have not gained a foothold in dense social networks. Because state institutions are replaced at the local level by rebel institutions in rebel controlled territories, the government will be more likely to allow or sponsor militia activity to uproot rebel social ties and install new local wartime institutions while the government continues the effort to win the broader war.

There is no need for a violent group to emerge if the status quo does not need to be defended by a group other than the state. I assume, therefore, that individuals, groups, and the state are all rational actors that act to maximize gains at the lowest cost. Rebel groups must have a reason to fight against the government (or at least disrupt the status quo) despite the risk of death. PGMs have no reason to mobilize and militarize unless there is a threat to the status quo they wish to protect and the state cannot (or does not wish to) defend the status quo on its own. States will sponsor militias if the tactical benefits of PGMs outweigh the risks of sharing their monopoly on the use of violence. This assumption is important to identify because it underpins the idea that emergence of groups is not serendipitous nor without purpose. It also implies that conflicting parties can change their strategies as risk and incentive structures change. Lastly, I assume that states are self-interested and will choose not to sacrifice autonomous control of their monopolies of violence unless they believe that doing so is the best strategy against their enemy.

As discussed previously, the emergence of PGMs is purely reactionary. Therefore, the causal mechanism for the emergence of PGMs must be related to the characteristics of the groups that oppose the status quo. Whether explicitly sponsored by the state or not, a PGM must

overcome the same collective action problem as rebel groups: individuals must be willing to join rather than free ride. Potential or existing state sponsorship provides a means by which a PGM can mobilize because the costs of militarization are decreased. It must be noted that PGMs do not require explicit state sponsorship to emerge, though at least tacit sponsorship by the government occurs in most cases. Still, if the state increases the relative costs of a pro-government group from emerging, individuals that benefit from the status quo are further incentivized to free ride while the government deals with the rebellion unilaterally.

The emergence of PGMs, however, is more likely if the rebel group(s) represent a significant threat to the status quo. A greater threat leads to a greater necessity for violent response by a group independent of the state because civil conflict is a zero-sum game: as a rebel group's strength increases, the relative power of the state decreases (Mason, Weingarten, and Fett 1999). While the number of troops a rebel group is a strong indicator of rebel strength, the relationship between the rebel group and the civilian population is even stronger. Groups that can successfully augment "rebelocracies" challenge the legitimacy of the state by of controlling the rules of the game at the local level (Arjona 2014). In doing so, these groups root themselves within existing social networks to sustain the rebellion long-term. Indeed, "Social embeddedness determines whether insurgent institutions can be built and maintained in the face of counterinsurgency" (Staniland 2014, 2).

If a rebel group establishes institutions that oppose or replace those of the state (or of elites benefiting from the status quo that are not being adequately protected by the state), there is a greater incentive for PGMs to emerge. Again, this can occur more quickly if elites hire paramilitary groups or if the state sponsors a group explicitly. Therefore, the primary causal mechanism for PGM emergence is the change in local institutional structure from state to rebel

control. The role of a militia is to uproot rebel institutional ties to social networks by fighting against the rebel group and replacing these local institutions. The militia is particularly apt for this purpose for a number of reasons. First, militias can maneuver like guerrilla rebel groups, whereas the state may have more difficulty traversing mountains and forests (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Second, militias are better at gathering intelligence than state troops because they can more easily blend into the population and can threaten civilians from a more localized position (Lyall 2010). Third, militias are not tied to international political constraints like governments are. This affords them the freedom to use more diverse tactics, including violence against civilians (Mitchell, Carey, and Butler 2014). This freedom parallels that of rebel groups, making it easier to replace rebelocracies with short term militarized institutions that favor the preferences of the militia. Like rebel groups, militias in control of a territory may violent or protective, though paramilitary groups tend to be more strict and violent (Arjona 2014). Regardless of their tactics, however, militias are not charged with long-term state building responsibilities. If militias can establish local wartime institutions in place of former rebelocracies, the government may focus on ending the rebellion, regaining control of the state, and strengthening weakened state-level institutions. Moreover, just as Eck (2015) finds that militias may serve as placeholders within the state military after a purge, I argue that militias are particularly efficient at replacing rebelocracies at the local level where there is a disconnect with the state.

