

Rebelling Against Rebellion: Comparing Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Recruitment

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Abstract

Rebellion—its causes, dynamics, and effects—has received considerable attention across several social science disciplines. Rebel recruitment, in particular, has attracted substantial effort. However, the question of why people “rebel against rebellion” has seldom been asked systematically: why is it that individuals join armed groups located outside the formal boundaries of the state to fight against the rebels? We use existing theoretical conjectures to derive hypotheses about how joiners in these two types of groups differ and test them using novel survey data from the ongoing Colombian civil war. We find that, compared to their rebel counterparts, individuals who join counterinsurgent organizations are equally poor, yet more motivated by materialistic concerns; though less rural, they are equally likely to have lived in areas of low state capacity and equally likely to have lived in areas ruled by the group they eventually joined. The importance of territorial control revealed by our data points to the crucial role of “endogenous” dynamics in civil war.

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1. Introduction

Thirty-seven years ago Ted Gurr formulated a question that still stands at the center of one of the most venerable research programs in the social sciences: “Why men rebel?” (Gurr 1970). In the years since, the literature on insurgent collective action has exploded. Several recent studies have sought to explain why some people join armed groups (Weinstein 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006b; Gutierrez 2004b; Peters and Richards 1998; Lichbach 1995) and why others collaborate with such groups short of joining as full-time combatants (e.g. Wood 2003; Petersen 2001; Popkin 1979; Scott 1976). While not addressing directly the questions of insurgent recruitment and collaboration, recent influential cross-national research has relied, explicitly or implicitly, on this literature to explain the onset of civil war (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003).

Given such widespread interest, and taking into account the issue’s broad relevance, it is surprising to note that a crucial dimension of rebellion and civil war is almost completely neglected: in most civil wars thousands of individuals join local armed groups that form in opposition to the rebels and in defense of the state—though outside the state’s formal institutional boundaries. It is no exaggeration to say that for almost every individual who mobilizes in support of the insurgents, there is probably another one who actively opposes rebellion by taking up arms; and that every local rebel group that gets off the ground is likely to encounter, sooner or later, a rival paramilitary counterpart.

Like rebel groups, counterinsurgent groups vary widely in terms of their legal status, military organization and strategy, origins, and size. One finds clandestine death squads along with legal village “home guards;” groups that emerge as a result of direct state action along with organizations that grow out of independent “self-defense” movements; and tiny groups composed of a few hundred operatives along with mass organizations that recruit tens of thousands of civilians, often from the exact same pool that insurgents target for recruitment. Yet, compared to the extensive research on rebel recruitment, the

process of counterinsurgent mobilization remains unexplored. Who joins counterinsurgent groups and why? How do these groups succeed in recruiting poor peasants in defense of a status quo that typically appears staked against their own interests? In what ways are rebel and counter-rebel organizations different? What are the implications of counterinsurgent mobilization for our understanding of the dynamics of civil wars? We lack explicit comparisons of rebel and paramilitary groups—besides case studies where such comparisons tend to be incidental to the larger goal of describing and discussing particular conflicts.

The neglect of a phenomenon that amounts to the quasi-privatization of the state's monopoly of violence is not just a glaring empirical gap; it is also a theoretically consequential omission. For example, the collective action problem has been conceptualized as an issue that entails the choice of joining a rebel group versus “remaining” a civilian. But what if the real choice is (also) between joining competing armed groups? If this is the case, then theories of civil war stressing individual opportunities must account for the ability of rebel organizations to compete with counterinsurgent groups in terms of material inducements. Likewise, theories stressing popular grievances must explain why oppressed and deprived individuals join organizations that fight against social and political change. Likewise, state capacity theories must incorporate these hybrid actors who act outside conventional theoretical understandings and empirical indicators of state capacity.

This paper focuses on a specific aspect of the counterinsurgent phenomenon by comparing individuals who have joined armed groups that seek to overthrow the state with individuals who have joined groups that seek to defend the state by fighting against the rebels. By comparing their individual characteristics and motivations, we seek to determine *how* these two groups differ from each other in terms of their membership—a first step toward understanding *why* some individuals fight against the state while others fight against the rebels. This analysis contributes directly to the study of civil wars. To our

knowledge, this is the first paper that examines the determinants of recruitment into *both* insurgent and counterinsurgent organizations using survey data.¹

Our empirical strategy consists in bringing survey data from Colombia to bear on theoretical arguments about the type of individuals a particular group is able or willing to recruit. Obviously, the analysis of data from a single country entails an external validity trade-off. However, given the scarcity of systematic empirical data on these questions, our contribution constitutes a step forward in a larger, collective research program that is currently producing fine grained data from different civil wars.² In addition, by comparing individuals who join insurgent and counterinsurgent groups in the same civil war we are able to control for a set of factors related to the characteristics of the country and the particularities of the conflict. This allows us to better assess how individuals who find themselves in similar conditions join rival sides in a civil war.

Our contribution is both empirical and theoretical. Empirically, we compare objective and subjective characteristics of rebel and counterinsurgent ex-combatants. More specifically, we derive our hypotheses from extant theorizations of rebel recruitment. Although our focus is on the comparison between insurgent and counterinsurgent combatants, by comparing the two we are also able to explore observable implications of several theories of rebel recruitment. Theoretically, we stress an important dimension of recruitment in civil wars, one that emphasizes the effects of local territorial sovereignty. We find that the ability of armed organizations to rule specific areas and their inhabitants has an important and positive effect on the willingness of individuals from among this population to join it and to, respectively, shun its rival. Indeed, we find a strong effect for this variable even when controlling for factors that have been argued to be critical in rebel recruitment, such as greed, grievance, community

¹ Recent studies of rebel recruitment using survey data include Humphreys and Weinstein (2006b) and Guichaoua (2007). The former focuses on several armed groups operating under conditions of state collapse so that none qualifies as “counterinsurgent.”

² Precisely because the absence of systematic data has been such an important feature in this literature, the standard practice in the field has been to assess general theories with systematic data from specific countries (Blattman and Annan 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006a; Viterna 2006; Verwimp 2003).

structure, and state capacity. In fact, we find that insurgents and counterinsurgents recruit from a common pool of individuals who differ chiefly (though not only) in terms of who rules over their communities. Insofar as such rule is a dynamic outcome of the war itself, our contribution underlines the significance of “endogenous” dynamics of civil wars.

We proceed as follows. In the following section we discuss the phenomenon of counterinsurgent mobilization and note its undertheorization. In the third section, we specify our hypotheses about insurgent and counterinsurgent recruitment. In the fourth section, we embed this phenomenon in a discussion of the Colombian case. In the fifth section we present the survey we conducted in Colombia from where we derive our data. Finally, we present our findings and conclude.

2. Counterinsurgent Mobilization

The various irregular and semi-regular groups known as paramilitaries or militias, emerge specifically as a response to the rebels (Zahar 2001). They range from small professional death squads to local (usually village-based) militias composed of local individuals whose activities are closely tied to their locality but which can be aggregated into vast formations. It is estimated, for example, that by 1985 one million rural Guatemalans were involved in patrolling their communities and participating in actions against the rebels (Warren 1998:89). Militias are also prevalent in ethnic conflicts, as in the case of the notorious Janjaweed in Darfur, but also in places like Chechnya or Turkey, where their appearance is associated with phenomena linked to processes of ethnic defection toward the incumbent armies. For example, the Indian security services in Kashmir have been quite successful in turning Muslim militants into “countermilitants,” members of counterinsurgent squads also known as “renegades” by their former comrades and “friendlies” by the government (Gossman 2000:275). Because militias threaten insurgents, they quickly become the insurgents’ primary targets. Indeed, many massacres committed by insurgents take place in villages whose denizens defected by joining newly formed militias (Kalyvas 1999).

Most counterinsurgent groups emerge and operate outside the formal structure of the state, including its police and military. This is not to say that, despite varying degrees of autonomy, they do not cooperate with the state; a more precise formulation is that they substitute the state. Nevertheless, their

emergence is a sign of state weakness, which is to say of the state's incapacity to monopolize violence effectively.

Our systematic knowledge of why people join counterinsurgent groups is close to nil. There is extensive anecdotal evidence, however, which points to a multiplicity of pathways. A key factor is reaction to the rebels and protection from their activities and demands (Hedman 2000; Sluka 1999; Manitzas 1991). Several studies suggest that members of these groups often direct their violence against local enemies, which implies that they join at least partly to settle private and local disputes (e.g. Stubbs 1989; Paul and Demarest 1988). Switching sides from rebel to counterinsurgent groups and vice-versa also result from coercion as well as pecuniary and other non-ideological inducements, all connected to a fluid and evolving civil war context. Indeed, the possibility of switching sides introduces a dynamic element into the logic of recruitment that is typically missing from most existing work.

3. Theories and Hypotheses

Starting from existing theories of civil war onset, agrarian rebellion, and rebel recruitment, it is possible to formulate two general categories of theoretical conjectures for why people join armed organizations, insurgent and counterinsurgent alike: *individual-level* and *group-level* conjectures. In turn, these two categories can be disaggregated down to six more specific arguments.

