Rebelocracy

Social Order in the Colombian Civil War

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Abbreviations and Glossary of Terms

NRA  The National Resistance Army (Uganda)
NYT  New York Times
PKP  Communist Party of the Philippines
PLA  The People’s Liberation Army (China)
RCD  Congolese Rally for Democracy
RUF  Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)
SPLA  Sudan’s People Liberation Army
SPLM  Sudan’s People Liberation Movement
TPLF  The Tigray’s People’s Liberation Front (Ethiopia)
UNITA  The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

I

Introduction

The FARC were everything in this village. They had the last word on every single dispute among neighbors. They decided what could be sold at the stores, the time when we should all go home, and who should leave the area never to come back .... They also managed divorces, inheritances, and conflicts over land borders. They were the ones who ruled here, not the state.

Local leader, village of Librea, municipality of Viotá

We did interact with the FARC all those years. A little more than a decade. [At first] they came here, walked by, told us things, asked that we did certain things like not talking to the army .... Then they started to set rules and tell us how things needed to be done. They wanted to take power over these people and this land. But they couldn’t. We had to obey them in certain ways, of course, because they have the weapons. But we [the peasant leaders] are the authority here. People recognize us as such. They could not take that away from us. They didn’t rule us.

Local leader, village of Zama, municipality of Viotá

These are the testimonies of two individuals who lived in neighboring villages, less than 2 km apart, in the Colombian Andes. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), one of the world’s oldest guerrilla groups, controlled the area for about twelve years, but did so in drastically different ways in the two

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2 Personal interview, village of Librea, Viotá, Cundinamarca, Colombia, 2007. Given that the Colombian conflict is ongoing, I do not use the real names of my interviewees or their communities, only their municipalities.

3 Personal interview, village of Zama, Viotá, Cundinamarca, Colombia, 2007.
places. In the village of Librea, the FARC ruled over the political, economic, and social life of the population. Most people cooperated with the rebels and obeyed rules governing everything from mobility, public speech, and domestic violence to economic activities and conflict resolution. Things were quite different in the village of Zama, where civilian leaders remained the ultimate authority. The FARC regulated some aspects of civilian conduct, but locals remained in charge of arbitrating disputes, deciding the rules that guided social interaction, and holding meetings to discuss community problems and decide important issues. Whenever the FARC tried to intervene in their affairs, the community successfully limited their influence.

The situation of these villages illustrates a puzzling aspect of civil war: far from being chaotic and anarchic, war zones are often orderly. Although fear and violence exist, chaos is seldom the norm. In many places there is a sense of normality — even if different from that of peacetime — and people have expectations about what might happen. There is a new order in place, which civilians recognize, that marks many aspects of daily life. Furthermore, different forms of order frequently coexist in areas controlled by the same non-state armed group. Adjacent villages, or even neighborhoods, end up living under very different institutions — understood broadly as the formal and informal rules, norms, and practices that structure human interaction (North 1990) — which give way to different patterns of being and relating. In some cases, rebels establish institutions to regulate a myriad of conducts, while in others their intervention is minimal. What explains the emergence of order in war zones? Why, when order emerges, does it take different forms?

Media coverage of war and commonplace understandings of war zones are far from what these villages experienced. Most of what we hear about war entails destruction, death, and disruption. This is certainly part of the story, and we are prone to focus on it for obvious reasons — war is indeed a deeply devastating event. But much more than violence happens during war. Armed actors do not only kill, but also create institutions, endorse ideologies, form alliances with local actors, provide public goods, recruit, and, in so doing, transform the societies in which they operate. Civilians, on the other hand, do not only suffer from war — they also cope with it, adapt to it, and shape it. They bargain with armed actors, influencing how their communities are governed, and how they live. In sum, life goes on in war zones and we need to understand how.

This book investigates social order in civil war conceptually, theoretically, and empirically. Conceptually, I propose a typology to distinguish, first, between conflict zones in which civilians live with great uncertainty, which I call disorder, and those where a formal or informal social contract between civilians and combatants allows them to form clear expectations, which I call order. Second, the typology distinguishes between situations of order where rebels (or counter-rebels) intervene broadly in civilian affairs, which I call rebelocrac, and those where rebels rule in a minimalist way, leaving most local affairs in the hands of others — be it state officials, traditional leaders or some other local actor — which I call aliocracy. Hence, the book introduces and conceptualizes a novel phenomenon in the study of civil war.

