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What is This?

Ideology in civil war: Instrumental adoption and beyond

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Abstract

How important is ideology for the analysis of civil war? In contrast to literature that neglects ideology in its emphasis on structural variables or situational incentives, this article argues for the recognition of its essential role in the functioning of armed groups if they are to explain observed variation in armed group behavior. For example, sidelining ideology leaves major phenomena unexplained, including both mass killing and restraint in violence against civilians. Ideology is defined as a set of more or less systematic ideas that identify a constituency, the objectives pursued on behalf of that group, and a program of action (perhaps only vaguely defined). Ideology matters in two ways. First, it has instrumental value for armed groups, socializing combatants with heterogeneous motivations into a coherent group, dampening principal-agent problems, prioritizing competing goals, and coordinating external actors including civilians. Ideologies differ in the kind of institutions and strategies they prescribe for meeting these challenges and in the extent to which they do so. Yet this first approach is incomplete, as ideology has more than instrumental value. Members of some armed groups act on normative commitments in ways not reducible to instrumental reasoning, and some groups constrain their strategic choices for ideological reasons, often normative concerns prescribed by their ideology. Some groups, for example, engage in restraint, declining to use violence though it would have strategic benefit. The conclusion lays out a twin-fold research agenda: a 'weak program' that analyzes the instrumental adoption of ideology and a 'strong program' that explores normative commitments based on particular ideologies and on social preferences.

Keywords

armed conflict, armed group institutions, civil war, ideology, political violence

Is ideology important for the analysis of civil war? At first glance, the answer is yes: organized violence is about ideas as well as power. Like any other public undertaking (Elster, 1998), armed conflict has to adopt the rhetoric of collective interest and public good. No significant rebellion has been mute; violence is seldom a substitute for voice. We argue here that ideology is also fundamental for the internal life of armed groups. Rebels generally spend significant time and resources producing, transmitting, and discussing ideas. They divide and fight around ideas. And they use ideas when taking literally life and death decisions.

In contrast, a number of significant scholarly works ignore or downplay the role of ideology in civil conflict, a disinterest that reflects three basic assumptions: that

ideologies are simply rhetorical devices, that they can in the interest of parsimony be reduced to some structural variable, that their potential effects are overridden by situational logics. The first two are found abundantly in the 'economic turn' in the analysis of civil war, for example. On the one hand, ideology was seen as merely window wash, crafted to capture support and resources from international audiences during the Cold War or, afterward, diasporas (Collier & Hoeffler, 2001). On the other, what mattered for the analyst was

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observed behavior – in Collier's picturesque phrase, if somebody denied being a chocolate eater but anyway ate chocolate, that fact overrode the declaration (Collier, 1999). Both tenets – descriptive and methodological – have survived at least partially the 'distress' (Ron, 2005) of the economic turn. The third is an essential assumption of many influential works on violence against civilians during civil war: patterns of violence are determined by situational logics, with little role for ideology. Weinstein (2007) reintroduced ideology into the analytical landscape – a substantial step forward – but in a resource-curse framework in which ideology was a purely residual explanation for groups that were forced to rely on 'social endowments' in the absence of economic endowments. What these and other works have in common is an underlying intuition that in violent settings 'hard' facts trump 'soft' ideas. What matters is eating chocolate, not speaking about it. But the chocolate eater metaphor has not been extended to its logical conclusion. If as a result of advertising, a person comes to not only endorse an image of himself as slim but to value that image highly, then this will affect his chocolate eating practices.

In the case of political violence, ideology is best understood, we suggest, as a set of more or less systematic ideas that identify a constituency, the challenges the group confronts, the objectives to pursue on behalf of that group, and a (perhaps vague) program of action. Moreover, some ideologies prescribe strategies and institutions for the realization of those objectives. Thus all armed groups engaged in *political* violence – including ethnic separatist groups – do so on the basis of an ideology, that is a set of ideas that include preferences (possibly including means toward realizing those preferences) and beliefs.

One might therefore expect that neglecting ideology would leave major war-related phenomena unexplained. For example, can the Holocaust be explained with no reference to ideology? That the Nazis massively benefited from the killing and expropriation of the Jews is uncontroversial. But was this genocidal course of action uniquely determined by economic self-interest? The evidence points in the other direction. If genocide requires ideas to be understood – in the measure that it is understandable (Levi, 1958) – the same is true of the inverse phenomenon, restraint by armed actors. For example, rape of civilians often varies sharply across the actors within a single civil conflict, even when one adversary engages in it at high levels (Cohen, 2013; Wood, 2006, 2009). Why would one group not use a form of violence against an adversary when that adversary uses it against the group's constituency if it could benefit from doing so? The

answer, we suggest, lies in group ideology. If we abandon the grim world of violence against civilians we find similar phenomena for other aspects of conflict. For example, recent literature has emphasized the importance of organizational form for the dynamics and type of warfare in civil war (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010; Sinno, 2008; Weinstein, 2007). Groups vary strongly – though not haphazardly – in their organizational patterns (Gutiérrez, 2008) even within 'greedy' wars in which all actors have massive access to resources (Gutiérrez & Giustozzi, 2010). Such variation in organizational form is often best explained by variation in ideology.