So how do violent anti-government groups establish local institutions to sustain their rebellion? As Weinstein (2007) explains, "Institutions for governing civilians emerge as rebel groups begin to hold territory" (163). Once in control of a territory, groups can move more freely rather than being forced to hide in the bush (Weinstein 2007). They can then create institutions to extract resources by interacting with civilians (peacefully or violently) (Arjona 2014; Weinstein

2007; Mampilly 2011). Controlling territory not only serves as the roots for growing

rebelocracies, but signals tremendous strength to the population and government. This can be

particularly threatening if the territory in control is in the periphery of a warring country where

the state has less access (Arjona 2014). Thus, in order to test the theoretical proposition that the

institutionalization of rebel groups leads to the emergence of PGMs, I hypothesize that:

*$H_1$: If a rebel group in a civil war controls territory, the likelihood of PGM emergence increases.*

Underlying the hypothesis is the assumption that the state controls all territory that rebel groups

(or PGMs) do not. If a rebel group has control of a territory, it had to have actively seized it from

a governing predecessor, namely the state or actors aligned with the state. The reality in many

developing countries is that geographic areas do exist where the government of the state has no

real power; however, the maintenance of stability before the emergence of a rebel group is a

result of the governing status quo. For instance, even if a government does not enforce certain

laws in particular areas, all territories within the boundaries of the state comprise the state until

institutional control of a given territory actively shifts to a separate entity.

   While territorial control is essential to establish local institutions, tight social ties between

a rebel group and the local population provide the soil within which rebel groups may plant the

seeds for long-term institutions (Staniland 2014). Cohesive social ties are often related to ethnic

group dynamics (Posen 2003; Østby 2008; Gubler and Selway 2012). Shared ethnic identity

between a rebel group and the civilian population signifies a common narrative, which rebel

groups may use for recruitment. However, ethnic recruitment by a rebel group does not

necessarily signify a change in institutional structures or social ties from the status quo preferred

by the state. On the other hand, if an emerging rebel group and the state both recruit from the

same ethnic base, then there is a shift in the cohesiveness of social ties in favor of the rebel group

and at the cost of the state. This is particularly threatening to the state because these ethnic ties may be reoriented and re-institutionalized by rebel groups to take action against the state, leading to protracted conflict and a more sustainable rebellion[1]. Thus,

*$H_2$: If both a rebel group and the government recruit from the same ethnic pool, then the likelihood of a PGM emerging increases.*

PGMs respond to this shift in social-institutional structure by staying the threat at the local level.

Finally, the availability of lucrative resources most directly provides for the potential sustainability of a rebellion. Without genuine control of territory and institutions that facilitate resource extraction, lootable goods such as diamonds, drugs, and gemstones may be more difficult to obtain. At the same time, areas where these resources are abundant will likely be more attractive for rebel groups to control. The prospects for controlling these lootable resources contribute to the ability of a rebel group to grow and incentivize the rebel group to control particular territories (Arjona 2014; Mampilly 2011; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Collier et al. 2003; Lujala 2009). Similarly, PGMs benefit financially from defeating these rebel groups and holding territories with these resources, especially if the state promises a share of the resources to the PGM in exchange for its services. Therefore,

*$H_3$: If gemstones, drugs, and/or oil is present in the country during its civil war, the likelihood that a PGM will emerge increases.*

**Methodology**

*Unit of Analysis, Dependent Variable, and Methods*

This study constitutes one of the first global quantitative analyses of the emergence of pro-government militias during civil conflict. The unit of analysis is civil conflict-year. The UCDP

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[1] For a more comprehensive discussion on the ability of rebel leaders to manipulate and reorient ethnic narratives, see Christia (2012).

defines a civil conflict as "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths" (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015, 549). All intrastate and internationalized intrastate conflict-years are included in the dataset from 1981-2007. The temporal domain is restricted to these years due to the availability of the data for the dependent variable. The data is taken from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2015 (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015). Since these data are organized according to separate conflict IDs, some overlapping country-years exist if the government is fighting against multiple rebel groups with distinct goals (secession, government overthrow, etc.). The specific type of civil conflict is not theoretically relevant to this study, so the new dataset contains only one conflict-year per country in the same year. After eliminating all "duplicate" country-years between 1981 and 2007, the final dataset consists of 765 civil conflict-years[2].

The dependent variable—*PGM*—is binary, representing whether or not a PGM is active during each given country's conflict-year. A 1 signifies that at least one PGM is active in that conflict-year, while a 0 signifies that no PGMs are active in the conflict-year. The data is taken from Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe (2012), who define a PGM as one that "is identified as pro-government or sponsored by the government (national or subnational), is identified as not being part of the regular security forces, is armed, and has some level of organization" (250). They identify and characterize 332 distinct PGMs over the years 1981-2007. Because this study is primarily concerned with the emergence of PGMs during civil conflict, all country-years in the

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[2] There is some missing data due to the limited capability of researchers to gather precise information on certain rebel and militia groups. I report the results of the logistic regression analysis on the available data; the final sample size is 696 country conflict-years. Though the loss of information is unfortunate, and the missing data should be taken into account when interpreting the results, I do believe that the sample size is large enough to make generalizable conclusions.