Theoretically, I propose a model to explain variation in wartime social order across time and space by examining the interaction between the warring sides, on the one hand, and between civilians and combatants, on the other. There are two factors that determine what kind of social order will emerge in conflict zones: armed groups’ time horizon — that is, whether or not they care about future outcomes more than they do about present ones — and the quality of preexisting local institutions, particularly those for adjudicating disputes. First, I argue that rebels with short-term goals will produce disorder in the territory. Most groups operate under long-time horizons most of the time, but when they face internal discipline or competition with other warring sides, their preferences shift and they care more about present outcomes than future ones. This may also happen under certain peace negotiations. It is in these situations that disorder emerges, forcing civilians to live under great uncertainty. Second, rebels with long-term horizons will seek a rebelocracy. In areas where local institutions are effective and legitimate, civilians have bargaining power because they can threaten rebels with collective resistance. In such cases, the rebel group has incentives to settle for aliocracy as its form of rule. On the other hand, where preexisting civilian institutions are either ineffective or illegitimate, civilians are unlikely to resist collectively, and therefore lack bargaining power. In these cases, rebels are able to establish rebelocracy.

Empirically, the book undertakes two tasks. First, it describes in great depth how distinct forms of social order function in Colombian conflict.

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3 The neologisms rebelocrac and aliocracy come, respectively, from the Latin words *rebello*, which means “rebel,” and *alio*, which means “other.” The Latin root *cracy* forms nouns meaning “rule by” or “government by.” I provide a formal definition of these terms in Chapter 2. This typology, together with some of the material in Chapters 1 and Chapter 2, was introduced in a journal article in Arjona (2014).
zones. Using surveys, interviews, and memory workshops, I reconstructed the history of interaction between non-state armed groups and seventy-four local populations throughout the country, creating a large dataset as well as local histories that provide a nuanced account of social order in conflict zones. Based on these sources, I present evidence on the institutions that armed actors have established, as well as on the local dynamics that those institutions engender. I also recount how different aspects of daily life change with the new order, and how civilians and combatants perceive those changes.

The second empirical task is to test the theory. I rely on a multi-method approach to test the central hypotheses that emerge from the model, as well as their underlying microfoundations – that is, the assumptions on individual behavior on which the argument is built – and mechanisms. I take advantage of the strengths of various methods to achieve distinct goals, and rely on different kinds of evidence that I collected on civilians, combatants, communities, and armed groups in multiple waves of fieldwork conducted between 2004 and 2012 in Colombia.

**CIVILIAN–COMBATANT INTERACTIONS, WARTIME INSTITUTIONS, AND THE STUDY OF CIVIL WAR**

The existing literature on irregular civil wars – those fought by at least one nonconventional force – has widely recognized that this type of conflict entails a close interaction between civilians and combatants. Moreover, the quality of this interaction is often seen as a key determinant of war outcomes: the idea that popular support is essential for victory has been stressed by rebel theorists, military historians, and scholars alike (Galula 1964; Trinquier 1964; Taber 1965; Mao 1978; Guevara et al. 1997). Debates about counterinsurgency also revolve around the importance of civilian collaboration with the warring sides in conflicts ranging from Vietnam, to El Salvador, to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Civilian–combatant interactions are crucial also because they shape the context in which both civilians and combatants make a wide range of choices. Understanding the terms of those interactions is therefore central when we ask why people join rebels and militias, why families decide to flee, why combatants kill, why locals support or boycott counterinsurgency operations, and why former fighters successfully reintegrate into their communities or fail to do so. Even when we ask questions about macro-level outcomes such as the duration of war, the stability of peace agreements, or the effects of peacekeeping operations, our theories and interpretations of empirical results rely on assumptions about how actors make decisions on the ground – and such decisions are deeply influenced by the nature of civilian-combatant relations.

Despite the centrality of the interaction between civilians and combatants, its variation has seldom been described systematically, let alone theorized. To be sure, there are excellent studies of civilian–combatant relations and of the fate of populations in conflict zones. However, scholars have mostly focused on rebel behavior, or on how civilians experience war and cope with it, instead of theorizing and documenting the interaction between the two.

For a long time, what happens in areas where rebels or paramilitaries are present was essentially a black box that the literature depicted with two contrasting views. The first relies on the “hearts and minds” metaphor, portraying rebels as freedom fighters who try to gain popular support on the basis of good behavior and ideological propaganda. The second view emphasizes the criminal behavior of non-state armed organizations: combatants are assumed to rely only on coercion to induce cooperation from local populations. This dichotomy leads to the simplistic assumption that civilians are either politically supportive of the rebels or cowed and victimized by them. Accounts that explain war dynamics on the basis of rebels’ criminal or idealistic nature have further advanced this view. For example, according to Weinstein (2007), idealistic groups recruit ideologically motivated individuals, limit their use of violence against civilians and provide them public goods, and garner popular support; predatory groups, on the other hand, attract greedy persons to their ranks, exploit local populations, and fail to obtain civilian support.

Evidence of life in war zones, however, confounds this view. A given guerrilla or militia group often opts for different strategies towards neighboring local populations. The Chinese People’s Liberation Army, for example, followed strict rules governing its treatment of some communities, while, in others, combatants showed little restraint (Hinton 1966; Girling 1969; Hartford 1993). What is more, while an armed group may rule in one place as an occupying army that controls only security and taxation, in other communities it can become a proto-state by functioning as the police, court, and public-goods provider.