The first type focuses on individual motivations for joining. Three arguments dominate: (i) individuals join armed groups to help bring about a political and social change that will rectify existing grievances (*Grievance*); (ii) individuals join armed groups primarily attracted by the promise of specific monetary or material rewards to be delivered either during the war or at the end of it (Collier 2001; Tullock 1971) (*Greed*); and (iii) individuals join armed groups primarily attracted by the promise of non-material rewards, delivered exclusively to combatants at the time of enlistment, during the war, or at the end of it, such as security (Lichbach 1998) (*Non-material selective incentives*).

Based on existing research and common sense, we would generally expect grievance to characterize individuals joining insurgent rather than counterinsurgent groups, since the former fight against the status quo while the latter defend it. Alternatively, if greed theories are right, material

incentives ought to potentially motivate individuals joining both insurgent and counterinsurgent organizations. Likewise, non-material selective incentives ought to characterize both types of joiners, since we would expect both types of organizations to offer such incentives.

Group-level conjectures point to structural conditions that make individual enlistment more likely. Two leading arguments can be identified: (i) low state capacity encourages the emergence and development of rebellion (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Skocpol 1979) (*State capacity*); (ii) cohesive communities made of networks of interacting individuals solve the collective action problems and produce mobilization (Petersen 2001; Gould 1995) (*Community structure*). If low state capacity favors insurgency, we would expect rebel groups to attract individuals in areas of low state capacity, unlike counterinsurgent ones. In contrast, we have no reason to expect community structure to *a priori* differentiate the two types of joiners since they solve collective action problems in general.

Finally, we introduce a variable that captures the dynamic dimension of civil wars but has been absent in existing theories. We build on Kalyvas' (2006) observation that when armed organizations control a locality the costs for individuals who collaborate with them go down while the costs for individuals who collaborate with rival organizations go up, and on Arjona's (2007) analysis of the effect of armed actor rule on endogenous preferences and beliefs shifts. Specifically, we hypothesize that the ability of armed groups to rule certain areas shapes the patterns of recruitment in those areas in ways that favor these groups (*Sovereignty*).

In the following section we turn to each of these six theoretical conjectures and translate them into testable hypotheses. We use two types of proxies. Direct proxies capture responses to questions we asked the participants in our survey about their own motivations, perceptions, behaviors, and living conditions. Indirect proxies, captures responses to questions that serve as indirect measures of that status.

2.1 Grievance

Several accounts of why people join existing armed groups can be grouped under the umbrella of "grievance." The underlying idea is that people join armed groups motivated by a set of factors that create grievance or discontent and with the explicit goal of bringing about political and social change that will

rectify these grievances. Grievances can include all types of concerns, including economic, ethnic, or religious ones; they can also be activated through the individual internalization of ideological appeals. Cross-national studies have attempted to get at individual motivations through aggregate indicators. This is an enterprise fraught with problems because grievance is consistent with multiple pathways, some consequentialist and others expressive, which are consistent with competing theories. Irrespective of the specific mechanism at work, we should expect grievances to motivate primarily individuals who join organizations dedicated to revolutionary change; in contrast, we should not expect individuals joining organizations dedicated to the preservation of the status-quo and the fight against revolutionary action to be motivated by such grievances.³ We identify three types of grievance: economic, political, and ideological and we proxy them with different variables.

We capture economic grievance directly through an individual's self-assessment of their own household's social class prior to joining (*POOR*, which measures whether the respondent described his/her family as poor) and indirectly through their employment situation prior of joining (*PRECARIOUS*—which measures whether the respondent was unemployed or temporary employed in the year before enlisting), their household income level (*RADIO*, measuring whether the respondent reports having a radio at home prior to joining), and their community wealth (proxied by whether there was a phone service facility nearby the locality, *TELECOM*). We capture political grievance directly through a respondent's feelings of having being alienated from the political process prior of joining (measured by whether the respondent reports supporting a party or leader, *PARTY*) and indirectly through their voting turnout prior of joining (*TURNOUT*, which measures whether the respondent never voted before enlisting, was under 18 and hence could not vote, or voted at least once). Last, we capture ideological grievance directly through a respondent's self-assessment of their ideological motivation in joining (*IDEOLOGY*) and indirectly through the organization of meetings to talk about ideology in the locality

³ Note that in the context of ethnic conflicts, members of the ethnic majority may have grievances against a rebellious minority *once* this minority engages in a rebellion. This mechanism points to endogenous grievances which, however, are not part of the general theories of grievance.

where the person lived prior to joining by the group the person eventually joined (*MEETINGS*). Note that ideology also serves as a test of an observable implication of theories about the “fit” between the type of group and the type of individuals who join it (Weinstein 2007; Gates 2002). For example, armed groups with access to considerable financial resources would be more likely to attract opportunistic or greedy individuals compared to poorer armed groups that must develop strong ideological appeals as a way to attract committed individuals.

2.2 Greed

The so-called “greed theory of civil war” contends that individuals join rebel groups motivated primarily by the expectation of material rewards; it states that people choose to become combatants only if there are direct, individual (or selective) material benefits that exceed the expected costs of fighting. Different versions of this approach have been proposed by students of agrarian revolutions and authors researching civil wars more generally. The former include Popkin (1979) and Lichbach (1994), who stress not only the importance of materialist selective incentives but also emphasize the relevance of political entrepreneurs who trigger and sustain collective action. Within the broader literature on civil wars Collier and Hoeffler (2004) are the quintessential exponents of the greed theory: according to them, rebels can be seen as greedy individuals (“criminal rebels”) who engage in civil war because they expect individual economic rewards that exceed expected costs. Note, however, that the greed and grievance conjectures are largely observationally equivalent insofar as a poor person may join an insurgent group either to receive material rewards or to rectify a social injustice (note as well, that these theories refer explicitly to rebel groups). However, the underlying logic of the theory implies that any armed organization that is able to attract recruits offers some form of material rewards, and those joining do so with the expectation of receiving such rewards—a logic that applies particularly to armed groups operating in countries with natural resources. Also, this conjecture implies that individuals who join armed groups should not feel that they sacrificed substantial material goods to do so. We capture greed directly through the *POOR* proxy mentioned above (the expectation here being that there should be no difference between the joiners of the two groups), our respondents’ self-assessment of whether they joined motivated by the expectation

of material rewards (*MATERIAL MOTIVATION*), and their answer to a question about having sacrificed (or not) material goods to join (*MATERIAL SACRIFICE*); we capture greed indirectly by recording their expectation when they joined that they would receive a salary (*SALARY*)—which is an indirect measure of their materialist motivation—and their employment status prior of joining (*EMPLOYED*)—which provides an indirect measure of the material sacrifice they made when joining.

Based on the greed conjecture, we expect no differences between individuals joining insurgent and counterinsurgent groups in terms of their expectation of material rewards, perception of receiving a salary, class, material sacrifices, and employment. Note that these expectations are based on an assessment of these groups based on the simple fact that they rely on natural resources to finance their operations—as stated by the greed conjecture. Since our goal here is to test if rebels and counterinsurgents differ as existing theories of recruitment would predict, we do not take into account any other characteristics of these groups that would lead to different empirical expectations.

2.3 Non-material Selective Incentives

Among the several non-material selective incentives that have been flagged in the literature, several moral ones (Wood 2003; Scott 1976) cannot be tested with our data because of the difficulty of specifying the relevant proxies. There is one incentive, however, that we can test with our data: security—which Lichbach (1995) argues is precisely such an incentive. If violence is mostly used against civilians, non-combatants may choose to become full time members of one of the warring sides to find protection (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Arjona 2005; Gutierrez 2004a). We expect no difference across the two types of groups as both can provide security to their combatants *compared* to non-armed non-combatants. We capture this proxy both directly via the self-stated motivation of joining to secure protection (*SECURITY*, which measures whether the respondent explicitly says he/she enlisted after running away from a threat) and indirectly through the extent of insecurity that an individual faced when leaving his/her home one year prior of joining (*INSECURITY*). Because both insurgent and counterinsurgent groups can potentially provide security to their members, we expect to see no differences between the joiners of both groups.

2.4 State Capacity

State capacity arguments imply that individuals are likely to join insurgent groups under conditions that favor insurgency (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Low state capacity and “rough terrain” are flagged as such conditions. We capture state capacity directly through responses that refer to state actors in a question about “who ruled” the respondent’s community a year prior of joining (*STATE RULE*),⁴ and indirectly, through a question that measures whether there was at least one paved road connecting the locality with other localities (*PAVED*). Our expectation is that state capacity should differentiate between the two types of joiners: individuals who lived in areas of low state capacity should be more likely to join the rebels compared to the paramilitaries.