A robust consideration of ideology is necessary to explain the differences between armed groups and to fully analyze armed conflict as 'politics by other means' (von Clausewitz, 1832/2012). We are aware of the difficulties involved in reconsidering the role of ideology in civil wars: ideology is not easily defined or delimited. Nor is it easily added to the usual approaches to conflict; analysis of its role entails genuine methodological difficulties. A non-rigorous approach can use ideas as a wild card to explain anything.

Nonetheless, there are two approaches through which ideology can – and, we argue, must – be analyzed. First, ideologies matter because armed groups adopt them instrumentally. For example, if a rebel group fails to socialize its members into some basic gregarious values it will struggle to organize the high-risk collective action of warfare. Moreover, ideologies prescribe – to widely varying extent – distinct institutions and strategies for attaining those goals.

Yet, this first approach is incomplete. Ideology matters in a second way: some groups – more precisely, at least some of their members – are normatively committed to an ideology. In this case, the group's emergence, evolution, and behavior cannot be understood without incorporating such commitments into scholarly analysis. We suggest that the behavioral economics literature on social preferences offers micro-foundations for such an approach. Founders cannot choose just any ideology but must take into account normative commitments: which ideology will identify, resonate with, and therefore motivate a concrete constituency?

We develop this argument as follows. The first section is a necessarily brief review of recent literature, focusing on illustrative key works and turning for insight to the literature on terrorism. In the second, we argue that key observed patterns of violence are not easily explained without a strong role for ideology. The third focuses on why a non-state group might adopt an ideology on purely instrumental grounds, an approach to the analysis

of ideology we term the 'weak program'. The fourth argues that (at least some) members of some groups act on normative commitments to an ideology in ways not reducible to instrumental reasoning and self-regarding preferences, the 'strong program'. In the conclusion, we lay out a research agenda that follows from our argument.

The role of ideology in recent literature

Since the turn of the century, there has been a revival of scholarship on civil war, but ideology is often absent, replaced by structural variables or situational incentives. More recent works consider ideology, but to a limited degree and often only implicitly: the emergence of conflict and patterns of violence are shown to depend on the type of armed actor, the ethnic configuration of power, or group institutions – all of which suggest a role for ideology, one not sufficiently developed.

By *ideology*, we mean a more or less systematic set of ideas that includes the identification of a referent group (a class, ethnic, or other social group), an enunciation of the grievances or challenges that the group confronts,[1] the identification of objectives on behalf of that group (political change – or defense against its threat), and a (perhaps vaguely defined) program of action.[2] Ideologies also prescribe – to widely varying extent, from no particular blueprint to very specific instructions – distinct institutions and strategies as the means to attain group goals (see below). There are of course other sources of variation in institutions and strategy; ideology comprises an important but often neglected source of such variation.

Armed group ideologies vary from highly systematic doctrines on the part of some groups to loosely related ideas vaguely advanced by leaders of others. Maoist groups, for example, embrace an ideology of social revolution for the benefit of workers and peasants and prescribe 'prolonged popular war' as the overarching strategy and a set of specific institutions to implement that strategy. Despite the distinction in earlier literature between 'ideological' and 'ethnic' groups or conflicts,

ethno-nationalist groups in civil conflict also embrace an ideology, namely, that of nationalism, which prescribes a specific strategy, namely, secession through warfare (perhaps combined with other strategies).

Ideology (however defined) is markedly absent in key works published since 2000. Collier & Hoeffler (2001, 2004) argue that the emergence of civil war in poor countries is best understood as the mobilization of greed rather than grievance. They also find that ethnic dominance was a significant predictor of civil war – ideological factors such as the Cold War and social cohesion were not – but treat it as a structural not ideational variable. Through the use of doubtful proxies (Cramer, 2002), Collier & Hoeffler model warfare as a market, thus analyzing war as 'economics by other means' (Keen, 2000). In contrast, Fearon & Laitin (2003) do not explicitly reject ideological approaches but explain the emergence of civil wars in poor countries in terms of state capacity and rough terrain. These early works thus concurred that there was no need to explicitly include ideology or ideational factors to explain civil war emergence.[3]

Influential works on violence against civilians during civil war similarly sidelined ideology in their emphasis on strategic incentives in particular situations. For example, Kalyvas (2006) emphasized the role of information and territorial control in civil wars fought through irregular warfare: where armed groups (state or insurgent) had partial control, they could identify and target civilian supporters of their enemy; where they had no control and hence no information, they targeted indiscriminately (if they could engage in such regions). Other scholars such as Lisa Hultman (2007) emphasized battlefield dynamics rather than territorial control to explain variation in civilian casualties, similarly disregarding ideology.

The absence of ideology in these works reflects a presumption that all insurgent groups are essentially alike: whatever the differences in rhetoric, groups and their members respond similarly to such incentives and thus ideological differences are irrelevant. This emphasis echoes standard social science micro-foundations emphasizing self-regarding preferences with little role for other-regarding or ethical motives. Moreover, groups are presumed to be unitary actors, which removes any need to analyze group cohesion, discipline, or identity – for which a careful consideration of ideology is essential.

Of course it is not easy to analyze ideology, which poses challenges for both description and analysis. Speech may

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[1] Our definition of ideology incorporates groups whose members are motivated by 'greed' as well as 'grievance' as long as the group is political in the sense that it seeks to realize a goal on behalf of some group beyond its own members. On the origins of ethno-political groups in the grievances of their members, see Gurr (2000), especially Chapter 3.

