

Weinstein, J. M. (2007). *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

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The end of the cold war was accompanied by a spike in civil wars; more of a temporary blip than a secular trend, this spike nevertheless caused an impressive revival in the study of civil wars. Along with some robust findings, this revival generated some questionable theories such as the “greed” thesis and the “new war” conjecture. Informed by a Hobbesian outlook that saw human beings as inherently violent when left uncontrolled, and inspired by recent African civil wars, these theories emphasized opportunistic behavior, gratuitous hyperviolence, and absence of politics.

Jeremy M. Weinstein’s book updates this Hobbesian thesis in a powerful way. Explicitly excluding from his analysis secessionist insurgencies, he specifies an ontology of violence whereby rebel abuses against the civilian population result from lax discipline. In this view, violence is an unintended organizational by-product rather than the outcome of the intentional pursuit of specific goals. Positing a world populated by two types of rebel organizations, “resource-wealthy” and “resource-poor,” Weinstein argues that the former will attract opportunistic individuals (or “consumers”), whereas the latter, forced to rely on “social endowments” such as political ideology or ethnic and religious identities, will attract highly committed individuals (or “investors”). The main empirical prediction is that resource-wealthy organizations will mete out indiscriminate violence against civilians, whereas resource-poor organizations will develop cooperative relations with noncombatants and exhibit restraint. Because resource-wealthy organizations emerge where foreign sponsors are available and natural resources are present, these factors can be linked directly to high rates of rebel indiscriminate violence. The argument is Hobbesian at both the micro- and macrolevels: It locates the origins of violence in the absence of effective organizational control over individuals while implying that the statistical link between natural resources and civil war onset translates into a world of rebellion that is both opportunistic and extremely violent.

No theoretical account before *Inside Rebellion* has specified and explored in such a clear, tight, and comprehensive way the interface of resources, organization, and violence. “The brutal and widespread abuse of noncombatants by insurgent forces,” Weinstein argues, “is often an unintended consequence of an organizational strategy that appeals to the short-term material benefits of potential recruits” (p. 301). This is a startling claim because it goes against the instrumental understanding of violence, that is, its use as a means for implementing various goals, such as compliance, ethnic homogeneity, victory, and so on.

The argument is developed and tested in four case studies: The Ugandan National Resistance Army (NRA); the Resistencia Nacional Moçambicana, or RENAMO, in Mozambique; the Sendero Luminoso in Peru (“Sendero Nacional”); and last, one of

its regional branches, the Comité Regional del Alto Huallaga (“Sendero CRH”). The case evidence includes both quantitative data (which disaggregate types of violence and target identities) and interviews (I would refrain, though, from following Weinstein in calling them an “ethnography,” which requires in-depth participant observation rather than simple interviews involving translators and research assistants). The evidence matches the thesis. On one hand, the NRA and Sendero Nacional were resource poor: They relied on existing networks and ideological messages and refrained from indiscriminate violence against noncombatants. On the other hand, the RENAMO and Sendero CRH relied on either external funding or drug-based resources and were involved in such violence. Three out-of-sample tests serve to raise the external validity of the theory, including a large-*N* analysis. Finally, testable implications are drawn out and tested. The book is an exemplar of the benefits accruing from shifting our attention to the microlevel and using a multimethod approach as the best way to capture the dynamics of violence.

Overall, then, this is an original and provocative argument backed by substantial evidence. However, rebellion and violence are tough problems to crack. Careful reading reveals several unresolved issues—conceptual, theoretical, and empirical. Ultimately, the argument falls short of its stated goals on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

The entire book is based on a single premise: that patterns of rebel violence in civil wars are caused by the initial interaction of leaders and members of rebel organizations. Everything else flows from it and can be explained by it. This is the book’s main strength but also its greatest weakness. Two critical dimensions, in particular, are missing: the interactions between rebels and civilians and between rebels and the state forces. Their absence is consequential.

Bracketing off the interaction between rebels and civilians implies that civilians are completely useless to the rebels and helpless in the face of their abuse. This is not, however, necessarily the case. Civilians can flee, which is bound to have consequences for the rebels—unless the government has no way of harnessing the negative reactions generated by rebel actions (I return to this below). Often, civilians have another choice, as did the Peruvian peasants: They may join state-sponsored local militias to defend themselves and fight back. Such a choice has important implications for rebel strategy: They must shift their strategy and take civilian behavior into account if they want to avoid defeat.