2.5 Community Structure

Some authors point to the role of community structure in spurring participation in civil war (Petersen 2001; Gould 1995). The central idea comes from the literature on collective action according to which strong, cohesive communities are more able to overcome the collective action problem than dispersed, weak communities (Ostrom 1990). We capture this dimension directly through the respondents’ perception of trust in their community prior of joining (*TRUST*) and the self-stated motivation of having joined because friends and family already had (*FRIENDS & FAMILY*). We also proceed indirectly, by asking our respondents whether people in their community used to discuss the problems of the community with their neighbors (*INTERACTION*) and whether they knew of individuals who had joined the group they did prior to them joining (*OTHERS*). Because community structure is supposed to solve collective action problems, we expect to find no difference between joiners of insurgent and counterinsurgent groups along this dimension: simply put, counterinsurgent groups must also overcome collective action problems; they would, therefore, benefit from the “right” community context.

2.6 Sovereignty

The last theoretical conjecture we test is sovereignty. Because, unlike the other conjectures, it has not been theorized within the recruitment literature, we provide a more detailed discussion starting with

⁴ The proxy measures whether the respondent said that the police, the army, the mayor, or any other state agency or public servant ruled the community at that time.

Kalyvas (2006) who identifies seven mechanisms whereby territorial control generates collaboration and, by implication, recruitment. First, the imposition of control allows the use of selective violence, thus deterring defection to the rival side. Opponents are identified: some flee, others are neutralized, and still others switch sides. Observing this, the population complies, while some people may shift their preferences to side with the new “sovereign.” Second, control lowers the cost of collaboration with the “sovereign” by shielding the population from competing sovereignty claims. Third, over time control potentially produces “mechanical ascription” (Zulaika 1988:32) or “legitimacy.” Long-lasting control spawns robust informational monopolies that socialize populations accordingly. In theory, people have a choice between two parties, but in practice such choice does not even enter the decision yet. Joining an army (even a rebel one) appears as a natural course of action for many. Fourth, control signals credibility—both the short-term credibility of immediate sanctions, as well as the long-term credibility of benefits and sanctions based on expectations about the outcome of the war. Fifth, control makes possible the provision, when available, of benefits intended to generate loyalty—“hearts and minds.” Sixth, control facilitates direct monitoring and population control. Such monitoring requires better and more extensive administration which is impossible in the absence of control; in turn, improved monitoring reinforces control. Once an area is placed under control, processes such as the registration of inhabitants and the compilation of detailed lists of the population of every locality become possible. Effective control facilitates recruitment in many ways, as discussed above. Finally, long-term control may spawn a perverse self-reinforcing dynamic, as some areas develop a reputation of being loyal to a group and are subsequently targeted indiscriminately by its rivals, thus turning potentially accidental strongholds into real ones.

The process whereby sovereignty produces recruitment is further elaborated by Arjona (2005) who emphasizes the role of endogenous preferences and beliefs. A country in the midst of a civil war is best conceptualized as a fragmented territory; the ensuing “micro-orders” are characterized by varying standards of governance established by the ruling armed groups. There are several types of “micro-orders” depending on the type of standards imposed by the group, and the civilians’ reaction to them. By

investigating the roles that armed groups play in these different local orders, it becomes evident that choosing to enlist can be the means through which civilians may seek very different ends. A person is most likely to make the decision to join an armed group if she lives in a micro-order where that group has consolidated its power and the majority of the community has embraced its rule. This is most likely to occur in localities where the group has engaged in a comprehensive type of rule—i.e. if combatants are able to establish a monopoly of the use of violence *and* rule over other aspects of human interaction such as economic activities, sexual conducts, or religious practices. There are several mechanisms through which a group's behavior and the local dynamics it unleashes leads to recruitment. First, violence affects the payoffs that civilians associate with different behaviors through survival maximization, as discussed above; or via the shift of individuals' beliefs about the group (for example by engaging in the elimination of thieves); or by triggering emotions that motivate civilians to enlist: fear leads to search for protection, while revenge (both against a rival armed group and personal enemies) may blur rational calculations and push victims to the group's ranks. Second, sovereignty allows indoctrination which affects recruitment in several ways. Third, by assuming the role usually ascribed to the state, armed groups become recognized as the authority, which ultimately leads, among others, to recruitment.

We capture sovereignty directly by asking our informants who ruled their community one year before they joined (*PARAS RULE* or *FARC RULE*), and indirectly by asking them whether one or more guerrilla or paramilitary members were very important in their community (*PARAS IMPORTANT* or *GUERRILLA IMPORTANT*). We expect that individuals living in areas ruled by the rebels would be much more likely to join them and vice-versa for the paramilitaries.

In addition to these proxies, we use three controls: first, the respondent's age at the time of joining (*AGE*); second, the respondent's level of education at the time of enlisting (*EDUCATION*); third, whether the respondent lived in a village as opposed to in a city or a town prior to enlisting (*RURAL*); and fourth, whether the respondent is a paramilitary deserter (*DESERTERS*) in order to control for the process of desertion among paramilitaries (see below). The wording of the survey questions can be found in the

Appendix. In the following section, we briefly discuss the Colombian conflict and our survey, after which we proceed with the data analysis.

4. Data

Providing an accurate empirical test for these hypotheses requires micro-level evidence about the characteristics of individuals who join insurgent and counterinsurgent groups. The absence of such data is evident in the literature, which usually relies on country-level proxies or anecdotal evidence. We rely on survey data from 732 ex-combatants of a leftist guerrilla group and a right-wing paramilitary confederation of groups, both participants in the Colombian civil war. Not only do these data offer a unique opportunity to test theories of recruitment in insurgent and counterinsurgent groups at the micro level, but they also allow us to test each hypothesis with several proxies for variables that are usually very hard to measure.

4.1 The Colombian Conflict

The ongoing Colombian conflict can be traced back to a civil war called *La Violencia* ('Violence') which took place between 1949 and the early 1960s. During that period, fighting between members of the two main Colombian political parties (Liberals and Conservatives) caused the death of around 200,000 people. Even though violence decreased following an agreement between the two parties, several leftist guerrilla groups emerged in the following decade including the FARC, the ELN, and the EPL (respectively: *Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia*, *National Liberation Army*, and *Popular Liberation Army*). Even though most scholars link the origins of these groups with the violence of the 1950s, the ongoing war is usually addressed as a separate conflict that started in the late 1960s with the emergence of these groups.

For several decades the guerrilla groups were barely active in peripheral areas of the country and their military capacity was low. As a result, Colombian governments treated them as if they were small local bandit groups. In the mid-seventies, however, these groups began to expand into new areas of the country partly due to revenues from the trafficking of illicit drugs, kidnapping, and extortion. In turn, these methods affected directly the everyday life of the country's regional elites, consisting mainly of

landowning, cattle farming, emerald-trading, and political elites. In reaction, these elites began to form paramilitary groups. While a few of these groups were genuine self-defense groups formed by peasants who resented the rebels, most were set-up by these powerful local and regional traditional elites, along with emerging drug traffickers. The paramilitary groups were funded through voluntary and forced contributions of landlords and firms as well as income derived from drug trafficking. Though not widely believed to be directly involved in the emergence of these groups, the national army has been repeatedly accused of tolerating and abetting them. Recent evidence also points to a rather extensive supporting role by local and regional politicians.⁵

In the late 1980s, the armed conflict escalated to an unprecedented level, with clashes between guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the army growing more frequent and more deadly. The total number of attacks by armed groups (including homicides, massacres, kidnappings, and attacks) increased steadily. The FARC emerged as the most powerful guerrilla group, followed by the ELN, while several other guerrilla groups made agreements with the state and demobilized their troops. Paramilitary groups also underwent a tremendous expansion during the same period. After a pick in the mid-1990s, however, various indicators of the intensity of the conflict appeared to indicate a decrease in violence against civilians and clashes between groups since 2002 (Security and Democracy Foundation 2006).

In this paper we will focus on two of the warring sides. The leading guerrilla group, the FARC, and the paramilitaries united under an umbrella called the AUC (*United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia*). In the remaining of this section we refer only to these two groups, even though other actors have played an important role in the conflict.

The origins of the FARC are subject to debate. Most authors connect it to the violence between liberals and conservatives during the so-called *La Violencia* which, as mentioned before, took place between the late 1940s and the early-1960s. The FARC was officially founded in 1966 by guerrilla groups that fought during *La Violencia*. It was closely linked to the Colombian Communist Party through

⁵ Evidence linking senators, regional governors, and majors with the paramilitaries led to the scandal known as “parapolitics” in 2006.

which channeled organizational and financial support from the Soviet Union. Most of the early members of the FARC were peasants and the stated goal of the group was to seize power in order to establish a new system based on the principle of equality in the income distribution (Ferro and Uribe 2002). The total number of FARC combatants is presently estimated to be between 17,000 and 22,000 (Gutierrez 2006).