PGM dataset in which civil conflict does not occur are excluded[3]. As previously discussed, PGMs are reactionary entities that develop after opposition to the state has emerged, so including all country-years (rather than conflict-years only) would unnecessarily dilute the dataset and lead to biased statistical results.

*Independent Variables*

To test my primary hypothesis ($H_1$), that a rebel group controlling territory will increase the likelihood of PGM activity, *Territory Control* is coded as a binary variable representing whether or not at least one rebel group active during that conflict-year controls territory. The data on active rebel groups are taken from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2015 (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015). The data on territorial control are provided by Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan's (2013) Non-state Actors in Civil Wars dataset. The authors define territorial control as land "that can provide rebels considerable security from the reach of the government" (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009, 575). These data are not time invariant, but also do not vary by country-year. Rather, the unit of analysis of the data is rebel group-conflict "spell," where each conflict spell represents a cluster of consecutive years of conflict between the rebel group and the government. This is consistent with the organization of the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2015 in terms of how distinct conflicts are distinguished from a single civil conflict with a short-period of inactivity between the warring parties. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that many rebel group characteristics do not vary drastically within clusters of conflict-years. Therefore, each conflict-year in my dataset assumes the value given for the territorial control variable by Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2013) for the conflict-spell containing that year.

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[3] Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe (2012) also exclude Somalia from their dataset due to its lack of government. Indeed, a violent group cannot be defined as "pro-government" if a government does not exist. Furthermore, Somalia is excluded from this study's dataset as well.

Shared ethnic identities also represent a social tie between the population and a group (or government) that must recruit and mobilize soldiers. The shift in the level of institutionalization of this social tie from the government and the population to a rebel group and the population incentivizes the state to utilize a PGM to sever the rebel group's popular linkage. Thus I test $H_2$ by including a binary variable—*Shared Ethnic Tie*—representing whether or not at least one rebel group engaged in conflict with the government in a given year recruits from the same ethnic pool as the state. The variable is coded based on ethnic recruitment data from from Wucherpfennig et al. (2012).

Finally, the effects of lootable resources on the emergence of PGMs ($H_3$) are assessed using data from Buhaug, Gates, and Lujala (2009) and Fjelde and Nilsson (2012). Two separate binary variables representing the existence of *Gemstones* (alluvial diamonds, ruby, sapphires, opal, or jade) and the cultivation of *Drugs* (opium poppy, coca bush, or cannabis) in the conflict zone of each country. The presence of *Oil* in the country in conflict is also included in the analysis. The variable is binary and was extrapolated from Lujala, Rød, and Thieme's (2007) Petroleum Dataset. Lucrative resources reduce the relative costs for the emergence of both rebel movements and PGM groups that seek profits for their "services" to elites or the government.

*Control Variables*

I control for a number of other factors that could contribute to the emergence of PGMs, including the ongoing *Duration* of the conflict. The length of the conflict is derived from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2015 (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015). The duration variable is created by coding each conflict-year with the value corresponding to the number of years that had passed since the beginning of the conflict. Since many civil conflicts involve multiple rebel groups that emerge and fall during different years, the "beginning" of a civil conflict may be

interpreted in a number of ways. For the purposes of this study, the beginning of a civil conflict

is based on the start-date for a given conflict ID in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-

2015. If a "new conflict" occurs during a period of conflict with another rebel group—that is, if a

new rebel group emerges with a political goal different from the current opposition to the state,

which is then coded with a separate conflict ID—the value for the duration variable still

represents the number of years since the beginning of the original conflict. In this way, civil

conflict is conceptualized as a state of being rather than distinguishable within the same conflict-

year based on differing "incompatibilities" between the government and a single rebel group. In

other words, a single country cannot be engaged in multiple civil conflicts within its own

borders; rather, regardless of the number of rebel groups involved in the conflict, the country is

in a singular state of civil war. On occasion, a state in civil conflict experiences a short period of

peace before conflict resumes. These situations can be problematic for the coding of the

*Duration* of the conflict, especially when a country has been in a state of prolonged conflict

before only a brief interruption. Short periods of peace are often not long enough for the

government to reestablish institutional control over the entire state, and certainly some rebel

groups may simply be regrouping or remobilizing. In order to account for this issue, conflict-

years are coded as consecutive if there are only two years or less of peace between years of

conflict.