 Civilians, for their part, exercise agency despite the hardship of war and can respond to the presence and behavior of armed groups in different ways: some cooperate enthusiastically, others passively obey, and others
resist fiercely. For example, even under the surveillance of one of the world’s most powerful armies, civilians in Afghanistan have often helped the Taliban in a myriad of ways—from hiding rebels in their homes, to flying kites to signal the arrival of American troops (NYT 2010b). At the same time, others have taken risks to aid American forces in areas where the Taliban has a strong presence (NYT 2010a). Civilians can also choose to flee when living in a war zone becomes too risky or strenuous. Furthermore—and despite common beliefs—civilians can resist armed groups’ ruling attempts. Instances of armed resistance have been documented in many cases like Mozambique (e.g., Weinstein 2007), Kenya (e.g., Anderson 2005), and Peru (e.g., Isbell 1992). An emerging literature shows that peaceful resistance to armed actors has also emerged in many armed conflicts—from Peru to Colombia to Sudan to Indonesia (e.g., Hancock & Mitchell 2007; Kaplan 2013b). Ethnographic evidence on several rebellions has also shown that civilians find ways to make demands on the rebels, bargain with them, and strike deals (Weber 1981; Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers 2004b; Lubkemann 2008; Arjona 2015; Barter 2015; Förster 2015).

Clearly, civilian–combatant relations can take many forms, leading to substantial variation in the nature of daily life in war zones. Even though this variation is staggering in its range across and within civil wars, our understanding of its causes and effects is still quite limited. A new literature on rebel governance has made excellent contributions but, for the most part, has focused on variation across armed groups, rather than within them. In addition, the few existing accounts focus on explaining why combatants govern civilians or not, rather than on why they govern them differently. Furthermore, the focus of these studies tends to be rebel provision of public goods rather than the creation of new institutions.4

The neglect of wartime institutions is actually quite widespread in the literature on civil war more generally. Despite the general agreement that institutions shape behavior, the study of how civilians and combatants make choices in war zones tends to overlook the role of wartime institutions. Disregarding the effect of institutions in the analysis of individual and collective behavior would be astounding in many social sciences; however, it has endured in civil war studies perhaps because war is assumed to be chaotic and anarchic, as the widespread use of concepts such as failed states, collapsed governance, and ungoverned spaces suggests (Justino 2013).

Yet, the emergence of local institutions—and, with them, order—in the midst of war makes sense. To start with, war often weakens, and sometimes destroys, state institutions. Different literature has shown that in contexts where access to effective institutions is lacking, new informal institutions are likely to emerge. For example, rural communities that depend on limited, public natural resources often develop norms that facilitate collective action (Ostrom 1990). Illegal markets where property rights and contracts cannot be enforced by law also tend to develop their own parallel institutions (e.g., Gambetta 1996; Volkov 2000; Varese 2001; Skarbek 2011). Some theorists have argued that every tight social group develops norms that encourage cooperative behavior (Ellickson 2009:167). The emergence of the state itself has been explained as a process whereby one actor offers institutions and protection in exchange for taxation, thereby transforming a situation of anarchy into one where clear rules allow for higher predictability, productive activities, and capital accumulation (e.g., Tilly 1985; Olson 1993). Even within contexts where institutions do exist, actors often attempt to provide private orderings to “realign incentives and embed transactions in more protective governance structures” (Williamson 2002; see also Dixit 2007:438). These insights suggest that when prewar institutions are weakened in war zones, some sort of new institutions that establish order are likely to emerge.

The existence of wartime institutions should not be surprising for another simple reason: armed groups have incentives to create them. First, as Tilly (1978) suggests, in order to overcome their competitors, warring sides try to monopolize the means of violence, extract resources from local inhabitants, and, at the same time, promote capital accumulation. Even though Tilly was referring to a long historical process, armed actors fighting civil wars are likely to learn that in order to advance their cause, they need to create a sustainable system of resource extraction to fund their operations. Such a system, in turn, requires some security and limited taxation for civilians to engage in productive activities (Olson 1993) – in other words, it requires institutions. In addition, as I will argue in this book, armed groups interested in controlling territory have incentives to establish institutions because doing so helps them to both gain territorial control and strengthen their organizational capacity.

Overlooking wartime institutions and the emergence of new forms of order has important implications. Theoretically, by ignoring the different

4 I discuss this and other literature in Chapter 2.
ways in which armed groups approach civilians, we fail to understand how the former seek obedience and support, how they are able to grow and survive, and how their behaviors affect local populations. At the same time, overlooking the roles that a given armed group comes to play within a given community leads us to investigate civilian behavior without paying attention to the institutional contexts in which civilians live. Hence, our understanding of civilians’ decision to cooperate with armed actors, flee, or join or oppose combatants, ignores a crucial aspect of the context in which they make their decisions.