The paramilitary groups emerged in different areas of the country in the 1980s. While the causes of their formation are still open to debate, most authors converge in assigning an important explanatory role to the impact of guerrilla action on the interests of local and regional elites (Romero 2003). In addition to the support given by traditional elites, these groups seem to have been backed up (and in occasions created) by narco-traffickers who were gradually displacing the traditional landowning elites (Cubides 1997). Some authors have also argued that the peace process initiated by President Betancourt (1982-1986) was a catalyst for the formation of several paramilitary groups due to its anticipated positive effects for the guerrillas (Romero 2003; Cubides 1997). These peace processes implied a potential redefinition of the political order that would have favored the guerrillas and their allies and sympathizers which, in turn, undermined the regional balance of power (Romero 2003:18). As mentioned before, although these groups were not directly formed by the Colombian state, the army tolerated their activity and refrained from confronting them for a long time. The stated goal of these groups was basically to do what the state was incapable of, namely defend their properties and lives. In other words, these organizations claimed to be self-defense groups that also defended the state and its institutions. They saw themselves as protectors of the establishment, the right of private property and parliamentary democracy. Some authors argue, however, that their central goal was to defend local power and privileges rather than their property alone (Romero 2003). Others argue that through time their *raison d'être* changed from mere defense to expansion (Reyes 1988). Estimates of the total number of paramilitary combatants vary. While some authors mention 10,000 combatants (Sánchez et al. 2003) and others 15,000 (Gutierrez 2006), the total number of officially admitted fighters into the governmental demobilization program is above 30,000.

The FARC is structured as an insurgent guerrilla army. It boasts a well defined hierarchy along with iron discipline. It is organized in blocs and fronts active in different areas of the country. The commander of each front has some autonomy but has to follow guidelines put forth by the national leaders (Gutiérrez 2006). The FARC operates mostly in rural areas but has also formed urban militias which undertake political and military operations in towns and cities. The paramilitaries are also structured in an army-like fashion but their internal structure is not as formal and centralized throughout the country as that of the FARC. Initially the different paramilitary groups were not formally connected and operated autonomously. In 1997 Carlos Castaño, the leader of one of the most powerful among these groups, the United Self-Defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU), united several paramilitary factions into a national structure, the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC). The AUC resembles more a confederation than a cohesive, unified organization. It lacks a set of central, well-defined rules. Generally, however, these groups replicated some of the strategies of the rebels (González et al. 2001): they sought to establish local control by expelling the guerrillas and by targeting their civilian supporters in notorious massacres. Several authors argue that, although the paramilitaries were initially extremely violent and prone to indiscriminate targeting, they eventually cultivated civilian support and turned to much more selective violence (Romero 2003). In fact, they succeeded in establishing themselves in several areas of the country that used to be guerrilla strongholds. Presently, most of the AUC-affiliated groups have demobilized, although the depth and duration of this demobilization remain to be seen.

Even though insurgents and paramilitaries have some common features in terms of their internal organization and their modus operandi, they differ in several dimensions that directly affect what recruits may expect by joining each group. First, their stated goals differ. While the rebels claim to be defending the poor and oppressed and seek to seize power in order to change the status quo, the latter describe their fight as necessary to preserve the Colombian state and rescue it from the dangerous consequences of the communist insurgency. Hence, if motivated by ideology, guerrilla and paramilitary recruits would differ greatly from each other in terms of their beliefs and expectations.

A second crucial dimension in which the guerrillas and the paramilitaries differ is their treatment of combatants. The guerrillas appear to be far more demanding and require greater sacrifices from their fighters compared to the paramilitaries (Ferro and Uribe 2002, Gutierrez 2004a). For example, the FARC does not pay salaries or provide any material reward to their combatants; it requires a life-time commitment and only in rare occasions allow combatants to leave the group, while usually imposing severe sanctions on deserters, including the death penalty; it keeps contacts with friends and family to a minimum by screening mail and allowing combatants to make only a few visits to their hometowns; also, guerrilla fighters are highly mobile which makes it difficult for individual combatants to establish long-term personal ties with civilians. In contrast, the paramilitaries usually offer monthly payments to their recruits (estimated at around 200 dollars per month) (Gutierrez 2006); they allow combatants to take vacations as well as time off occasionally; they also let them serve in their hometowns, which allows the preservation of family and local networks; usually they can also resign and leave. In short, becoming a paramilitary fighter does not require the life-long commitment that guerrillas demand.

Finally, although both paramilitaries and guerrillas seem to care about the combatants' behavior towards civilians, the rebels seem to be much more strict in their enforcement of their rules regarding interactions with local populations. This is especially the case when it comes to financial issues. While all three groups derive income from the illegal drug market and extortion, several authors have found that opportunities for individual enrichment are much more pronounced for the paramilitaries than they are for the rebels, since the latter is much more effective in controlling the internal management of these resources (Romero 2003; Gutierrez 2006). In short, the differences between insurgents and counterinsurgents are significant enough to generate implications about the process of recruitment.

4.2 The Data

Research on civil war phenomena often faces important limitations. Due to obvious difficulties—including, but not limited to, security issues and complicated fieldwork conditions—systematic data are usually lacking. Data gathering in times of war is usually restricted to specific areas and is anecdotal. At the same time, existing studies of ex-combatant populations are usually conducted several years after the

war is over, which leads to possible biases due to memory, the emergence of an ‘official’ account of the war, and the difficulties of generating a representative sample of the population. By conducting a survey with demobilized combatants in Colombia while the conflict was ongoing, we sought to gather systematic data on a conflict that entails several phenomena that are poorly understood and measured. Colombia, where illicit resources play a key role and counterinsurgent organizations have evolved into veritable armies, is an ideal laboratory for theoretical study and empirical analysis.

We interviewed ex-combatants who joined the Demobilization and Reintegration Program launched by President Alvaro Uribe in 2002. This program has so far attracted around 11,200 ex-combatants who voluntarily deserted either guerrilla or paramilitary groups, and 31,687 AUC fighters who were collectively demobilized within peace negotiations between the government and paramilitary leaders.⁶ Unlike the program of voluntary *individual* demobilizations, this demobilization process resulted from decisions taken at the leadership level of the paramilitary organizations.

We conducted a survey with both voluntarily and collectively demobilized combatants between June and October 2005. We completed 829 interviews of which 439 were conducted in Bogotá with voluntarily demobilized ex-combatants of the FARC, ELN and paramilitary groups, and 390 were conducted in Cúcuta and Montería, two medium-size cities in the north-west and the north-east of the country, with paramilitaries who participated in the collective demobilization process. The survey instrument was designed to gather evidence on three main areas of inquiry: joining; group organization and practices; and demobilization. The instrument includes 255 questions most of which were “closed,” while a few were open-ended, which allowed us to collect qualitative evidence as well. Interviews lasted on average 1.5 hours.

Due to constraints, it was not possible to produce a truly random sample of the individually demobilized ex-combatant (IDE) and collectively demobilized ex-combatant (CDE) populations. In the case of the IDEs, at the time we conducted the survey there were 4,032 demobilized FARC members

⁶ The data are from the Colombian Ministry of Defense and the office of the Peace Commissioner: <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/libro/librofinal.pdf>

(presently the total number is 5,800) and 2,810 ex-paramilitaries (the total number at present is 3,526). These ex-combatants were living in “safe houses” (*albergues*) located in several cities. However, given that the great majority of these ex-combatants were living in Bogotá (where most of the Program’s resources were located), we decided to conduct all our interviews in this city. Since many ex-combatants who demobilized across the country lived in Bogotá, the population of ex-combatants living in this city was highly varied in terms of place of origin and demobilization as our survey data show. In fact, the 439 ex-combatants in our sample came from around 140 different municipalities located in 30 of the 33 departments of the country. We completed 315 interviews by visiting a random sample of safe-houses (where ex-combatants had been randomly assigned by the Program); we selected our interviewees using a randomization procedure. Participation consistently exceeded 95%. Due to security issues, we were forced to stop our visits to safe houses and completed 124 additional interviews at a different site where IDEs attend sometime during their participation in the program.⁷ We randomly selected a small number of IDEs during different days of the week for a period of one month. Overall, we completed 438 interviews with IDEs of which 246 belonged to the FARC, 59 to the ELN, 9 to other guerrilla movements, and 108 to the paramilitaries. Figure 1 compares our sample to the population of individually demobilized combatants.

[Figure 1 about here]

The CDE population at the time of the survey consisted of 4,433 individuals (they are presently close to 31,000), distributed in seven towns. We faced, again, constraints for designing a truly representative sample: logistical problems prevented us from distributing our enumerators to all seven towns. We decided, therefore, to conduct surveys in two towns with the highest percentage of ex-combatants and with the highest variation in terms of group membership and place of origin. We selected the cities of Montería and Cúcuta where 32% and 13% of all CDEs lived, respectively. Cities like

⁷ On July 15, 2005, a bomb exploded in front of one of the safe houses. The government then decided to close all the safe houses within a few weeks and relocate all ex-combatants in rural areas.

Medellín and Cali had a higher number of CDEs but the percentage of those who came from urban militias was quite large, which would have undermined the representativeness of our sample given extant knowledge about the origins of those paramilitary organizations.