[2] Our definition builds on that of Freeden (2004: 6) but requires the identification of a specific though possibly abstract group whose welfare the ideology addresses.

[3] Later, more sophisticated econometric work also neglected ideology (Hegre & Sambanis, 2006).

indeed be mere rhetoric; stated goals of public good provision may be mere cover for selfish material interests. Particular ideological gestures may be embraced in order to secure support.

Despite these challenges, some recent works advance our understanding of the role of ideology in civil war. Jeremy Weinstein (2007) analyzes variation in violence across insurgent groups: some exercise brutal, frequent violence against civilians while others do not. He traces this divergence to the groups' initial endowments: those with economic endowments (lootable resources or external sponsors) attract opportunistic recruits whose predatory inclinations are not easily disciplined, while those who rely on social endowments attract activist recruits who accept that the group's reliance on civilians implies restraint in violence. Although Weinstein includes ideology (along with ethnicity and kinship) as a type of social endowment, economic incentives trump both ideology and leadership: where economic resources exist, opportunistic groups will emerge because competition between rivals rewards those who build an organization quickly using those resources. Despite this work's notable contribution in systematically analyzing the challenges that insurgent groups confront, his account is problematic for two reasons. His parsimonious emphasis on distinct pools of recruits neglects the powerful potential of socialization (and therefore ideology), which he rejects as unable to account for variation in group norms (Weinstein, 2007: 125). (The research agenda advanced in this article's conclusion would build such an account.) Moreover, the claimed correlation between reliance on lootable resources and abuse of civilians may not be true: Stanton (2009, 2013) shows that rebel reliance on contraband is not correlated with relevant patterns of violence against civilians in civil wars since 1989. Nonetheless, Weinstein's (2007) study is a distinct advance over earlier work in showing how socially endowed and economically endowed groups address governance issues very differently.

In contrast to earlier literature, several recent quantitative analyses of civil war have demonstrated the importance of ethnic militancy – and therefore ideology – in civil war. Their findings are largely due to their stronger research designs, which use theoretically relevant rather than weak proxies for key variables, code group variables at the group level, focus on the interaction between the challenger and the state through dyadic research designs, and analyze the ethnic configuration of power rather than ethnic diversity. For example, Cederman, Wimmer & Min (2010) show that the exclusion of ethnic groups from power leads

to conflict.[4] Wucherpfennig et al. (2012) found that civil wars in which rebel organizations recruit from and fight on behalf of excluded ethnic groups last longer than others, a finding they interpret in terms of the strong collective solidarity, high tolerance for risk, and legitimacy among civilians on the part of excluded groups. Cederman et al. (2013) show that the presence of co-ethnics across the border has a curvilinear effect on the probability of conflict if those co-ethnics are excluded in the neighboring state. Wimmer (2013: 23) argues that nationalism, which he explicitly treats as an ideology of 'political self-rule', delegitimizes other forms of rule and facilitates the mobilization of ethnic constituencies by political leaders, particularly in decaying empires and new states. These works advance our understanding of the conditions promoting ethnic militancy, yet political processes are proxied by structural variables and underlying mechanisms are not specified (Wood, 2013). Co-ethnics must be *mobilized* into supporting rebel groups, which raises the question: What is the role of ideology in such mobilization?

Scholars increasingly focus on the variation across armed groups in how they organize and relate to civilians, as well as in how they carry out violence (Arjona, 2010; Mampilly, 2011; Sinno, 2008). However, the extent to which ideological differences explain variation in group institutions and norms, perceptions of and responses to strategic incentives, and processes of mobilization is as yet under-explored (Blattman & Miguel, 2010). Such differences are often treated as exogenous with little effort to assess their possibly ideological origins. For example, Humphreys & Weinstein (2006) show that armed groups that engaged in high levels of abuse of civilians during Sierra Leone's civil war were more ethnically fragmented, recruited based on material incentives, and failed to build disciplinary institutions, but they did not assess whether these differences were due to distinct ideologies. A key exception is the recent work by Kalyvas & Balcells (2010; Balcells & Kalyvas, 2012) on Marxist insurgencies, which we discuss in the penultimate section.

The literature on terrorism sheds light on how ideology matters for terrorist groups and how its role might be analyzed. Ideological differences explain differences across such groups; for example, the pattern and goal of terrorist violence differs with group ideology (Drake, 1998; Sánchez-Cuenca & de la Calle, 2009). Scholars of religious terrorism

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[4] Lyall (2013) shows that in wars fought conventionally (including interstate wars), political exclusion of a group before the war delegitimizes the regime in the eyes of combatants from that group, increasing the probability of both desertion and defeat.

emphasize how religion (under certain conditions) provides the ideology and beliefs that legitimate symbolic violence as part of a cosmic struggle against the forces of evil (Juergensmeyer, 2003). Moreover, religion also provides the organizational structure for religious terrorism (Juergensmeyer, 2003), as well as strategic guidance about how and where it is legitimate to fight (Hegghammer, 2013). Bloom (2011) shows that a culture of martyrdom emerges in some Islamic terrorist organizations but not in others – differences that reflect distinct ideological interpretations of martyrdom and suicide terrorism. Those members of organizations that engage in such attacks do so based on strong normative beliefs nurtured by deep immersion in the organization (Bloom, 2007). Finally, ideology may truncate the organization's strategy set; in other words, some organizations eschew terrorism for ideological reasons. In South Africa, the African National Congress did not engage in significant violence against civilians despite propitious conditions, a choice that reflected its non-racial ideology (Goodwin, 2007). Importantly, the literature on terrorism is increasingly moving away from the tendency to proxy ideology with some overarching type, such as when 'revolutionary', 'religious', 'reactionary', and 'nationalist' stand in for particular ideologies that prescribe specific strategies and institutions.