      Since recent literature on pro-government militias has addressed the effects of foreign

support for the regime in a warring state, I control for *External Democratic Sponsorship* of the

government (Mitchell, Carey, and Butler 2014; Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015). A

government reliant upon external resources from a democratic country may be constrained by its

sponsor's strategic preferences regarding the violations of human rights that PGMs often

commit. For this reason, governments in civil war may be less likely to fund a PGM and more likely to suppress any that emerge in order to maintain foreign support. The data are taken from Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan's (2013) Non-state Actors in Civil Wars dataset and Polity IV (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2014). After cross-referencing the names of any foreign supporters for a government during a given conflict-year with their respective Polity score, I create a binary variable wherein a 1 signifies that there is explicit military, non-military, or troop support from an external democratic state. A 0 represents a lack of explicit support. A sponsor is considered a democracy if its Polity score greater than 5.

Two separate dummy variables representing mountainous terrain—*Mountains*—and forest cover—*Forest*—are also included in order to control for rough terrain in the warring country. Rough terrain may prevent the government from establishing a foothold in an area, which allows rebel groups and PGMs to more effectively institutionalize without government interference (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Both variables are coded with a 1 if more than 50% of the country is covered with the associated terrain. The data for the forest variable are taken from the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Database ("Proportion of land" 2015). Mountainous terrain data are extrapolated from Buhaug, Gates, and Lujala (2009).

I also control for the regime type of the country in conflict. The binary variable *Democracy* is derived from each respective country's Polity IV scores, which range from -10 (complete autocracy) to 10 (fully consolidated democracy) (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2014). A state is considered a democracy (and coded with a 1) if has a Polity score is greater than 5. States are assigned a 0 if their Polity scores are less than 6.

Lastly, a dummy variable representing *Rebel Power* relative to the government in a given conflict year is included in the analysis. The variable is based on the ordinal-level data provided

by Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2013). A 1 signifies that at least one rebel group in a given conflict-year is at parity or stronger than the government, whereas a 0 denotes that all rebel groups fighting in that conflict-year are weaker than the state. This variable is included in order to address an alternative hypothesis; militias may emerge when elites believe that the state is likely to be defeated by the rebels if they do not intervene by funding a PGM.

*Method of Analysis*

Since the dependent variable is binary, a multivariate logistic regression is employed to investigate the hypotheses. This method of analysis will provide comparable ratios to assess the actual odds of the emergence of a PGM, given the effects of each variable in the regression.

**Results and Discussion**

The results for the logistic regression analysis are recorded in Table 1, which includes the odds ratios associated with each variable. The model is highly significant at the $p<.000$ level, and there are no problematic levels of multicollinearity between any of the independent variables (see Table 2). Most variables associated with the hypotheses of this paper are significant, though not all confirm the predicted direction of the effect on the dependent variable. $H_1$ is supported at the $p<.05$ level: if at least one rebel group in a given conflict-year has institutional control over a territory, the odds of a pro-government militia emerging increase by a factor of .53, holding all other variables constant. There is a similar magnitude of effect on the emergence of PGMs if a rebel group and the state are both targeting their recruitment efforts at the same ethnic group, but only at the $p<.10$ level. Still, the results demonstrate moderate support for both $H_1$ and $H_2$.

*Territory Control* and *Shared Ethnic Tie* are distinct from many of the others in the regression analysis because they are more directly related to the actual mobilization of a militia group in a given conflict-year, rather than representing a characteristic of the state or conflict

| Table 1: **Logistic Regression- Dependent Variable *PGM Activity*** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Independent Variables** | β | Odds Ratio |
| | (Se$_β$) | (Se$_{or}$) |
| *Territory Control* | .429** | 1.536 |
| | (.196) | (.302) |
| *Shared Ethnic Tie* | .45* | 1.568 |
| | (.236) | (.37) |
| *Gemstones* | .613** | 1.846 |
| | (.245) | (.453) |
| *Drugs* | -.842** | .431 |
| | (.296) | (.127) |
| *Oil* | .134 | 1.144 |
| | (.196) | (.225) |
| *Duration* | .1*** | 1.105 |
| | (.013) | (.014) |
| *Ext. Dem. Sponsor* | -.546** | .579 |
| | (.198) | (.115) |
| *Mountains* | -.179 | .836 |
| | (.207) | (.173) |
| *Forest* | .631** | 1.879 |
| | (.276) | (.519) |
| *Rel. Rebel Power* | -.164 | .849 |
| | (.305) | (.259) |
| *Democracy Dummy* | .701** | 2.015 |
| | (.242) | (.488) |
| N= 696 | | Prob. > $\chi^2$ = .0000 |
| Log Likelihood= -348.177 | | Pseudo $r^2$= .1814 |