Given that CDEs did not live in safe houses but among the population and since their contact information was highly protected, we had to use a different strategy to reach our interviewees. With the cooperation of the Ministry of Interior's local offices we asked about 500 ex-combatants to attend a meeting at a secure place in the cities of Montería and Cúcuta. To our surprise around 400 out of the 500 came, and 99% of those who came agreed to participate in the survey. Even though we cannot cross out a possible bias derived from the fact that respondents had to decide to attend, the fact that they were not given any information about the nature of the meeting and that only 20% refused to attend increases our confidence about our sample. We completed 390 interviews with CDEs in these two cities.

Our research faces two additional limitations. First, our sample is not representative of the universe of guerrilla combatants of Colombia since respondents are selected from the population of combatants who voluntarily joined a demobilization program. This fact implies that our generalizations about the FARC have limitations. Obviously, it is impossible to conduct a survey of actual combatants and even if we were able to, it is not clear that the responses would be unbiased. At the same time, some of our findings can be cross-checked with existing aggregate data at the municipality level, as well as qualitative and ethnographic data. So far, our findings regarding motivations for enlistment are consistent with existing anecdotal and ethnographic evidence of Colombia and elsewhere. Most importantly, by comparing collectively and individually demobilized paramilitaries we were able to assess the existing bias in specific responses given by ex-paramilitary fighters and we found the responses of the two groups of paramilitaries not to diverge significantly. An additional way in which the data allows us to assess biases is by comparing interviewees' responses about groups they did not join. We asked many questions about all armed groups the respondents interacted with as civilians, i.e. before they enlisted, and these responses give us a sense of the bias in the responses of those talking about the group to which they belonged. Last, we systematically compare the responses of two types of guerrilla deserters: those who

left soon after joining and those who left many years later. By using the latter as a proxy for combatants who have not deserted—or at least did not do so for a long time and thus most closely match the population of fighters who have not demobilized, we were able to assess the size of bias in our sample, which we found to be limited.

In sum, we are aware of several potential sources of bias. At the same time, we are confident that this bias is not significant. It is important to emphasize here that while far from perfect, our sample is one of very few attempts to survey a population that is notoriously difficult to sample, especially for an ongoing war as is the case of the Colombian conflict.

In order to test our hypotheses, we use different responses to survey questions to create the proxies presented in section 3. Most of them are responses given to close-ended questions where the respondent could choose among a list of possible responses. Others were close-ended but responses were not prompted. We also use data on the respondents' stated motivation to join which comes from answers to the question "What was most important in your decision of joining [the armed group you joined]?" We asked this as an open-ended question and recorded the response. We then asked our enumerators to code this open-ended response in a list of thirteen motivations, following which the respondent was explicitly asked to pick his/her key motivations for joining from a list. In this paper we rely on the motivation as coded by our enumerators, though we also run our models with the respondents' response.⁸ Last, we tried several proxies for some of our variables. We refer to these tests in the results section. Table 1 provides information about the theories, variables and proxies, along with basic descriptive statistics for each proxy.

[Table 1 here]

⁸ It should be noted that the two kinds of responses are highly correlated, but the response coded by the enumerators usually points to more motivations compared to what the respondent mentioned in his/her open-ended response.

All our proxies are dummies, coded as 1 if the person has the characteristic of interest and 0 otherwise, with the exception of *class*, which can take three values: poor, middle class, and rich⁹.

5. Findings

We use a logit model to perform the same exercise while controlling for each variable. The dependent variable is group membership, whose value is 0 if the person belonged to the FARC and 1 if he/she belonged to the paramilitaries. We present three models, all with robust standard errors. The first one uses “direct” proxies, the second one “indirect” proxies, and the third one combines the strongest proxies. Note that we exclude ELN ex-combatants from our analysis.¹⁰ The results are included in Table

2.

[Table 2 here]

The first logit model, which uses direct proxies, suggests that compared to ex-rebel combatants, ex-paramilitary ones are more likely to self-classify as poor, more likely to portray them selves as supporters of a political party or leader before joining an armed group, more likely to say that they were motivated by material incentives, more likely to have lived in an area ruled by the paramilitaries, less

Comment [AMA1]: I think we don't need to give any further explanation. Just that we focus on FARC and PARA combatants because they make up most of our sample. However, we can run the analysis with ELN and FARC merged, and mention the results.

⁹ To avoid problems of bias and sample size reduction caused by listwise deletion, we imputed all missing values following the procedure offered by King et al (2001). We use the software program Amelia II (Honaker et al. 2007).

¹⁰ This is why our data is based on 732 respondents as opposed to the 829 interviews we conducted. We dropped the ELN combatants for two reasons. First, we interviewed only 59 individuals who demobilized from the ELN. Compared to the number of FARC and paramilitary ex-combatants, the ELN sample is small. Furthermore, of these 59 ex-ELN fighters, 12 fought in another group before they joined the ELN, which reduces our sample even more. Second, given that the FARC is the main guerrilla group currently fighting the Colombian conflict, it makes more sense to focus on the comparison between its fighters and those of the paramilitaries. Discussing the results for the ELN makes the analysis unnecessarily complicated without adding much to our central research question since the ELN and the FARC share several characteristics of their internal organization, goals, and modus operandi. To be sure, these are different groups with different trajectories, but they do not differ much in terms of the dimensions that we investigate in this paper. Hence, we believe that excluding it from the analysis improves the clarity and simplicity of the paper without sacrificing substantial theoretical insights or overlooking important empirical evidence. In fact, when we run a multinomial logit model including ELN ex-combatants, the results did not change in any important way: none of the variables have explanatory power of the decision to enlist in the ELN versus the paramilitaries with the exception of salary and presence of guerrilla and paramilitary groups.

likely to have come from a rural area, and more likely to join at a young age. The role of material motivations mostly among ex-paramilitaries is consistent with descriptions of the FARC as not providing material incentives to its combatants *despite* its wealth derived from illicit resources.

The first thing to notice about the second model, which includes indirect proxies, is that it performs much better in terms of overall explanatory capacity. Here we find that compared to our ex-rebel combatants, our ex-guerrilla combatants come from communities where public ideological activities organized by the rebels tended to be common and where the members of those guerrilla organizations were very important. Ex-paramilitaries knew at the time of enlisting that the group they joined paid salaries to their members; they were likely to live in communities where the paramilitary fighters used to be visible and important. Their communities tended to be more urban while these fighters were likely to have joined at an older age. In contrast, the two types of combatants are not differentiated in terms of the overall wealth of their family or community, their alienation from the political process, their feelings of insecurity, their employment status, or their education.

Last, our third model, which combines the strongest direct and indirect proxies, achieves the highest explanatory capacity. We find that counterinsurgents are differentiated from insurgents across the following dimensions: they are less likely to have lived in an area where the paramilitaries organized public political events, more likely to self-classify as poor and to claim material motivations for having joined--and they knew that the paramilitaries would pay them a salary if they joined. Furthermore, they are likely to have lived in a paramilitary-controlled zone and less likely to have come from rural areas. All other variables we tested for do not differentiate between the two groups. In short, the most powerful variables are those related to the rural/urban divide, materialist motivations, and prior rule (including the behavior of the ruler in terms of giving ideology talks). Figures 2 and 3 are simulations of the effect of prior rule on recruitment when fixing all the other variables to their means. Our results are robust to several specifications with different versions of our proxies.¹¹

¹¹ First, we run this model with other proxies of state capacity: whether an unpaved road arrived

[Figures 2-3 here]

The fact that prior rule turns out to be a key factor differentiating the two groups raises the question of the determinants of such rule—one that goes beyond the objectives of this paper but needs to be addressed here. It may be that armed groups “conquer” areas that are already receptive to them for a host of structural reasons. In this interpretation, sovereignty is endogenous to these structural characteristics. Alternatively, control may be caused by a combination of geographic and military factors, but once established and maintained it shapes the behavior of individuals. This interpretation stresses the independent (“endogenous”) effects of civil war. We are inclined to support the latter, as control has varied considerably over time in Colombia, whereas structural characteristics tend to be constant. To probe our intuition, we follow two strategies—one qualitative, the other quantitative.

First, it is easy to see that presence and control are fluid and shift during the course of the war, sometimes even rapidly and abruptly. Several cases in the Colombian armed conflict serve to illustrate this point.¹² The city of Barrancabermeja in the North, has a complex history of presence of different groups, a process partly linked to the extraction of oil in the area and the presence of a very important port in the Magdalena river. In the 1960s the ELN established one of its key centers of operations in the municipality of Vicente de Chucurí, near the city. Barrancabermeja itself had a strong tradition of social and political movements, including trade unions, since the 1920s, which made it a natural stronghold for the guerrilla group by facilitating this initial process of rebel recruitment and collaboration. Between the 1960s and 1980s the ELN consolidated its presence in the area, both in rural and urban centers. Precisely when the ELN was consolidating, however, the FARC arrived in the area. Although the two rebel groups

to locality, an office of the Agrarian Bank was nearby the locality, there was electricity at home, aqueduct connected home, and whether the army was present in the locality. All proxies are not significant. Second, we used a different coding of the variable rural with 1 for a person who lived in a city at the time of enlisting, 2 for the person who lived in a town, and 3 for a person who lived in a city. The results don't change. Third, as we pointed out, we tried motivations as coded by the interviewers and we report that the results don't change—with one slight exception: when ideology is coded by the interviewer it is significant in the first model.