Recent literature has thus advanced more compelling explanations of variation in violence, recruitment, and ethnic militancy, and sometimes these explanations include ideational dimensions. But how and why ideology matters is not clear.

Why the analysis of ideology is necessary

What do we miss if we ignore ideology or reduce it to structural variables? In this section we make a prima facie case for the importance of ideology in explaining two dramatically distinct patterns of violence: mass killing and restraint in violence.

Mass killing from the Holocaust to Rwanda is difficult to explain without a strong role for ideology. Valentino (2005) argues that despite the diversity of types of such killing, a common pattern holds: leaders orchestrate violence as the best means for some essential end (a new society, group defense, the definitive defeat of an enemy) and legitimize mass killing as a necessary response to threats to the group. Mass killing is thus carried out under an ideology: a referent group is identified, its defense is the clear goal, and an overarching strategy endorsed. Similarly Straus (2006) shows that in Rwanda, mass violence by neighbors against neighbors was legitimized by regime hardliners who insisted that all Tutsi were enemies of the Hutu nation and that genocide was therefore a necessary form of social order. In its

interpretation of the rebel threat, Hutu Power was thus an ideology that identified a referent group, an objective, and a program of action. At the level of the individual, ideology may shape ethnic violence through the cultivation and channeling of emotions toward violence, as when ethnic majorities, threatened by the reversal of ethnic hierarchies, act on resentment made salient by leadership rhetoric and therefore target minorities with violence (Petersen, 2002).

Restraint in the use of violence toward civilians during civil war is also difficult to explain without recourse to ideology. Stanton (2009, 2013) shows that more than 40% of states and of rebels during civil conflicts since 1989 exercise restraint – the absence of massacres, scorched earth campaigns, forced displacement, bombing or strafing of civilian areas. Among other findings, she shows that rebels that have a political wing to their military organization are more likely to exhibit restraint. Her findings thus raise several questions that point to the importance of ideology: Why do some rebel groups, but not others, construct political wings? Why do some develop relatively sophisticated institutions while others do not?

Restraint is particularly puzzling when exercised against an enemy who engages in atrocities against the group's civilian base. In a study of wartime rape by armed groups in all major civil wars between 1980 and 2009, Cohen (2013) found that in 38% of wars where there were (at least) some reports of rape (all but 13 of the conflicts), only one side perpetrated the violence. (Most often, it is state forces, not rebels, that do so.) Countrywide social structures and cultural norms cannot explain such sustained asymmetry in rape, suggesting that group ideology may play a role (Wood, 2012; Cohen, Hoover Green & Wood, 2013). Prohibition, of course, could be for instrumental as well as normative reasons (see Kalyvas & Sanchez-Cuenca, 2006, on suicide bombing). Yet the instrumental prohibition of rape depends on the perception that its consequences undermine the group's project and on institutions that implement that prohibition, both of which may stem from an ideology. Hoover Green (2011) and Manekin (2012) show how internal group institutions explain patterns of violence in El Salvador and Israel, respectively, but do not explore their ideological origins.

These examples suggest that a significantly deeper engagement with ideology and its relationship to group strategy and institutions would contribute to scholarly understanding of variation in patterns of violence.

The instrumental value of ideology

In this section we consider the reasons why an armed group might adopt an ideology for purely instrumental

reasons, the 'weak program'. Focusing the discussion on rebel groups, we first ask: Under what circumstances will a rebel group adopt an ideology on instrumental grounds? We then discuss how some but not all ideologies define and prescribe particular strategies and institutions as the best means towards the realization of group goals.

Ideology as ideas to motivate and coordinate

The first and simplest instrumental answer to these questions is that ideology is only a rhetorical façade fabricated by rebels to attract funding (Collier, 2006). That the group claims to speak in the name of an aggrieved social sector is an instrumental, rent-seeking fiction. Rather awkwardly, this approach assumes that the group's members are vulnerable to ideological appeals (otherwise, they would not be seduced by rebel rhetoric). The argument is further undermined by the fact that one of the main observed regularities of non-state armed groups is that they invoke one or more worldviews (Marxist, nationalist, ethnic or religious), which not only identify objectives, friends, and foes, but also give a template to live by and sometimes strategies and institutions (on which more below). Many groups thus adopt a working ideology, which is used not only as a discourse to attract support, but also to interpret the world and to structure everyday hierarchical and horizontal relations between members.

More specifically, to further motivate the instrumental interpretation of ideology, we present five 'stylized facts' about rebellion (see also Weinstein, 2007). First, its members are diverse: they join the group following different motivations, and have different backgrounds (Andvig & Gates, 2010). Motivational heterogeneity implies that groups face serious difficulties solving their collective action problems. Greedy combatants can behave poorly in defense (Constant, 2007) and vengeful combatants can be wayward and undisciplined.