Neglecting the different forms that war takes on at the local level also has important consequences for our understanding of post-conflict outcomes. Civil war triggers many processes that transform economic activities, infrastructure, demographic patterns, social fabric, and political identities, among others (Wood 2008; Arjona 2009; Justino 2013). Yet, assuming that these processes are homogeneous across regions or within an armed group is inconsistent with available empirical evidence. Precisely because the way in which armed groups occupy territories varies across space and time, we cannot assume that these processes affect all local populations – even those in the same region – in the same way. Ethnographic evidence shows that there is great variation in how neighboring communities within a province experience war (e.g., Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers 2004a). As I show in this book, systematic data supports these findings. The effects of war cannot, therefore, be assumed to be constant within a country or its regions. Accounting for that variation is essential to understanding both wartime dynamics and their effects in the post-conflict period.

Concerning policy, understanding the behavior of armed groups and civilians is essential to identifying the challenges and opportunities for different sorts of intervention. Efforts to limit civilian casualties, prevent displacement, or promote development in war-affected areas have to be grounded in a realistic assessment of the local dynamics of war. Civilian-combatant relations are also at the core of counterinsurgency studies. The idea that gaining popular support is essential for victory has been invoked to plan, or criticize, counterinsurgency strategies across the globe. Yet, such strategies cannot be evaluated without assessing how armed groups gain territories, settle in them, and secure civilian obedience and support, as well as how civilians respond in different contexts.

Finally, if institutions are, as many disciplines believe, an essential building block of economic, social, and political phenomena, we need to understand how they are transformed by war, and how this differs across localities. The challenges and opportunities for reintegration, reconciliation, poverty alleviation, and institution-building may well vary depending on the type of social order that emerged during the war. Yet, as Blattman and Miguel (2010) note, the institutional legacies of armed conflict have been largely neglected.

Challenging the assumption that civil wars are characterized by chaos and “collapsed governance” (Justino 2013; Risse 2013; Reno 2011), I argue that our understanding of the conduct of war as well as its legacies demands a theory of the creation of social order during wartime. By offering such a theory, this book aims to open the black box of civilian-combatant relations and institutional arrangements that characterize war zones. In the remainder of this introduction, I lay out the central components of the theory (which is presented in Chapter 3), the research design, and the organization of the book.

A THEORY OF SOCIAL ORDER IN CIVIL WAR

I propose a theory of the creation of social order in irregular civil wars by analyzing the interaction of state and non-state armed actors as well as between them and civilian populations. My central argument is that, in any given war zone, the length of an armed group’s time horizon determines whether or not it establishes a social contract with the local population, giving place to local order. In situations where a social contract is established, I argue that the quality of the preexisting local institutions – defined as their legitimacy and efficacy – determines whether rebelocracy or allocracy emerges.

The logic of the argument is as follows: I assume that rebels aim to control territories as a means of pressuring the incumbent and increasing their strength. I also assume that a secondary goal is to maximize the byproducts of that control – such as obtaining material resources, attracting recruits, and expanding their networks – which help rebels build their organizational capacity. Given these two goals, I argue that rebels prefer order to disorder and, among the possible types of order, they prefer rebelocracy to allocracy.

Order is instrumental to maintaining territorial control, which is hardly possible in the absence of clear rules that regulate both civilian and combatant behavior. Such rules facilitate rebel monitoring of civilian conduct (such as helping the enemy), and also make civilians more likely to voluntarily obey and offer support. Rebels, therefore, have
incentives to establish a social contract with the local population, where both sides are subject to certain rules. However, as Olson (1993) argued, establishing a social contract pays off in the long run: actors incur the costs of limiting their behavior in the present for the sake of future benefits. When rebels have short time horizons, they have incentives to reject any commitments that limit their present behavior.

I identify two conditions under which a given armed group, or one of its units, operates under short time horizons. The first is when a group faces armed competition with other warring sides in a given territory, which forces it to focus on defense. When fighting to preserve territorial control, rebels have fewer incentives to restrain their behavior and abstain from conduct that they expect will increase the odds of winning that territory. A social contract with the local population becomes a burden, as it does not help the group to achieve its short-term goals and can, on the contrary, hamper its success. Furthermore, preserving order becomes too costly, as the group prefers to devote resources and manpower to fighting its enemy. Disorder, or the absence of a social contract, is therefore likely to emerge when two or more warring sides actively compete for territorial control.

This argument is consistent with theories of rebel and criminal violence and predation (e.g., Kalyvas 2006; Metelits 2010; Skaperdas 2001), in which armed competition pushes armed actors to use more violence and neglect social contracts.

The second condition under which armed groups operate on a short time horizon is when they lack internal discipline. Different factors can affect the internal organization of armed groups, such as their social networks, ideology, and the type of recruits they attract (e.g., Weinstein 2007; Staniland 2014), making them more or less disciplined. In the absence of an internal structure that makes combatants follow rules and orders from their commanders, fighters are likely to engage in behaviors to satisfy their individual preferences. Rules that limit combatant behavior are often disobeyed, and civilians face great uncertainty about how combatants will act. Disorder is, therefore, more likely to emerge when combatants can disregard the orders of their commanders. This argument is consistent with theories that stress the role of organizational structures in rebel violence and governance (Weinstein 2007).