¹² These descriptions are based on short field trips to each site conducted in 2006 by a research team led by the authors, and news reports.

had an initial agreement and each operated in a defined area, by the end of the decade the FARC attempted to expand its domain which led to clashes between the two groups. The paramilitaries entered into the picture in the early 1980s and succeeded in gaining control of several rural and urban centers through the years. The AUC started to directly challenge rebel rule at the end of the 1990s. They managed to push the guerrillas out of the main population centers and to the mountains and gain control of Barrancabermeja. Presently, all three groups operate fronts or battalions in the area, but the paramilitaries control most neighborhoods and economic activities.

The municipality of Apartadó, located in the center of the country (in the Department of Antioquia) saw the arrival of the FARC in the 1970s. The rebel EPL arrived in the 1980s. Both groups controlled the area without facing any important challenge from the state. In 1991 the EPL negotiated its demobilization with the Colombian government. The FARC did not approve this agreement and declared the demobilized combatants military targets, which led to a first wave of intense violence. The paramilitary group ACCU (United Self-defense Movements of Córdoba and Urabá) entered the region in the 1990s and perpetrated numerous killings in the area. Through time they gained control over an important part of the locality and harmed FARC's capacity to keep its stronghold in the area. In 1997 the inhabitants of this locality established a 'Peace Community' in an effort to keep the operations of the different warring sides away from their territory. However, killings and massacres have still taken place, mostly attributed to the paramilitaries. These examples suggest that control is constantly being contested and shifting.

Second, we rely on available aggregate indicators of guerrilla presence at the municipality (*municipio*) level for two periods: 1985-1989 and 1990-2001, and of paramilitary presence in 1997 and 2001.¹³ We coded presence of either side with a dummy variable. We then looked for overlaps between the two periods. Of the 1,001 municipalities from which data were available, 477 municipalities had

¹³ Presence is coded based on data on violence perpetrated by the actors coming from a database of CEDE at Los Andes University, compiled by Fabio Sánchez, and a database compiled by Camilo Echandía, from Externado University. We are grateful to both professors for sharing their data with us.

guerrilla presence between 1985 and 1989, and 495 between 1990 and 2001. However, 156 of the localities where the guerrillas were present in the first period did not have guerrilla presence registered for in the second period. This means that the guerrillas left 156 municipalities and arrived to 174 new local territories. The paramilitaries were present, according to the data, in 323 localities in 1997 or 2001. Of the 477 localities that had presence of the guerrillas between 1985 and 1989, 67 had only presence of the paramilitaries between 1997 and 2001, and 170 had presence of both guerrillas and paramilitaries. Likewise, according to data collected by Echandía (1999), 173 of all 1002 municipalities displayed guerrilla presence in 1985. In 1991, however, the number of municipalities with guerrilla presence increased to 437, and in 1995 to 622. Last, according to the National Census of Local Officials, in 1993 there were 138 localities with paramilitary presence, most of which had guerrilla presence in the past. These data point to considerable levels of fluidity and confirm our intuition about the relative independence of control vis-à-vis structural factors.

Finally, an important point worth noting is the following one: besides the effect of the particular variables highlighted in our quantitative analysis, our qualitative analysis suggests a heterogeneity of motivations influencing individuals into joining the counterinsurgents as opposed to the insurgents. In the open-ended questions, most respondents mentioned several motivations and asserted all of them were important in their choice. For example, a female ELN ex-combatant observed that she “was drawn to it... because of ideology, to change the country, for social change, and to carry arms, for security.” An ex-FARC man who joined when he was eighteen years old told us that he “joined to experiment military life;” and added: “I was drawn to the principles and the ideology of [the FARC], the fight for social rights, and because I was in love with a woman who was a member of the FARC.” A former paramilitary combatant pointed out that he joined “to protect my family. [...] drug traffickers were after me. Plus, I liked weapons a lot. I didn’t have enough money. [I wanted to] get rid of lots of things... that people didn’t look down on me, to be respected. Because of revenge.” An ex-combatant of the ELN stated that he joined because of “the weapons, prestige, and respect. He would have liked to be a military, in the national army”. Likewise, a former FARC combatant simply said that he “liked the ideas. Because of

friends, for fun.” And another is explicit about his indifference to which group he was joining: “I joined because of I was fond of weapons. I would have joined any armed group. I liked to shoot guns.”

5. Conclusions

In this paper we focused on an important dimension of civil wars—and one that is systematically absent from recent theoretical and empirical work: why do people take up arms against the rebels? We tried to answer this question by deriving empirical propositions from existing theoretical conjectures and testing them by comparing the characteristics of individuals who joined both insurgent and counterinsurgent groups.

What we found is that grievance factors, be they economic, political, or ideological do not differentiate between the two groups; if anything, people who think of themselves as poor are more likely to join the counterinsurgents than they are to join the insurgents. Similar accounts of guerrilla and paramilitary ex-combatants illustrate this point. The testimony of a FARC ex-member: “I lived in Tolima with my family which was poor. We worked in farms, I was not paid. I got bored with this and joined the FARC.” At the same, time an ex-paramilitary describes his motivation in similar terms: “I was very poor. I lived in a rural area in Pereira, working in the fields. I also worked selling beverages in the street. I was not paid.”

Greed factors, on the other hand, do differentiate between the two groups, but in a way that diverges from extant theorizing: it is the counterinsurgents that appear to be more motivated by material concerns, whereas those who join the FARC clearly do not see it as an employment agency. In response to the open-ended question “What was most important in your decision to enlist?” about half of all ex-paramilitary fighters mention economic interest as one of their reasons to enlist in an armed organization, while about 25% of FARC ex-combatants state they expected some sort of material reward. However, about 60% also mention other motivations, and more than 50% do not talk about money or material interests at all. Paradoxically, then, at least in the Colombian case, greed theories which were formulated to explain rebel mobilization apply better to the counterinsurgents rather than the insurgents.

Theoretical conjectures stressing non-material selective incentives and community characteristics fail to differentiate between the two groups. In the former case, this result is not due to the fact that joiners of both groups are highly motivated by the search of security: only 4.05% of FARC and 4.12% of paramilitary ex-combatants mention this motivation as key in their decision to enlist—consistent with the relative absence of mass indiscriminate violence from the Colombian conflict. In the case of community characteristics, our descriptive data suggest a more substantial effect.

Besides the importance of greed in differentiating between the two types of individuals, and the non-importance of grievance in doing so, we would like to highlight three important findings.

First, the non-significance of the state capacity variables is theoretically important. For instance, our descriptive statistics show that 64.5% of the ex-paramilitary respondents lived in areas where the state did not rule. So, whereas our theoretical expectation was that low state capacity would favor the insurgency, we found that low state capacity, at least in Colombia, did favor the counterinsurgency as well! The absence of the state left the targets of rebels unprotected—and with a very strong incentive to mobilize, consistent with the results of qualitative research (Romero 2003). Our empirical results, therefore, suggest a substitution effect between the state and counterinsurgent groups: where the former is strong it has little need for them since it can rely on formal institutions such as the police and the military; where it is weak, however, it must rely on counterinsurgent groups. If this turn out to be the case widely, then the state capacity pathway connecting low GDP to insurgency must be rethought to take into account the emergence (or not) of counterinsurgent groups. Overall, our paper suggests that our understanding of counterinsurgent organizations must incorporate processes of state decline, and that our understanding of low state capacity should be decoupled from the idea that it is exclusively associated with rebellion against the state. This last point goes a long way toward explaining the puzzle of civil war “scarcity:” the great majority of low capacity states do not experience civil war most of the time.

Second, the fact that rural contexts favor rebel recruitment, suggests a particular process of counterinsurgent mobilization where the decline of state capacity or its alliance with counterinsurgents is

associated with urban processes. In other words, similar processes of state decline may produce significantly different effects in rural and urban contexts.

Last, we must stress the robust and consistent effect of the sovereignty variables: an individual is just much more likely to join the group that rules its community, even when controlling for all these other factors. The significance of local sovereignty on recruitment (and the multiplicity of pathways activated by sovereignty) can also be found in some of the responses we got. As a former member of the FARC told us, he joined the group because “I saw [FARC combatants] since I was little. I liked what they used to do.” Another FARC ex-combatant stated that “since I was a kid I knew the FARC, and I liked weapons.” In short, recruitment into armed groups is not a phenomenon taking place pretty much equally across the territory of a country as assumed by some leading theories of civil war onset. We believe that this is an important finding, especially since it tends to be overlooked in most theoretical and empirical studies. For one thing, civil war is a deeply “endogenous” process that generates new dynamics once it begins. As a result, attempting to theorize it using categories and data derived exclusively from the period preceding it is bound to miss this fundamental dimension. Additionally, this finding undermines popular conjectures implying that individuals “shop around” for groups to join. In contrast, recruitment does not occur throughout the country but is locally focalized. Our paper, in short, suggests the importance of incorporating a dynamic analysis of civil war—particularly in studies of civil war duration and termination, from where such an analysis has been relatively absent.