Second, they are in a situation characterized both by stark interdependence and collective action problems. Their survival may depend in large measure on the success of the group. However, the combatant herself would be better off shirking to minimize individual risk, and the group itself may lack strong coordination systems (Gates, 2002; Policzer, 2009).[5]

Third, and relatedly, leaders do not observe directly the behavior of their subordinates (especially when engaged in irregular warfare) and thus face persistent principal-agent problems (Gates, 2002; Hoover Green, 2011; Weinstein, 2007). Furthermore, intermediate cadres have to adapt and innovate (Mao, 1937), and the boundary between adapting and disobeying is decidedly fuzzy.

Fourth, they generally fight in a situation of sharp technological inferiority with respect to their adversaries (Giap, 1970; Mao, 1937). They rarely have realistic expectations of leveling the field of technological and financial capacity vis-à-vis the state or international coalition against whom they fight. The history of insurgencies is marked by failure, with few clearcut victories, and some intermediate cases (those which have been able to force a favorable peace process, for example). Non-state groups are hard-pressed to build the military capacities and skills to compensate for their lingering technological inferiority, which is overcome only very slowly (Mao, 1937).

Last but not least, rebels are much more likely to survive if they have some degree of social support. At the most basic level, they need to renew their ranks and to extract resources on a relatively stable basis (Olson, 1993); both are significantly easier with support. Moreover, rebels that are protected by the population enjoy key informational advantages (Kalyvas, 2006; Wood, 2003). Supporters are generally a heterogeneous group. Even if there exists a nominally cohesive motive for rebellion such as ethnic identity, the group must coordinate the different, sometimes contradictory, interests and demands of its constituencies, donors, and other audiences for its actions.

Weak monitoring and decentralized decisionmaking, heterogeneous motivations and constituencies, and technological inferiority thus constitute challenges that can jeopardize the performance and the very existence of insurgencies. Rebellion takes place under the shadow of these combined challenges: how best to maintain cohesion and morale, to guarantee obedience, but also, when necessary, to motivate innovation. To address them, a group may adopt an ideology on purely instrumental grounds. First, an ideology provides the means to socialize the members of the group into compliance with its commands and discipline (a weak form of socialization)[6] so that individualistic motivations such as adventure seeking and vengeance do not disrupt operations.

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[5] Even when joining an insurgency is the only safe option and therefore the organization does not face a collective action problem in recruitment (Goodwin, 2001; Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007), any organization that engages in armed action faces a collective action problem in coordinating participation by its members in those actions.

[6] On levels of socialization, see Kelman & Hamilton (1989).

Second, an armed group may choose on instrumental grounds to instill a stronger form of socialization in order to dampen informational asymmetries. Socialization that induces identification on the part of the recruit with the role of combatant-on-behalf-of-the-group aligns the combatant's behavior (that is, his public preferences) with those needed by the group (and perhaps his private preferences as well, in which case socialization has reached the deeper level of internalization, see below). Role identification has the additional advantage of robustness: in comparison to other solutions, it is much more resistant to external shocks and to personnel variation.

Third, by providing a group identity, boosting combat morale, and dampening unruly individualism, ideology can also increase the combat capacity of the group (Taber, 2002). Such organizational concepts and practices tend to be heavily 'asset-specific' (Williamson, 1996): they are skills that develop in concrete organizational settings, and are deployed by interacting agents following a more or less formal script. They thus constitute a form of distributed knowledge that deepens cohesion by fostering collaboration. Moreover, they are not portable knowledge that can be taken away by deserters as they depend on particular group practices. Furthermore, since ideology justifies answers to questions, it can provide simple and clearcut recipes on how to act in the world (if A happens, do this; otherwise, do that), which may be invaluable in moments of crisis.

Moreover, ideology can serve as a (still instrumental) cognitive device. Non-state armed groups are multi-objective optimizers, and sorting out priorities is not easy. Leaders have to take fast decisions regarding hard trade-offs in a high-risk environment. Ideology provides access to tested and crystallized solutions by shrinking radically the range of options considered and defining a common language for explaining the courses of action adopted, including the sacrifice of individual lives for the common cause. It is hard to see how this could be demanded without recourse to ideology as defined here.

Of course ideologies can mislead, as well as inspire and coordinate the group. They can specify, but also unduly narrow, the menu of strategies and tactics. This is why ideologies that specify strategies and institutions do not necessarily entail military efficiency, and why some group leaders may attempt to switch ideology, at a high risk, as we discuss below.

Ideology can also be an instrument for *external* coordination, particularly for generating civilian support. Weinstein's argument that resource-rich groups cannot leverage ideologies overlooks the fact that resources and ideologies are not perfect substitutes. Rich groups often face more difficult coordination problems than poor groups, as they often interact with a wide panoply of actors, including social movements and leaders, religious leaders, members of civilian and armed bureaucracies of the state, business partners, and global actors. The interests, orientations, and policies of all these actors are dissimilar and difficult to align. For example, acts of extreme violence or attacks against an ethnic minority can please local and regional actors but may also alienate national/international sympathizers. If an insurgency is to maintain its networks of allies, it must mount a permanent effort to align interests and juggle disparate demands and pressures – for which an ideology may provide the criteria.