In the absence of armed competition and indiscipline, armed actors are more likely to operate under long time horizons, establishing a social contract with the local population. The ensuing social order may take one of two forms. The first form of social order is rebelocracy, or the rule of rebels, where armed groups intervene broadly in civilian affairs, regulating behavior beyond the spheres of taxation and security. For example, combatants may regulate public and private conduct, establish a justice system to adjudicate disputes and enforce contracts, and provide public goods. The second form of social order is aliorcacy, or the rule of others, where armed groups only intervene in civilian affairs by collecting taxes and regulating conduct related to security, while others—such as civilian authorities, state institutions, or traditional leaders—regulate the remaining aspects of local life. To use the language of the state, under rebelocracy the armed actor adopts the functions of an interventionist state, while in aliorcacy it resembles a minimalist one.

I argue that armed groups with long time horizons prefer rebelocracy to aliorcacy for three reasons. First, rebelocracy facilitates territorial control, as the group can directly regulate and monitor many activities. Second, it allows the group to create and transform institutions in the social, political, and economic spheres both to build its organizational capacity and further its interests. And finally, by influencing local life in profound ways, the group also manages to elicit civilian cooperation. Such cooperation, in turn, reinforces territorial control. In this way, the group reshapes local life in accordance to its interests, needs, and principles. In addition, thanks to what we could call an economy of smallness, rebelocracy is not hard to implement. A few local informants who are willing to report on instances of disobedience of rules, together with exemplary punishments, often suffice for civilians to follow the new rules that combatants establish. It follows that once they target a territory to settle in, rebels prefer rebelocracy to aliorcacy.

But civilians do not always give in. While one of the tenets of decades of research on guerrilla warfare is the centrality of civilian support for rebel survival and success, the bargaining power that such a position proffers civilians has been widely ignored. Yet, if civilians resist collectively, they can endanger armed groups’ territorial control and its byproducts. To avoid such a costly outcome, the armed group prefers to settle for a social order in which its influence on locals’ lives is limited, yet still allows it to preserve control of the territory. Armed groups are, therefore, better off by tailoring their strategy to each community based on their expectation of collective resistance.

The question that follows, then, is under what conditions do civilians resist collectively? I argue that the likelihood of collective resistance to rebelocracy in a given local community is a function of the quality of the local institutions in place prior to the arrival of the group, in particular,
dispute institutions – those that adjudicate disputes, enforce contracts, and protect property rights. By quality of institutions, I mean their legitimacy – that is, that they are recognized as valid by most community members – and their efficacy, meaning the extent to which they tend to be observed. Two mechanisms are at work: first, the quality of institutions influences individuals’ preferences for preserving the current form of governance and therefore their desire to resist an insurgent’s ruling attempts; and second, it shapes the community’s capacity to launch and sustain resistance, which I conceptualize as a collective action problem.

When armed groups approach local communities with high-quality institutions, they anticipate resistance and prefer to establish a social contract that respects the existing governance scheme. In exchange, combatants demand obedience to rules regarding their security and the fulfillment of material contributions. This agreement is often the result of prodding and negotiations. The ensuing social order, aliocracy, is substantially different from a social order of rebelocracy in two ways: first, civilian affairs remain mostly in civilian hands in aliocracy, whereas combatants are highly influential in rebelocracy; and second, under rebelocracy the armed group is more able to shape the economic, political, and social life of the community in ways that benefit its interests. Still, both arrangements help the group to preserve territorial control more than disorder would.

Finally, some territories are so important for the group that tolerating civilian autonomy is too costly. Areas where high-level commanders live, or where new recruits are trained, are good examples. Other territories are highly valuable because of their geographic location, such as corridors that would allow the group to bring in weapons, export illegal resources, or connect factions deployed across the country. In these strategic territories, armed groups need tight population control and broad cooperation, and therefore do not tolerate civilian autonomy, even if they expect resistance. Communities that demand civilian autonomy are therefore likely to be targeted, often with the aim of displacing all their members from the area. Disorder is the likely outcome.

In addition to rebel and civilian behavior, the theory explains the role of the state in wartime. I distinguish between the state’s armed forces and its other agencies, which can create and change local institutions. If the state’s forces compete with other warring sides, I expect disorder to emerge. If other state agencies established high-quality institutions – in particular dispute institutions – prior to the arrival of the armed actor, I expect the latter to establish aliocracy instead of rebelocracy for fear of organized resistance.

Although the theory focuses on social order as an outcome, describing and explaining the process by which new social orders are consolidated is essential to this book. How do armed groups actually penetrate communities and rule them? How do civilians manage to limit rebels’ ruling aspirations? What are the modes of resistance? How is civilian cooperation sought? How do guerrilla and paramilitary commanders earn deference or disdain? By investigating when and why distinct types of social order are likely to emerge, I delve into these questions and address the process by which armed groups make their way into communities and rule them – or fail to do so. I also assess how ideology, community structure, state agents, and alliances between armed groups, on the one hand, and elites and other sectors of the population, on the other, shape these processes.