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Table 1: Theories, Variables, and Proxies

Theory	Variable	Survey Question	Type of Proxy	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Grievance	Poor	Respondent characterized his/her family one year prior to enlisting	Direct	0	1	0.58	0.49
	Precarious	Respondent was unemployed or temporary employed at time of enlisting	Indirect	0	1	0.41	0.49
	Radio	Respondent said there was a radio in his/her home one year prior to enlisting	Indirect	0	1	0.80	0.40
	Telecom	Respondent said there was a telecommunication service facility at least within 30 minutes from his/her place of residence one year prior to enlisting	Indirect	0	1	0.72	0.44
	Party	Respondent said s/he considered his/her self as a conservative, a liberal, or supported another political party or leader prior to enlisting	Direct	0	1	0.29	0.45
	No turnout	Respondent never voted prior to joining	Indirect	0	1	0.39	0.49
	Ideology	Respondent stated ideology as one of his/her key motivations to join the armed group in which s/he fought	Direct	0	1	0.13	0.34
	Meetings	Respondent said the group s/he eventually joined gave ideology talks to civilians in his/her place of residence prior to joining	Indirect	0	1	0.27	0.44
Greed	Poor	Respondent characterized his/her family one year prior to enlisting	Direct	0	1	0.58	0.49
	Material motivation	Respondent mentioned ideology as one of his/her key motivations to join the armed group in which s/he fought	Direct	0	1	0.41	0.49
	Material sacrifice	Respondent said s/he sacrificed money, property or other resources for joining	Direct	0	1	0.024	0.15
	Salary	Respondent said s/he thought at the time of joining that combatants of the group h/she eventually joined received a fixed income or benefits	Indirect	0	1	0.64	0.47
	Employed	Respondent said s/he was employed at the time of enlisting	Indirect	0	1	0.17	0.37
Non-material	Security	Respondent stated ideology as one of his/her key motivations to join the armed group in which s/he fought	Direct	0	1	0.04	0.19
	Insecurity	Respondent said s/he felt insecure to leave his/her home and go around his/her locality one year prior to joining	Indirect	0	1	0.25	0.43
State capacity	State rule	Respondent said the major, the police, or the army ruled the locality in which s/he lived at the time of enlisting	Direct	0	1	0.30	0.46
	Paved	The respondent said that at least one paved road communicated the locality where s/he lived with others	Indirect	0	1	0.47	0.49
Community	Friends & family	Respondent stated ideology as one of her/his key motivations to join the armed group in which s/he fought	Direct	0	1	0.04	0.19

	Others	Respondent said some of her/his relatives or friends joined an armed group before s/he did	Indirect	0	1	0.59	0.49
	Trust	Respondent said most people of his community could be trusted one year prior to joining	Direct	0	1	0.61	0.48
	Interaction	Respondent said in her/his locality people discussed problems of the community sometimes or often (at least a few times per year)	Indirect	0	1	0.48	0.50
Sovereignty	Farc ruled	Respondent said the Farc ruled the locality in which s/he lived at the time of enlisting	Direct	0	1	0.30	0.45
	Paras ruled	Respondent said the paramilitaries ruled the locality in which s/he lived at the time of enlisting	Direct	0	1	0.22	0.42
	Guerrilla important	Respondent said a guerrilla commander was very important in his/her locality one year prior to enlisting	Indirect	0	1	0.29	0.45
	Paras important	Respondent said a paramilitary commander was very important in his/her locality one year prior to enlisting	Indirect	0	1	0.30	0.46
Controls	Age	Respondent's age at time of enlisting	Direct	7	61	20.7	6.7
	Education	Respondent's level of education (0= none; 1=primary; 2=high school; 3=technical; 4= university)	Direct	0	4	1.40	0.65
	Rural	Respondent lived in a village at time of enlisting	Direct	0	1	0.27	0.44
	Deserters	Respondent was a paramilitary deserter	Direct	0	1	0.15	0.36

Table 2: Logit Regressions

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
		Direct Proxies	Indirect Proxies	Mixed Proxies
Grievance	Poor	0.383 (-0.22)		0.746** (-0.27)
	Precarious		0.516 (-0.27)	
	Radio		-0.369 (-0.31)	-0.282 (-0.36)
	Telecom		-0.178 (-0.3)	
	Party	0.279 (-0.23)		0.660* (-0.29)
	Turnout		0.04 (-0.15)	
	Ideology	-0.066 (-0.28)		
	Meetings		-1.611*** (-0.34)	-1.638*** (-0.36)
Greed	Poor	0.383 (-0.22)		0.746** (-0.27)
	Material motivation	1.087*** (-0.22)		0.815** (-0.27)
	Material sacrifice	0.115 (-0.57)		
	Salary		2.926*** (-0.29)	3.374*** (-0.35)
	Employed		0.622 (-0.38)	
	Security	0.865 (-0.48)		1.015 (-0.73)
Non-material selective incentives	Insecurity		-0.361 (-0.28)	
	State rule			0.131 (-0.32)
State capacity	Paved		-0.19 (-0.25)	
	Friends & family	-0.227 (-0.39)		-0.917 (-0.61)
Community	Others		-0.38 (-0.26)	
	Trust	0.396 (-0.21)		
	Interaction		-0.261 (-0.24)	-0.307 (-0.26)
Sovereignty	Guerrilla ruled	-2.140*** (-0.28)		-2.331*** (-0.36)
	Paras ruled	1.638*** (-0.35)		1.753*** (-0.44)
	Guerrilla important		-2.012*** (-0.25)	
	Paras important		1.549*** (-0.25)	
Controls	Age join	0.053** (-0.02)	0.028 (-0.02)	0.013 (-0.02)
	Ruraldummy	-1.648*** (-0.24)	-1.160*** (-0.27)	-1.124*** (-0.29)
	Deserters	2.137*** (-0.48)	2.038*** (-0.5)	1.902*** (-0.51)
	Education	0.073 (-0.16)	0.223 (-0.19)	0.336 (-0.2)

Logit coefficients given first, standard errors in parenthesis.

Figure 1: Population and Sample of Individually Demobilized Combatants by Group Membership

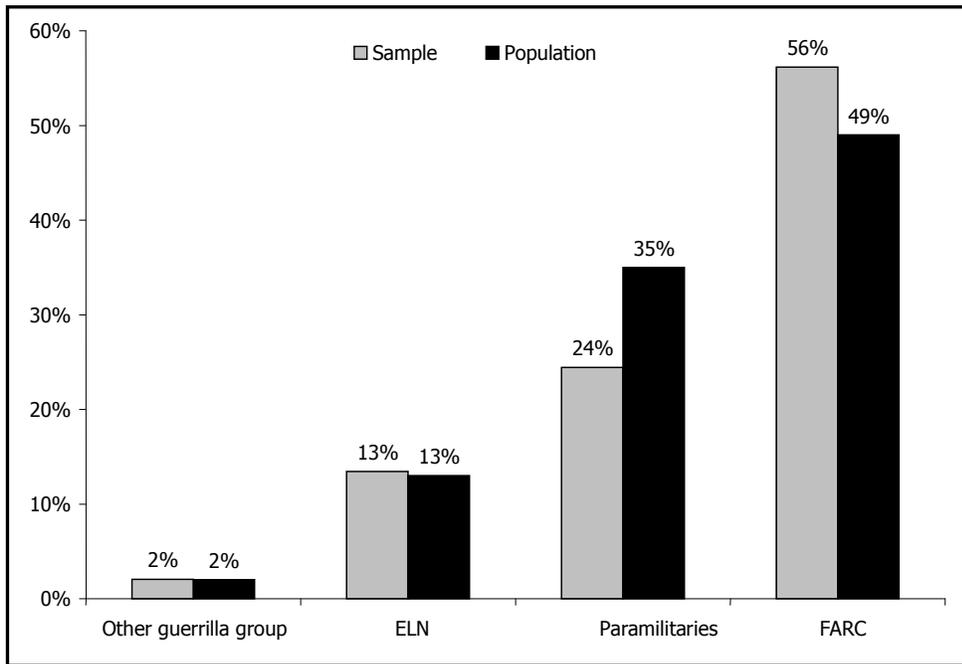
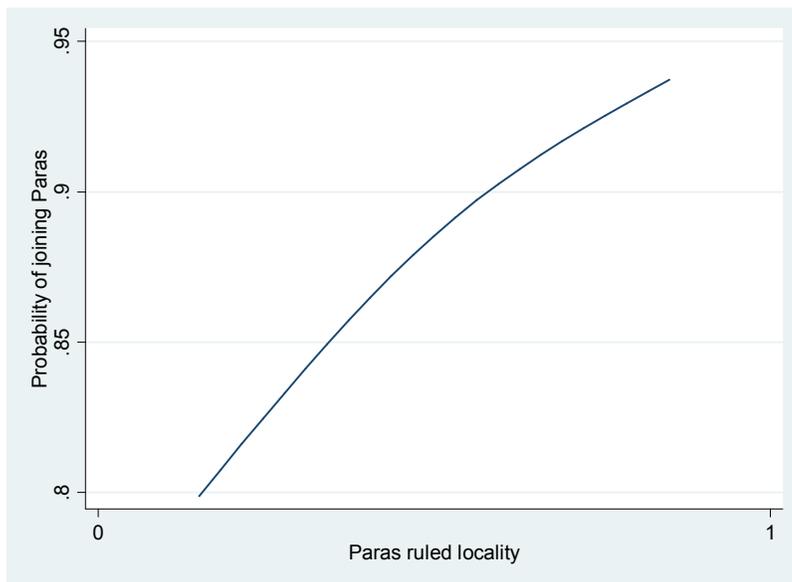