Ideology and the embeddedness of group institutions

Not only do ideologies provide the ideational resources for motivating combatants and coordinating factions and allies, but they also often provide blueprints for strategies and institutions. As the literature increasingly emphasizes, there are many kinds of insurgencies. Some are organized as armies, others as networks (Gutiérrez & Giustozzi, 2010). Some consist of combatants working for pay with minimal socialization into group goals and norms (that is, they are essentially mercenaries), other groups are tightly knit around common ideas and values, and many groups fall between these poles. As Weinstein (2007) observed, some groups are much more 'ideological' than others, which we interpret to mean that some ideologies impose significantly denser 'blueprints' than others. This suggests that the *content* of ideology may help explain such variation.

For example, some ideologies prescribe specific institutions and strategies to meet the challenges discussed above (Mao, 1937; Ugarizza, 2009). That is, institutions and overarching strategies are *embedded* in some ideologies. Kalyvas & Balcells (2010) show that rebels during the Cold War were much more likely to fight through irregular warfare than were rebels after 1990, a pattern explained in part by Marxist ideology, namely, the belief that radical transformation was possible via armed insurgency generally and irregular warfare particularly. That ideology was also consequential for conflict outcomes: such warfare, as shown in a related paper (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2012), is associated with longer conflicts and a higher likelihood of incumbent victory. Marxist insurgencies often exhibit very similar institutional configurations, such as a party organization (with varied relations to the military organization), ongoing indoctrination meetings, and the holding of self-criticism sessions (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010; Mao, 1937).

Such ideologies not only provide a blueprint for institutions and strategies, but also structure everyday life (Gutiérrez, 2008). For example, some Marxist insurgencies regulate the sexual life of their members. The adoption of an ideology has consequences for believers and non-believers alike: it shapes routines as well as institutions. Even non-ideologically motivated members have to live by the rules prescribed by the ideology.

Thus, a founder might choose an ideology – at least in theory – because he believes that its institutions and routines are effective. Moreover, because ideology implies particular skills, routines, institutions, and rules of thumb, adoption of an ideology generates strongly path dependent dynamics, which may be sufficient to dominate the centrifugal pressures of a resource windfall (contra Weinstein, 2007). And while group leaders as a result of exogenous or endogenous wartime processes may come to instrumentally prefer a different ideology, the group is constrained in its choice of a new ideology: not all groups could effectively adopt Maoist ideology, for example, which requires the development of particular, possibly very different, internal institutions.[7] Because ideologies identify goals but also prescribe strategies and institutions, they are (to varying degrees) 'sticky'.

Thus leaders may adopt an ideology instrumentally, as a means to obtain objectives, in principle without any normative or emotional commitment on their part. Precisely because ideology has such instrumental implications, it may increase the survival likelihood of the group at specific points of its trajectory. However, despite their contributions to morale and coherence, ideologies can also mislead. Institutions and practices developed based on a once-useful ideology may later prove inadequate to meet the evolving challenges of the conflict.

But is there something beyond the instrumental value of ideology? We argue in the next section that there is.

Ideology as normative commitments beyond the instrumental

The instrumental version of the 'ideology matters' thesis reasons from something akin to the invisible hand of the market, namely, the invisible brain of the master strategist, who reasons that one means forward toward the group's goal is the instrumental adoption of an ideology. To what extent do we need more than an instrumental approach to ideology to explain variation across non-state actors in civil wars? In this section we argue that

an adequate explanation of the full spectrum of variation in armed group behavior – the 'strong program' – rests on a more-than-instrumental understanding of ideology, one that recognizes a role for *commitments*. In short, some armed groups depend on combatants normatively and emotionally committed to an ideology. Founders cannot therefore choose just any ideology; they must take into account the normative commitments of their combatants: Which ideology will identify, resonate with, and therefore motivate its constituency? Moreover, they choose an ideology from a set of historically relevant ideologies, not from a long list of all possible ideologies.

Ideology as normative commitments to a cause

We begin with a simple observation. Not all combatants fight for instrumental reasons: some join for normative reasons, and, even if they did not, they may come to be normatively committed to the group's ideology as a result of socialization processes. Socialization by some insurgencies goes significantly beyond compliance and role identification and may be facilitated by selective recruitment of those who appear to be already ideologically committed.

Recruitment into non-state armed groups ranges from forcible recruitment, to the solicitation of volunteers, to the careful vetting of aspiring applicants. For example, the Salvadoran insurgency, the Frente Farabundo Marti de Liberacion Nacional (FMLN), relied nearly exclusively on volunteers and (initially) carefully vetted prospective members. Many of those who joined the FMLN were already motivated by normative commitments forged by their highly contrasting experience of liberation theology and indiscriminate state repression (Peterson, 1996; Wood, 2003). In the context of an extremely hierarchical rural society, liberation theology spread new, radically more egalitarian ideas and identities – God cares about justice not only in the afterlife but in human history and therefore the poor need not simply endure social injustice – to rural residents who suffered the contempt of their social 'betters' as well as grinding poverty.[8] Thus liberation theology is an ideology: it identifies the suffering poor as the core reference group, analyzes social injustice, and prescribes mobilization. (Whether or not it endorsed violence was hotly contested among theologians and activists alike.) The result was widespread nonviolent social mobilization. Indiscriminate state violence against participants, their families,

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[7] See Staniland (2010) on local social structures and armed group emergence.