*Note: \*\*\*p<.000; \*\*p<.05; \*p<.10*

itself that creates an environment conducive to PGM activity. In other words, when a rebel group takes control of a territory and effectively replaces state-based institutions, the emergence of a pro-government militia is "triggered." This trigger effect is also present when a rebel group and the government recruit from the same groups—the actual severance of socio-cultural ties between an ethnic group and the government actively triggers the activity of militia groups that can more quickly and efficiently re-orient these groups away from the rebellion. Thus, in the same way that rebel groups originate from discontent with the status quo, PGMs mobilize as a reaction to the strategy utilized by the opposition to the status quo.

The regression provided mixed results for $H_3$. The presence of oil in a country in civil war is insignificant even at the $p<.10$ level, but the presence of drug cultivation and gemstones in the conflict zone are both significant at the $p<.05$ level. However, while gemstones are positively related to the emergence of PGMs, drug cultivation decreases the likelihood of militia involvement in the conflict. This may indicate that elites who control opium fields, for instance, would rather shift their operations in drug cultivation to another location rather than invest in a privately sponsored militia to fight off a rebel group. Gemstone deposits cannot be moved, so elites or the government will be more willing to invest in the defense of locations with these particularly lucrative resources. In more developed countries where laws against drug cultivation are more strongly enforced, the elites that benefit from the profits of drug sales may not wish to lose favor with the government, which could be more active in the area now defined as a "conflict zone." Elites may prefer to bribe the government or rebel groups in the area to maintain authority over the territory, which could be cheaper than financing a militia to protect their illegal practices. Gemstones, on the other hand, are legal to sell in the global market, so the government benefits from controlling gemstone-abundant areas.

The mixed results for $H_3$ may also reflect the fact that the mere presence of these lootable resources within a conflict zone does not necessarily trigger the mobilization of PGMs in the same way that a change in territorial control does. More specifically, the variables used to test $H_3$ are limited by the available data. Diamonds or drug cultivation in a particular area may make those areas more prone to violence between the state and a rebel group, but their presence alone does not trigger PGM emergence. Moreover, the variables have limited internal validity because they do not represent which warring party actually controls them. If alluvial diamonds, for instance, exist in a territory where the state and a rebel group have clashed, but the government

| Table 2: Correlation Matrix | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IV | Terr. Control | Eth. Tie | Gem | Drug | Oil | Dur. | Dem. Spons. | Mnt | Frst | Reb. Pwr. | Dem |
| Terr. Control | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Eth. Tie | -.17 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| Gem | .163 | .113 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Drug | .151 | .154 | .498 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Oil | -.04 | -.012 | -.066 | .026 | 1 | | | | | | |
| Dur. | .168 | -.188 | .179 | .334 | .04 | 1 | | | | | |
| Dem. Spons. | .052 | -.087 | -.132 | -.096 | .227 | .142 | 1 | | | | |
| Mnt. | -.035 | .221 | -.039 | .122 | -.001 | -.063 | .114 | 1 | | | |
| Forest | .076 | .112 | .423 | .384 | -.055 | .135 | -.07 | .04 | 1 | | |
| Reb. Pwr. | .186 | .01 | .096 | .023 | -.095 | -.216 | .001 | -.006 | .126 | 1 | |
| Dem | -.0333 | -.221 | -.085 | -.039 | .28 | .213 | .308 | .089 | .029 | -.224 | 1 |

maintains control of the area, then there was no transfer of institutional (or more specifically to this case, economic) control from the state to an opposition force. Future research should address this data limitation by combining georeferenced natural resource data with the available data on rebel controlled territory. Data constructed in this way would provide better validity for any research that seeks to understand rebel tactics, recruitment processes, and the dynamics of geospatial politics in civil war.