The theory is meant to explain variation in non-state armed groups’ strategies towards local populations, the latter’s responses, and the ensuing forms of social order in areas where armed groups have an ongoing presence. Interactions between civilians and combatants in areas where the former are only sporadically present are not part of the universe of cases that the theory aims to explain. Put differently, I aim to investigate prolonged interactions of civilians and combatants, as opposed to their contact in isolated events like sporadic attacks.

The theory should apply to all irregular civil wars – the most common type of civil war since the 1950s (Kalyvas & Balcells 2010) regardless of the main division fueling them: secessionist, center-seeking, and ethnic-based groups are expected to follow a similar logic. However, several factors that shape the explanatory variables identified by the theory may co-vary with these types of conflicts, making a particular form of social order more or less likely. An important scope condition, however, is that armed groups should seek to control territory. The theory does not seek to explain social order in areas where armed organizations do not want to control territory. For example, secessionist rebel groups may only want to control territory in the area they want to “liberate,” but not in other regions of the country in which they operate. Other civil wars are characterized by armed actors that engage in genocide, rather than territorial expansion. This book does not explain their interaction with civilians. Finally, conventional civil wars, where clear battle lines exist, are also not within the scope of this project.
Introduction

RESEARCH DESIGN

I test several implications of the theory, as well as its microfoundations and mechanisms, with data on individuals, communities, and armed groups in the Colombian armed conflict. Colombia exhibits great variation in the factors that, according to the theory, shape wartime social order: several rebel and paramilitary groups have participated in the conflict, which allows for testing the argument on organizations with different internal structures and goals; the quality of local institutions also varies greatly across the territory, as they may come from the state, ethnic authorities, and sui generis forms of peasant self-governance; and finally, the value of local territories and competition for territorial control change across time and space. In addition, there is great variation in ethnicity, geography, and state presence, which allows for testing the theory in a wide variety of contexts.

Even though the conflict has lasted for more than four decades, there is great disparity in the duration of war at the sub-national level as armed groups expand to new areas of the country and abandon previous strongholds. For this reason, while some communities interacted with armed actors for only two years, others have coexisted with them for decades. This variation allows for testing the argument in communities that have experienced the war for substantially different lengths of time.

It is important to note that all armed groups in Colombia have been impacted, directly or indirectly, by the market of illicit drugs. This raises the question of whether the dynamics in Colombia can be found in civil wars where rebels lack valuable natural resources to fund their operations. It could be possible, for example, that armed groups that lack such resources are unable to establish institutions to rule populations. However, in later chapters I offer evidence of armed groups’ creation of rebeocracies in many countries around the world – some of which have natural resources and some of which do not. This evidence suggests that rebeocracy is appealing and can be established by rebels even in the absence of profitable goods. To be sure, it is still possible that the factors that lead armed actors to create disorder, rebeocracy, and aliquocity vary depending on whether natural resources are available or not. This is an open question that can only be resolved with new data.

The research design consists of different tests of observable implications of the theory regarding the determinants of social order, as well as the underlying mechanisms and microfoundations. I rely on original data that I collected between 2004 and 2012 with different methods, including three original surveys, structured and open interviews, in-depth case studies, and memory workshops to produce timelines and what I have called institutional biographies. The analysis relies on a mix of methodologies, including statistical analysis, process tracing, and natural experiments.

Research Design

The Determinants of Social Order

The first component of the research design tests hypotheses on the determinants of variation in social order across time and space. I selected a random sample of local communities in different regions of Colombia that had lived under guerrilla or paramilitary presence. With a survey that used vignettes to elicit responses, I gathered data on the interaction between armed groups and communities. While they do not necessarily offer an in-depth view of local histories, these vignettes were an effective way to get snapshots of the forms of social order that emerged in the sampled communities. Based on this initial coding, I randomly selected a sub-sample to focus on. Relying on interviews, memory workshops, and primary and secondary sources, I reconstructed the history of interaction between seventy-four communities and all the armed groups that had been present in their territory (more than thirteen armed groups in total, including several guerrilla and paramilitary groups). Using multilevel models, the statistical analysis confirms strong correlation between social order on the one hand, and preexisting local institutions, armed competition, and armed groups’ indiscipline, on the other. By design, I compare communities that are similar in many ways – they belong to the same municipality, have the same local government, and often the same local economy. However, to better identify the causal nature of these relationships, I rely on instrumental variables – a widely used method that helps to isolate causal effects.