Figure 2: Simulation of the Change in Probability of joining the FARC if the FARC ruled a Respondent's locality, Fixing all Other variables to their Means



Figure 3: Simulation of the Change in Probability of joining the Paramilitaries if the Paramilitaries ruled a Respondent's locality, Fixing all Other variables to their Means



Appendix: Survey Questions

Variable	Survey Question	Coding of Proxy
GRIEVANCE		
Poor	<i>Please think of the locality where you lived most of the time before becoming a combatant. If you were to divide the people of that locality between rich, middle class, or poor, where would you put your family?</i> <input type="radio"/> Poor <input type="radio"/> Middle Class <input type="radio"/> Rich	0 Middle class or rich 1 Poor
Precarious	<i>What was your occupation prior to joining? (Do not prompt)</i> I had a permanent job / I had a temporary job / I owned a business / I worked at the family business or farm / I helped with housekeeping at home / I was a coca gatherer / I was looking for a job, I was unemployed / I was studying / I neither worked nor studied / Delinquency / Another activity	0 Neither working nor looking for a job 1 Temporary job or unemployed
Radio	<i>Was there a working radio in your home in [one year prior to enlisting]?</i> Yes / No	0 No 1 Yes
Telecom	<i>Was there a telecom office within 30 minutes of your locality in [one year prior to enlisting]?</i> Yes / No	0 No 1 Yes
Party	<i>Did you consider your self liberal or conservative? Or neither? Did you like any other party or leader in particular? [Do not prompt]</i> I didn't have sympathies for any political party / I was a liberal / I was a conservative / I liked another party or leader	0 Did not support a party or leader 1 Was a liberal, a conservative, or liked another party or leader
Turnout	<i>Did you use to vote in the presidential or local elections?</i> Never / Once / Sometimes / Always / Couldn't vote, was a minor	1 Never voted 2 Was a minor when joined 3 Voted at least once
Ideology	<i>What was most important in your decision to enlist? (Open-ended question. Response coded by the interviewer)</i>	1 Ideology mentioned as key motivation 0 Not mentioned
Meetings	<i>I will read you a list of things that armed groups often do for civilians living in areas where they are present, please tell me if the groups that were present in your locality [one year prior to joining] did these things for civilians or not.</i> <div style="text-align: right; margin-right: 50px;">GROUP 1 GROUP 2 GROUP 3</div> Gave talks about ideology? Very often/sometimes/almost never or never	1 Ideology talks given by group to civilians 0 No ideology talks given to civilians
GREED		
Poor	<i>Please think of the locality where you lived most of the time before becoming a combatant. If you were to divide the people of that locality between rich, middle class, or poor, where would you put your family?</i> <input type="radio"/> Poor <input type="radio"/> Middle Class <input type="radio"/> Rich	0 Middle class or rich 1 Poor
Material	<i>What was most important in your decision to enlist? (Open-ended</i>	1 Expectation of

motivation	<i>question. Response coded by the interviewer)</i>	material resources mentioned as key motivation 0 Not mentioned
Material sacrifice	<i>What was most important of what you sacrificed for joining the group at the time when you enlisted? (Open-ended question. Response coded by the interviewer).</i>	1 Property or other material resources 0 Other response
Salary	<i>Please try to remember what you thought before joining [the group the person joined] about the payments the different armed groups offered to their combatants. Did you have any idea about whether these armed groups and the army paid something to their combatants so that they had a fixed income, something like a salary or monthly benefits?</i> <i>Farc</i> Yes/No/Didn't know <i>Eln</i> Yes/No/Didn't know <i>Erg</i> Yes/No/Didn't know <i>Paramilitaries</i> Yes/No/Didn't know <i>The army</i> Yes/No/Didn't know	0 The person thought the group s/he eventually joined did not pay a salary 1 Thought group did pay a salary
Employed	<i>What was your occupation prior to joining? (Do not prompt)</i> I had a permanent job / I had a temporary job / I owned a business / I worked at the family business or farm / I helped with housekeeping at home / I was a coca gatherer / I was looking for a job, I was unemployed / I was studying / I neither worked nor studied / Delinquency / Another activity	0 Not employed 1 Employed (had a temporary or permanent job, owned a business, or worked at family business)
NON-MATERIAL SELECTIVE INCENTIVES		
Security	<i>What was most important in your decision to enlist? (Open-ended question. Response coded by the interviewer)</i>	1 Escaping from a threat mentioned as key motivation 0 Not mentioned
Insecurity	<i>In [year prior to joining] did you feel secure to leave your house and go around your locality?</i> Yes/No	0 No 1 Yes
STATE CAPACITY		
State rule	<i>In general, who would you say ruled in your community in [year prior to joining]? (Do not prompt)</i> The army / The police / The major / A wealthy person / Paramilitaries / Farc / Eln / Other	1 The army, police or major ruled 0 Otherwise
Paved	<i>Please tell me if in [locality where you lived] in [year prior to joining] whether the following existed:</i> A paved road connecting the locality with other(s) Yes / No	0 No 1 Yes
COMMUNITY		
Friends & family	<i>What was most important in your decision to enlist? (Open-ended question. Response coded by the interviewer)</i>	1 Because his/her friends or family had joined before 0 Not mentioned
Others	<i>Did any of your relatives or friends, or another member of your community joined an armed group before you did?</i> Yes / No	0 No 1 Yes
Trust	<i>Would you say that one could trust in the majority of the people who lived in your locality?</i> Yes / No	

Interaction	<p><i>Do you remember how common it was that people discussed with their neighbors the problems of the community?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People never talked about the problems of the community. - Seldom (almost never) - Sometimes (a few times per year) - Often (about every month) 	<p>0 Seldom or never 1 Often or sometimes</p>
SOVEREIGNTY		
Farc ruled	<p><i>In general, who would you say ruled in your community in [year prior to joining]? (Do not prompt)</i></p> <p>The army / The police / The major / A wealthy person / Paramilitaries / Farc / Eln / Other</p>	<p>1 The Farc 0 Otherwise</p>
Paras ruled	<p><i>In general, who would you say ruled in your community in [year prior to joining]? (Do not prompt)</i></p> <p>The army / The police / The major / A wealthy person / Paramilitaries / Farc / Eln / Other</p>	<p>1 The paramilitaries 0 Otherwise</p>
Guerrilla important	<p><i>I will read you a list of people who are often important in neighborhoods, villages and towns. Please tell me how important they were in your locality [in the year prior to joining]:</i></p> <p>- A commander of a guerrilla group Not important / Somehow important / Very important</p>	<p>1 Very important 0 Otherwise</p>
Paras important	<p><i>I will read you a list of people who are often important in neighborhoods, villages and towns. Please tell me how important they were in your locality [in the year prior to joining]:</i></p> <p>- A commander of a paramilitary group Not important / Somehow important / Very important</p>	<p>1 Very important 0 Otherwise</p>
CONTROLS		
Rural	<p><i>Were you living in a village, a town or a city when you joined?</i></p> <p>Village / Town / City</p>	<p>1 Village 0 Town or city</p>
Deserters	<p><i>(i) Which armed group did you belong to?</i></p> <p><i>(ii) This variable is also based on whether the person was a beneficiary of the individually demobilized program, or of peace agreements within which paramilitaries were collectively demobilized</i></p>	<p>1 Was a member of the paramilitaries and demobilized individually and voluntarily 0 Otherwise</p>
Education	<p><i>What is your education level? In other words, until what course did you study?</i></p> <p>None / Primary school (complete or incomplete) / High school (complete or incomplete) / Technical school (complete or incomplete) / University (complete or incomplete)</p>	<p>The proxy measures education level from 1 (none) to 5 (university)</p>