[8] On liberation theology, see Gutiérrez (1973) and Ellacuria & Sobrino (1993).

and their communities led some to flee, some to acquiesce, and some to support the hitherto tiny armed organizations. Given the options of flight and quiescence, support in such high-risk circumstances is best explained by normative and emotional commitments to an insurgency understood as the necessary successor to the earlier movement (Wood, 2003). Some supporters were motivated by moral outrage, others by normative and emotional commitments to the exercise of collective agency for the realization of social justice.

Of course not all recruits were so profoundly committed; others were young people living in areas with a strong FMLN presence, seeking an alternative to highly circumscribed lives, or fleeing difficult home lives. All recruits were subject to an intense socialization process, one best characterized as preference transformation, the internalization of group purpose, identity, and norms (Hoover Green, 2011). Indoctrination sessions were a frequent event in the lives of combatants, including ongoing study of ideological materials at varying literacy levels, as well as critique/self-critique sessions. One result of this socialization was a pattern of restraint in violence, in sharp contrast to that of the state (Hoover Green, 2011).

Armed groups attempt internalization to highly varying degrees – some not at all. Other insurgencies that attempted such thoroughgoing preference transformation – but with distinct content and success – include Sendero Luminoso of Peru (Degregori, 1990), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka (Wood, 2009), and the insurgent groups of Colombia (Gutiérrez, 2008). Moreover, some insurgencies extend internalization to the civilian population, seeking to inculcate their ideology to children in local schools, as in the case of the LTTE (Mampilly, 2011; Wood, 2009). Groups that rely on mid-level commanders to interpret situations and innovate responses – including many insurgencies fighting via irregular warfare – are likely to attempt to inculcate a sophisticated understanding of group goals and strategies so that their innovations will align with group norms and goals. Of course, such efforts succeed to highly varying degree.

Ideology as a normative constraint on strategies and tactics

In some groups, ideas constrain normatively, not just instrumentally. Some types of violence are prohibited not because they would not have strategic benefit but because their use would undermine the group's ideological commitments, particularly its identity as a certain kind of force. Targeting civilians or engaging in rape may be proscribed because the group's identity and ideology include a claim to better govern civilians than does the state – normative positions not compatible with the targeting of (at least those) civilians. The LTTE, for example, rarely engaged in rape of civilians and did not rape even when engaging in ethnic cleansing (a frequent setting for widespread rape of ethnic others on instrumental groups), despite its general pattern of violence against civilians (Wood, 2009). The group also regulated who could marry whom and when on ideological grounds, suggesting that this restraint may be best explained by ideology (Wood, 2009).

More fundamentally, ideas may constrain the group from violence altogether or may justify violent over nonviolent strategies. Asal et al. (2013) show that ethnopolitical organizations in the Middle East with gender-inclusive ideologies were significantly more likely to engage in only nonviolent forms of protest, while those with leftist ideologies were significantly more likely to engage in only violent forms of protest.

Of course this does not mean that all groups with strong indoctrination programs engage in limited violence. Some groups that engage in high levels of socialization carry out horrific violence; indeed, their members are socialized precisely to carry out such violence in the name of the group's ideology. For example, the Colombian guerrillas regularly identify enemies on ideological grounds, singling them out for violent/lethal attacks (Arenas, 1971; Gutiérrez, 2008). The proposition is not, and should not be, that the more ideological the group, the less violent it is. Rather, we have argued that group ideologies often mandate particular strategies, tactics, and practices, as well as the institutions with which to carry them out.

The micro-foundations for the 'strong' program

Participation in mobilization in high-risk circumstances despite the opportunity to free ride (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001; Jasper, 1998) and restraint in the deployment of violence even when there would be strategic advantages are both difficult to explain with self-regarding, material preferences. Decades of research in behavioral economics and psychology confirm the ubiquity of social preferences: a substantial fraction of experimental subjects consistently demonstrate other- and process-regarding preferences, sometimes conditioned on identity or past behavior (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Camerer & Fehr, 2004). This suggests that scholars should not ignore the possibility that some combatants act on social preferences, including altruism.

Moreover, preferences are not fixed but depend both on framing and learning (Bowles & Polania-Reyes, 2012), which gives strong micro-foundations to the increasing emphasis by scholars on the endogeneity of preferences to conflict processes (Kalyvas, 2006; Wood, 2003, 2008).

Thus even if the founder of an armed group were to adopt a particular social group as 'its' constituency – for example, the strongest ethnic group in a region propitious for insurgency – on purely instrumental grounds, and then to recruit members, our argument still holds, for several reasons. First, the instrumental engagement with the ideology on the part of the founder does not mean that combatants are not normatively committed to it. Second, even when the founder chooses instrumentally a certain constituency, his choice of ideology is constrained to those that resonate with at least some, and ideally many, prospective supporters and with local social structures (Benford & Snow, 2000; Duverger, 1951; Staniland, 2010). Because of different interests, historical memories, and forms of sociability, peasants or workers or business people will not pick up just any form of politics. Third, the choice of ideology, even when made instrumentally, often bears with it particular repertoires of contention, specific institutions, and, more generally, political connotations, setting in motion a path-dependent form of organization that is costly to change. (This does not mean, of course, that organizations will not exhibit inconsistencies between their ideological rhetoric and their behavior.) In practice, rather than relying on such contorted reasoning 'from scratch', most founders of armed groups draw on their (likely flawed) analysis of past and contemporary models of armed movements, with perhaps some attempt to adapt them to local conditions, through a process that mixes normative and instrumental concerns. Finally, founders may themselves be normatively committed to a particular ideology.