This brings in the role of the state, which is totally excluded from the analysis. It is difficult to think of a theoretically sound reason for this exclusion. At a very basic level, Weinstein’s argument ought to apply to state behavior: If the presence of resources produces violent rebels, shouldn’t it also produce violent soldiers? However, such a prediction would be problematic. On one hand, the anecdotal record is replete with cases of massively violent counterinsurgencies launched by poor states. On the other hand, an implication would be that modern professional militaries that recruit individuals by offering pecuniary benefits rather than appeal to ideological commitments (e.g., the U.S. military) would be highly prone to mass indiscipline and abuse of civilians—an obviously dubious contention to say the least.

Most important, however, incorporating the state in the analysis would have forced Weinstein to acknowledge the strategic dimension of violence in civil war and modify his predictions, most notably by recognizing that typically, organizations must adapt to changing realities if they are to survive. Such recognition, however, is incompatible with the book's unflinching commitment to the most stringent version of path dependency. The entire argument relies on the assumption that only initial endowments matter: Once organizations attract a specific type of individual, they can't change even if their resource endowments change over time. Weinstein devotes an entire (very well-crafted) chapter to defend this assertion. This is no easy task, however. If anything, adaptation is a key concept in the descriptive literature on insurgencies. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine rebel organizations facing effective counterinsurgencies without either changing their ways or disappearing. Put otherwise, Weinstein's argument implies that abusive and undisciplined organizations survive without adapting only when the state is too weak to implement an effective counterinsurgency. This implicit parameter requires the state to be brought back in the analysis and delineates scope conditions for the theory that are much more restrictive than acknowledged.

The cost of excluding the state from the analysis becomes starker in the case studies, where state actions are surreptitiously invoked in support of the argument (pp. 134, 322) along with questionable assertions, for example, that state strength is constant and that states are necessarily strong ("Rebel organizations face a government adversary that is highly resourced, centralized, and coordinated"; p. 134). Note as well that this claim is especially problematic in light of Jim Fearon and David Laitin's (2003) finding about the link between weak state capacity and civil war onset.

An additional theoretical point concerns the exact causal mechanism at work. Weinstein argues that resource-wealthy organizations are forced to recruit by stressing short-term material interests, thus attracting opportunistic materialists. After this point, however, things get more complicated and opaque: Indiscipline emerges, resources are extracted through coercion, and this further reinforces indiscipline. However, the causal chain is far from watertight: It is possible to think of materialist individuals operating in a highly disciplined environment (think of modern corporations); more generally, it is not clear that we can really separate commitment and opportunism in a clear way; it is also unclear why the extraction of resources requires coercion rather than side payments (after all, these are "wealthy" organizations) or why externally funded organizations need to resort to any violence at all given that they can afford to forgo the extraction of resources from the population. Conversely, why must resource-poor insurgencies rely on ideology and networks? Why not forcibly recruit or abduct instead, like the Lord's Resistance Army does in Uganda? How to explain the fact that supposedly "wealthy" insurgencies, such as RENAMO or the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, resort to massive abductions when they supposedly have the material resources to pay their recruits? And why don't they use their resources for the acquisition of sophisticated weaponry that will increase the odds of victory? Indeed, how can we explain the ultimate

effectiveness of RENAMO, who fought the Mozambican government to a standstill, if it was just a ragtag band of inefficient and undisciplined men capable only of abusing the population and of deserting in the first opportunity (p. 158)?

In fact, despite the crucial work they do for the argument, resources remain a black box. It is not clear how the various rebel organizations use them—and if the way in which they do makes a difference. One would imagine, for example, that resources that enrich kleptocratic leaders would produce different organizational effects compared to those used to pay rank-and-file fighters on a regular basis. More generally, it would have been useful to estimate the actual level of available resources and to distinguish between absolute and relative levels of resources (i.e., compared to the state). Without more precise estimates, it is difficult to evaluate competing claims by Africanists who describe, as Stephen Ellis (1999, 2003) does, the conflicts in Mozambique and Sierra Leone as wars fought with limited resources (it is interesting that Ellis [1999, 2003] suggests the exact opposite mechanism: High levels of resources turn civil war into disciplined, conventional warfare; where resources are limited, as per his claim in Mozambique and Sierra Leone, violence easily degenerates into brutalizing terror).

