Recruitment and Allegiance: The Microfoundations of Rebellion

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The Microfoundations of Rebellion

- What motivates people to risk their life in armed rebellion?

- Why continue to expose oneself to life in the bush where one may be killed at any minute without home, family, or other comforts?

- Or from another perspective, how does a rebel group maintain organizational cohesion and deter defection?

- How does a rebel group sustain itself?
Supervision, Oversight, and Control in a Rebel Army

Central concepts:

- Geographic Distance
- Ethnicity (ethnic distance)
- Ideology (ideological distance)
Organizational Endowments

Figure 1: Theoretical Possibilities

- Economic Endowments vs. Social Endowments
- Points A, B, C, D
- Arrows indicating possible changes
Rebel Group Endowments

Figure 2: Actual Rebel Organizations

- Materially-based Coercion-based
- Identity-based Beliefs-based

Economic Endowments

Social Endowments
Joining a Rebel Group

**Participation Constraint**
- Recruitment. To join or not to join?
- Forced vs. voluntary participation
  - Child soldiers
- Outside options
  - Unemployment levels, poverty level
  - Security/Insecurity
Compatibility Constraint

- Allegiance. To stay or not to stay with group?
- Cooperate/ Defect -- compliance
- The problem of latent opportunism.
Incentives

Pecuniary Incentives

- Wages
- Loot
  - loot-seeking rebel groups vs. ideological groups
Non-pecuniary Incentives

functional preferences

- value associated with performing an assigned task
- “fighting the good fight” – ideological groups
- Thugs – hooliganism, rape
Non-pecuniary Incentives

- Solidary preferences and norms
  - Attachment to the group
  - Comradery
  - Ethnic identity and group solidarity
Punishment & Defection

- Punishment ranges from a verbal reprimand to death
  - Detection of defection & distance
    - Information regarding defection and distance
  - Costs of punishment & distance
  - Successful punishment & distance
Findings

1. The fundamental character of a group will shape the group’s reward structure.

- Ideological groups will rely on functional preferences as an incentive to motivate.
- Ethnic-identity based groups will tend to rely on functional preferences and solidary norms.
- Loot-seeking groups can recruit from a more diverse base
Findings

2. Distance is related to a group’s reward and punishment structure

- Figure 1
  - Factors that increase or decrease $b_{\text{max}}$
    - Pecuniary & non-pecuniary incentives
    - Ideological & Ethnic-based rebel groups
  - Factors that affect $b_{\text{min}}$
    - forced recruitment
    - Outside options
Figure 1 from Gates (2002)

Distance from leader

benefits to agents

$\text{b}_{\text{max}}$

$\text{b}_{\text{min}}$

derived function of benefits/distance

Distance from leader
Findings: Recruitment & Defection

3. A rebel group will only recruit those agents for which the benefits allocated to agents are high enough to ensure against defection.

- Figure 2

- Factors that affect the probability of success
  - Distance (probability of punishment)
  - Incentives → recruitment & allegiance
Figure 2 (Gates 2002)

Figure 2

Rebel's prob. of success

Govt's prob. of success

\[ \pi_0 \]

\[ 0.5 \]

\[ 1 - \pi_0 \]

\[ 0 \times \]

\[ x_i \times \]

\[ x_g \times \]

\[ 1 \times \]
Competition Between the Rebel Group & the Government

4. There exists a minimum distance between the government and the rebel group under which the rebel group will be unable to ensure compliance.

Figure 3
Figure 3 (Gates 2002)
Findings: Comparing Types of Rebel Groups

5. Rebel groups able to assure that the incentive compatibility constraint is high enough to assure no desertions (by raising $b_{\text{max}}$) can survive in close proximity with the government’s center.

- Ethnic-based & ideological groups can assure this better than pure loot-seeking groups
Findings: Competition Between Rebel Groups

6. There exists a minimum distance between a rebel group and another rebel group under which neither rebel group will be unable to ensure compliance.
Policy Implications

- Democratic political systems that mitigate grievances by certain ethnic & ideological groups will work against a rebel group’s ability to sustain itself.

- Improving the economy (lowering unemployment & poverty rates) will increase the value of outside options, decreasing the incentives to join rebellions.
Policy Implications

- Increasing state authority and legitimacy will increase the government’s probability of success, thereby working against rebel groups ability to sustain themselves.