Conclusion

Although influential works on civil war sidelined ideology, prioritizing explanations based on economic interests or situational logics, we nonetheless conclude that analyzing ideology – as ideas and normative commitments that motivate and coordinate, as the bearers of identities, strategies, and institutions, as normative constraints on group strategies – is essential. While we have developed this argument through an analysis of the role of ideology in non-state groups, the analysis holds for state militaries as well. There exist large-scale phenomena whose explanation is questionable or contrived without recourse to ideology. We have argued, for

example, that the large observed variation in violence – from mass killing or rape of civilians to the narrowly targeted use of only lethal violence– is not easily accounted for if we ignore ideology.

How then should scholars analyze the role of ideology? The first possibility – a 'weak program' of analyzing ideology – is to understand it in terms of instrumental rationality: groups adopt ideologies instrumentally to better adapt means to ends. In contrast to those who ignore ideology in favor of economic interests or situational logics, we argue that recognizing the many reasons why group leaders would instrumentally adopt an ideology is necessary for analysis of observed variation. Ideology enables armed groups – to highly varying degrees – to socialize combatants with heterogeneous motivations into a coherent group, to dampen principal-agent challenges, to prioritize competing goals, and to coordinate with external actors including civilians.

This approach to analyzing armed actors should yield insights about its role in war. But it is incomplete. First, it is logically subordinate. For strategizing founders to recruit members or to lure civilians into support, we have to acknowledge that at least some combatants in some groups act on sincere beliefs and other-regarding preferences, so sincere normative commitments need to come into the analysis at some point. Nor can instrumental explanations adequately explain the varied processes of preference transformation – whether through mobilization, the experience of violence, or group socialization processes – that give rise to or reinforce normative commitments, particularly those based on social preferences. Finally, the basic normative content of ideology – the choice of referent group and mobilizational form to address identified types of injustice or to preserve specific privileges – is not well explained by the instrumental approach. While a leader, seen as a political entrepreneur, might choose a certain constituency on such grounds, he would do so based at least in part on the normative commitments of others to that constituency. He is constrained by previously existing preferences and to the set of historically available set of ideologies, with some, but not infinitely many, degrees of freedom in his ideological choices.

Why and how do ideological beliefs and preferences motivate but also constrain combatants? The weak program cannot address this fundamental issue. The success of the weak program thus depends on the development of a strong program that allows for a robust explanatory role for normative and emotional commitments on the part of at least some members of some groups.

The strong program analyzes the extent to which some groups exhibit patterns of behavior best explained by a

normative commitment to ideology, one not merely instrumental. These patterns need not be desirable, or better than those produced by pure greed, but they are different and not explicable by instrumental reasoning alone. The strong program should decisively sharpen descriptive inference: accurate descriptions of some groups cannot be achieved without taking into account normative aspirations and commitments held by their members. When these are plugged into standard rationalistic models as outlandish beliefs that come from nowhere, the result is contrived, and one of the main advantages of the weak program – parsimony – becomes buried under successive layers of ad hoc assumptions. Rather, parsimony suggests that scholars must consider ideology as a source of variation across armed groups. Although ideology may co-vary under some conditions with structural variables, it also has autonomous explanatory power. Moreover, we argued above that most armed groups draw on their (likely flawed) analysis of past and contemporary models of similar movements, with perhaps some attempt to adapt them to local conditions, through a process that mixes normative and strategic concerns.

The most productive way forward will likely work at the convergence of the weak and strong programs. We suggest three promising avenues of research. First, we have argued that while founders many choose an ideology instrumentally, the choice is constrained: successful ideologies resonate with the movement's own past and present – its traditions, precedents, and the interests of their constituencies – and are congruent with specific social structures (Staniland, 2010). Even material interests are not addressed in a social or hermeneutic vacuum. Social actors learn how to stipulate their interests in the realm of ideology (Hall, 1989). Moreover, leaders face world system constraints: not all ideologies can be implemented at any time (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). Analyzing the process of choosing and developing ideology may illuminate when and why certain movements emerge but not others.

Second and more specifically, researchers should continue the recent trend of focusing on the internal institutions of armed groups (Gates, 2002; Gutiérrez & Giustozzi, 2010; Gutiérrez, 2012; Hoover Green, 2011; Manekin, 2012; Staniland, 2010; Wood, 2009). Since particular ideologies imply specific institutions and practices, this promising 'organizational turn' will be enriched if ideology is brought in more strongly. To what extent, and how, are internal institutions prescribed by group ideology? Where do ideologies, and therefore institutions, come from? How are they spread and adapted? In this context, it appears that a particularly promising avenue of research is the documentation and analysis of the variety of Marxist ideologies – with their distinct institutional forms and social norms – across rebel groups.

Third, social scientists should investigate the extent and role of normative commitments in the life of armed groups, thereby helping to explain the full spectrum of variation in armed group behavior, even in cases where leaders choose ideologies for purely instrumental reasons. In developing the micro-foundations for such research, scholars can draw on recent literature that emphasizes the heterogeneity, plasticity, and irreducibly social (other-regarding) nature of preferences.

Analyzing the role of ideology in civil war – along the lines of either the weak or strong program – will not be easy. Yet, given its importance in explaining observed variation between armed groups, scholars should embrace this challenging agenda.

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