One important question implicit in any study of pro-government militia behavior relates to their relationship with the state they fight to defend. It is beyond the scope of this study to explicitly determine whether or not local elites have more authority over a militia than the state,

but the regression analysis does support the proposition that international constraints imposed by democracies do have an effect on domestic politics. Contrary to Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell's (2015) argument, this study finds that external sponsorship of a government by a democracy has a significant negative relationship with militia activity. This implies that the state does maintain a certain level of control over pro-government non-state actors (see Stanton 2015). If a government at war is not receiving support from external state actors, or if that support comes only from non-democracies, then that government is more likely to have violently realized support from non-state groups. This study cannot conclude the degree to which a domestic government can dictate the tactical maneuvers employed by militias (including violence against civilians), but international and domestic forces do seem to be capable of suppressing PGMs activity in the first place.

Most of the control variables included in the statistical analysis are significant at the $p<.05$ level other than mountainous terrain. Militias tend to emerge more often in countries with high levels of forest coverage, as well as after long periods of war. PGMs, like rebel groups, are interested in maintaining their power or obtaining more. Rebel groups, however, benefit from longer conflict periods because it increases their likelihood of victory (Mason, Weingarten, and Fett 1999), whereas PGMs emerge after protracted conflict because elites fear losing power to the rebel opposition or wish to have greater power in the post-war regime if the state is victorious. The democracy control also yielded surprising findings: the likelihood of a PGM emerging in a democratic country is remarkably high relative to the other variables. Holding all other variables constant, it is possible that democracies may prefer to use PGMs to counteract rebel groups because PGMs can use tactics that democratic governments cannot use. The state can benefit from the violent efforts of PGMs and publicly "look the other way" in order to defect

from explicitly associating itself with that group. Future research should investigate the domestic political institutions that may give rise to or suppress PGM activity.

Finally, the results provide evidence against the alternative hypothesis that militias mobilize solely to counteract the strength of a powerful rebel group, since *Relative Rebel Power* is insignificant at the p<.10 level. Even if longer conflicts tend to result in PGM activity, the power of the rebel opposition relative to the government has no significant impact on PGM emergence. While rebel power and other group-level characteristics most certainly determine rebel behavior, further research should continue to address the consequences of rebel tactics on the behavior of other non-state actors.

**Conclusion**

From the "minute-men" of the American Revolution to the Peshmerga forces currently engaged in violent conflict with ISIS near Kurdistan, pro-government militias have been an instrumental component of the dynamics of conflict. PGMs emerge when there is a change in control of localized institutional structures from the state to rebel opposition groups. Institutional control and institutionalized ties can be conceptualized along spatial, socio-ethnic, and economic dimensions, though more detailed data are necessary to continue studying the effects of these linkages. The transition of control of these ties and institutions leads to the growth of non-state groups that favor the previous status quo to the new "rebelocratic" regime. PGMs can use the same tactics as rebel groups—including violence against civilians—due to fewer political constraints and easier mobility. After driving a rebel group from a given territory and uprooting rebelocratic local institutions, PGMs can restore the previous order or at least serve as a placeholder for the state at the local level while official government forces are still working to reinstate broader institutional control over the entire state.

There are a number of theoretical implications of this project's findings. First, militias are not generally organized organically. Some militia groups may emerge as defenders of the status quo in subnational locations where the government of the state is relatively absent, but most are likely tied directly to the state. If militia groups remain relatively independent from the government, they would not be constrained by international or domestic political forces. However, the empirical findings of this paper suggest that international constraints and domestic institutions are significantly related to PGM emergence. Further scholarly work should be dedicated to the evolution of PGMs, since some militias with greater freedoms or resources may eventually grow into opposition groups (Mitchell, Carey, and Butler 2014; Eck 2015).

Future research on PGMs also requires more concise categorizations of militia groups. As Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger (2015) explain, PGMs "vary with regard to size, location of operation, level of professionalism, and tasks; formation, recruitment, and membership; their relation to the population and their use of violence; and their relation to the state" (3). PGMs also differ in terms of targets and ideology. More specific data would allow for researchers to gain greater insight into how particular characteristics of these groups determine their behavior in civil war (Kalyvas 2006; Kalyvas and Balcells 2010; Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger).

Finally, the theory presented in this paper could be extended to the emergence of rebel groups in developing countries as well as conflicts against foreign occupiers or colonial powers (Branch 2007). If state-level governing structures are being implemented in a traditionally tribal or parochial society, then the transition of local political control to state control can result in violent collective action against the national regime[4]. Moreover, further research into local changes in institutional control may provide deeper insight into the underlying mechanisms of the grievance hypothesis of civil conflict onset.

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[4] For further discussion on political culture and civil society, see Almond and Verba (1963) and Kubba (2008).

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