I also test the central mechanism underlying the relation between the quality of local institutions and social order, to wit, the threat of civilian resistance. I find that rebeocracy is less likely to emerge in communities that had previously engaged in collective resistance against an armed actor, suggesting that those communities are more likely to bargain with groups that want to rule them, and that the latter are more likely to give in.
It is worth explaining why this is a theory-testing exercise rather than a theory development one. Although my theory had been informed by the dynamics I had observed in my fieldwork in two municipalities in Colombia (and qualitative evidence on many cases beyond Colombia), the main test of the hypotheses uses data on a random sample of communities throughout the country that were not available when the theory was developed. The survey questions were designed to test specific hypotheses, and the in-depth interviews were conducted to gather detailed data on previously theorized mechanisms.

Processes and Mechanisms: The Creation of Social Order
While the statistical analysis identifies the effect of the explanatory variables on social order, it fails to shed light on the processes by which new orders come to be. Put differently, the statistical analysis can only expound on social order as a static outcome; however, it is essential to understand it as a dynamic process. In order to illustrate how armed groups approach local communities at different stages, and how the latter react, I rely on both qualitative and quantitative information. The evidence comes from the in-depth studies of the sample of communities previously alluded to, as well as from in-depth interviews with civilians and ex-combatants of guerrilla and paramilitary groups. I use this evidence to illustrate how civilians and combatants interact in a dynamic fashion, facilitating the consolidation of new social orders.

The data also serves to test specific claims about mechanisms and microfoundations. For example, by relying on interviews and local histories, I show that civilian cooperation is more common under rebelocacy than under other forms of social order.

Given the central role civilian resistance plays in the argument, I rely on primary and secondary data to assess whether resistance in Colombia has been observed under the conditions specified by my theory. I built a dataset based on the existing literature on civilian resistance in Colombia to see whether patterns coincide with the expectations of the theory. In particular, the argument implies that resistance is not triggered by armed groups with long time horizons, unless the territory has a high strategic value. Although this is not a random sample and may not be representative of all Colombian war zones, it is a good plausibility test of the mechanism. I find that the large majority of cases of resistance do take place under the conditions specified by the theory.

A Process-Driven Natural Experiment
The third empirical component of the project entails an in-depth study of three local communities in the municipality of Viotá that interacted with the FARC for about twelve years each. Located in the Colombian Andes, Viotá was home to one of the most successful agrarian movements in the country between the 1930s and the 1950s. Successful collective action by this peasant community not only led to a radical transformation of land tenure, but also to the emergence of effective self-governing schemes, which were responsible for arbitrating disputes as well as defending the population from violent attacks, state repression, and a bloody civil war during the 1950s. Yet, around 1960 a fortuitous event – a gift of land to one of the key agrarian leaders – triggered the migration of most leaders to a specific village. Over time, the movement became concentrated in that village, while the local institutions that had marked collective action and self-governance faded away elsewhere.

This exogenous shock on local institutions created a unique natural (or quasi-natural) experiment. All the villages had been formed due to the successful agrarian reform led by communist cadres throughout the municipality. Furthermore, popular participation in the different forms of collective action between 1930 and 1960 was massive all over the municipality. By 1960, most peasants in all of the villages had acquired land. It was only when most agrarian leaders moved to a single village that differences in community organization and local institutions started to emerge across villages. I exploit these differences to assess whether the quality of local institutions had a significant impact a few decades later when the FARC settled in the municipality: did variation in local institutions affect the FARC’s strategies towards the different villages? Were locals’ reactions where institutions were still legitimate and effective different from reactions where they were not? Did a different form of social order emerge in these communities?

Combining the logic of causal inference of natural experiments and process tracing,5 I provide detailed evidence on the trajectories of three of the villages to argue that the quality of local institutions shaped the collective action capacity of their communities; their bargaining power vis-à-vis the FARC; and the ways in which the latter ruled. This approach allows me not only to test a complex mechanism but also to offer

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5 See Arjona (2016b) for a discussion of this approach.
a detailed account of civilian–combatant relations, civilians’ experience of war, and the creation of new forms of order during wartime.

I find that the FARC established alicracy in the village where legitimate, well-functioning institutions were in place. Despite the FARC’s full military control over the entire municipality, this community managed to remain relatively autonomous for years. Meanwhile, rebels became the de facto rulers elsewhere in the municipality — including the main urban center where the police, court, local government, and other state agencies operated. Rebels ruled over every facet of life in those communities — from solving private disputes, to regulating economic activities and social behavior, and to deciding the results of local elections. However, they were unable to take over the tiny village where they encountered strong self-governing schemes. Furthermore, years later when the FARC started to abuse the general population, this village resisted — and succeeded.

This comparison suggests that armed groups’ strategies, civilians’ responses, and the resulting social order can be radically different, even within a municipality, if there is variation in the quality of local institutions. Furthermore, it shows that when armed groups fully disregard civilian agency, communities with high-quality institutions are able to organize successful resistance, often without relying on violence.