The book would have also greatly benefited from a discussion of alternative theories. Such a discussion could include theories stressing the type of balance of power between the actors, pointing to particular ideological norms (e.g., Maoism or Leninism), or emphasizing the introduction of specific organizational techniques along with external founding (e.g., Cuban advisers). Could this last one be a reason why many cold war, Communist-inspired insurgencies appear to have refrained from the massive indiscriminate abuse of the kind witnessed in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo, or Mozambique? As it is, the book does not really address alternatives.

There are several issues with the empirics as well. First, the theory is said to have no implications on the within-country temporal and regional variation of violence, which appears to be enormous, especially in Peru and Mozambique. Would this variation suggest that resources varied across regions? Second, it is unclear if the use of different types of violence in different parts of the same country flows from independent decisions, as assumed, or is part of a common strategy. Third, at times the qualitative evidence tends to be interpreted in ways that favor the theory. For example, the NRA receives an overly flattering treatment (e.g., pp. 219-220) to the point that verbatim quotations of Chairman Museveni are used as evidence, whereas informing the government about the NRA is deemed a crime (p. 222). Conversely, evidence that does not fit the theory is sometimes overlooked, as in the cases of Mozambique (p. 232) and Lebanon, where the many massacres not attributable to indiscipline are ignored (e.g., Damour, Karantina). Fourth, the Shining Path presents a more general problem for the theory. Its violence was clearly massive and brutal, akin to “collective punishment” (p. 250). Weinstein argues that it was selective (which it often was—though not always, as in the targeting of entire villages) and that it constitutes an example of restraint (p. 258), which it clearly does not. But if rebel selective violence can be as extensive and widespread as in Peru, two serious problems emerge: Conceptually and normatively, the equation of mass violence with indiscriminate

practices is a nonstarter; methodologically, a problem of observational equivalence surfaces—mass violence can be both strategic and organized from the top and the by-product of indiscipline. Separating the two requires extremely fine-grained data, going well beyond what is available in newspapers. Fifth, the large-*N* analysis is fraught with problems: It does not include any control variables beyond duration, and no model includes both the proxies for resources and external intervention; this is a problem insofar as intervention is likely to be correlated with the existence of resources (and resources may be motive for intervention; witness the intervention of Rwanda and Uganda in the Congo). The measurement problem on the dependent variable (coded by the International Peace Research Institute [PRIO]) is enormous, as explicitly acknowledged. The case of Algeria (1962 to 1964) is indicative: The PRIO coders confused the limited civil conflict between the victorious Algerian factions with the unrelated massacres of the Harkis. Simple eyeballing of Figure 8.1 raises several questions. For example, the Greek Civil War seems to be the best case for the theory, as the Greek Communists appear both violent and flush with resources. It turns out, however, that this is an artifact of aggregation: The Communists were much more likely to target civilians in 1943 to 1944, when they lacked external resources, and much less likely to do so in 1946 to 1949, when they were receiving external aid from the Soviet block. In both instances, abuse and lack thereof were completely unrelated to problems of discipline. Given these problems, it is a bit of a stretch to describe the results as “robust and compelling” (p. 308). Finally, the random analysis of 10 cases is at best indeterminate. The high violence in 2 of the 4 resource-rich rebellions (Burundi, 1993 to 1999, and Indonesia, 1997 to 1999) was related to processes of ethnic cleansing rather than indiscipline. Of the 6 resource-poor rebellions, 3 clearly fail the test by displaying high levels of violence (Bosnia, Somalia, Central African Republic), whereas 2 are marginal cases that hardly qualify as civil wars (Russia, 1991, and the Uighur “rebellion” in China, 1991 to 1999). Only the Maoist rebellion in Nepal appears to fit.

My critical discussion of *Inside Rebellion* is fully compatible with its appraisal as an important book. Its clarity of exposition, bold argumentation, microlevel focus, combination of methods, and cross-regional comparisons are commendable. Clearly, this is an important contribution to the study of the dynamics of civil war that advances our theoretical understanding. At the same time, I have also suggested that the puzzle of cross-national variation of these dynamics remains unresolved: It calls for a sophisticated conceptualization of interactions within rebel organizations, between rebel organizations and civilian populations, and between rebels and the state. We have only begun to scratch the surface of this set of related phenomena, and Weinstein should be applauded for his contribution to this important enterprise.

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## References

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