Finally, this study provides detailed evidence on the processes that lead to different forms of social order, with a focus on the choices of both civilians and combatants. By delving into the history of three small communities, interviewing leaders, common peasants, and combatants who operated in the area, I was able to record the protagonists’ perceptions, learn about the small events that triggered great changes, and capture the nuances in the interactions between the FARC and these local communities under varying circumstances. This study demonstrates directly the operation of institutions — and rebels reacting to them. It also shows the complex roles that the state plays in conflict zones. Not least, it provides an intimate sense of how life in war zones goes on under different forms of social order.

Testing the Microfoundations: Social Order and Recruitment

In order to rigorously evaluate the microfoundations of the theory, I test the observable implications on recruitment. The argument is built on the assumption that civilian cooperation is higher under rebelocracy: I argue that one of the reasons why armed groups prefer rebelocracy is that it leads to higher levels of civilian cooperation, which in turn is crucial to maintain territorial control. Being a particular form of civilian cooperation, recruitment should be higher in local communities where rebelocracy emerged — where armed groups became de facto rulers and intervened broadly in community life. I use the data on local communities mentioned before, as well as on a large-scale survey with about 800 former combatants and 600 civilians that I conducted in collaboration with Stathis Kalyvas in Colombia. The data include detailed information on the profiles, families, and communities of ex-combatants prior to joining an armed group, as well as of civilians who did not join, but lived in municipalities where at least one person joined a group.

The analysis overcomes a problem shared by most studies with survey data on former combatants. These studies usually rely on data on ex-combatants’ and civilians’ characteristics either before the war started or after demobilization. In contrast, I rely on ex-combatants’ responses about their life one year prior to enlisting, and on civilians’ responses about their situation at different time periods. This allows me to build a dataset where the control group is made of civilians who were living at the same time and place where surveyed former combatants made the choice of enlisting in an armed group. This is important because war may transform many aspects of a person’s life; the real comparison group for recruits should be their peers who did not choose to join a group despite living in the same place, at the same time.

The substantial contribution of this analysis goes beyond testing the microfoundations of a theory of social order. It suggests that recruitment is not only highly endogenous to the presence of armed groups (Kalyvas 2006; Arjona & Kalyvas 2011), but also — and more so — to the form of social order that emerges in war zones. Understanding recruitment thus requires opening the black box of civilian–combatant relations and theorizing how wartime institutional arrangements — and the beliefs and preferences that often result from them — shape communities and individuals. Neglecting the importance of civilian–combatant relations would amount to studying people’s choices without considering the very context in which such decisions are made.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

The book is organized as follows. Chapters 2 and 3 present the theory. Chapter 2 introduces a new phenomenon in the study of civil war, wartime social order, and presents a typology. It also discusses current accounts of rebel behavior and civilian choice in civil war, and identifies how this project builds on, and differs from, them. Chapter 3 presents the
theory of social order, focusing on the determinants of variation at the level of the locality.

Chapter 4 presents the research design, and introduces the Colombian armed conflict, as well as the main non-state armed groups involved. Chapter 5 presents the results of the statistical tests on the determinants of social order. Chapter 6 focuses on social order as a process by examining its development, and theorizing and illustrating mechanisms and microfoundations. It offers rich, detailed evidence on civilian–combatant interaction and daily life in war zones throughout Colombia. I start with a stylized view of the process, beginning with the moment an armed group enters a community and ending with the consolidation of a new social order. I then focus on each stage, discussing the underlying mechanisms shaping civilian and combatant behavior.

Chapter 7 presents the process-driven natural experiment. It offers a detailed history of the municipality of Viotá based on primary and secondary data as well as interviews. It then reconstructs the history of the interaction between the FARC and three local communities where institutions took different paths. The chapter concludes with a discussion of plausible alternative explanations. Chapter 8 evaluates the microfoundations of the theory by testing its implications on recruitment.

Chapter 9 concludes by summarizing the argument and findings, addressing their limitations, and exploring implications beyond the Colombian case, as well as beyond civil wars.

Wartime Social Order

What Is It and How Does It Vary?

This book investigates a new phenomenon in the study of civil war: social order in war zones. How do we define “wartime social order” – a seemingly paradoxical term given the common portrayal of war zones as chaotic and disorderly? How does social order vary? Which dimensions should we focus on? In this chapter, I define the concept of wartime social order. I also propose a typology and assess its quality by discussing the relevance of the variation that it captures, whether it identifies real types, and its parsimony. I then consider the insights that the current literature provides for understanding the emergence of different forms of social order in war zones as well as of collective civilian resistance. Assessing both their contributions and shortcomings, I address the ways in which I build on and depart from these theories.

DEFINING WARTIME SOCIAL ORDER

We often think of civilians living in war zones as victims trapped in a state of uncertainty, where “normal life” does not exist. Yet, a closer look at civil wars shows a different picture: despite fear and violence, new rules of behavior often operate, and civilians plan their daily lives around them. A new routine becomes ingrained, and people have expectations about what might happen. I refer to the existence of this predictability as order.

Every form of order is built on a set of institutions – that is, formal or informal rules, norms, and practices that structure interaction (North