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Research Statement

My research investigates the causes, conduct, and consequences of inter- and intra-state conflict. I am currently working on three related research streams. First, I am developing a book manuscript, which advances a civilian agency theory to explain armed political organizations' territorial control and governance during civil war. Drawing upon a political accountability mechanism, the theory explains how community social structure and collective action influence armed group behavior and conflict processes. I test the theory using unique village-level evidence from the communist insurgency in the Philippines, with case comparisons to additional conflicts in the Philippines, India, Syria, and Afghanistan. A second set of projects investigates rebel groups' strategic use of terrorism in civil wars, using the Terrorism in Armed Conflict (TAC) data collection project (a collaboration with Page Fortna and Nick Lotito). A third set of projects investigates international security implications of increasingly common "gray zone" interstate conflicts, in which states compete using subversive strategies short of war. The Named Entities for Social Science (NESS) project uses linked data knowledge bases (e.g. Wikipedia) to construct a comprehensive global dataset of states, de facto states, and other non-state political organizations. The data will be used to re-evaluate predominant theories explaining the origins, conduct, and resolution of inter- and intra-state conflict; theories of state-formation and -failure; and the state-centric model of international politics. The first stage of the project focuses on explaining the causes and consequences of one particular "gray zone" conflict strategy: state sponsorship of nonstate political actors in an adversary's territory (proxy war).

Territorial Control, Governance, and Civilian Agency in Rebellion

Under what conditions do rebel organizations successfully control territory, and provide governance, during civil war? If the distribution of territorial control is as crucial to explaining the conduct and outcomes of civil war as the literature suggests, it is equally important to understand its origins. The process by which insurgency expands or contracts represents the crucial first stage that determines the context in which subsequent conflict outcomes occur.¹ The book project explains local-level variation in rebel groups' territorial control, governance, and strategic use of violence during civil war, emphasizing civilian agency to shape these conflict processes.²

The theory argues community *collective action capacity*, the ability to mobilize collective action to pursue common interests, influences rebel groups' territorial control and governance. Communities with greater collective action capacity are able to form political committees, gather resources and supplies, and control the flow of information. Because of these concomitant advantages, belligerents prefer to control territory in which communities possess high collective action capacity, all else equal. But all else is not necessarily equal, as collective action capacity may also empower communities to hold rebels accountable to higher standards

¹See Kalyvas (2006) and related work by Stathis Kalyvas, Ana Arjona, Laia Balcells, and others.

²For recent contributions emphasizing civilian agency in conflict, see Petersen (2001), Wood (2003), Parkinson (2013), Staniland (2014), Arjona (2016), Balcells (2017) and Kaplan (2017), among others.

of governance, protection from civil war violence, and service provision. Because governance is costly, collective action capacity may cut against belligerents' expected benefits to territorial control. These countervailing effects imply a conditional relationship: whether collective action capacity encourages or deters rebel territorial control depends on the community's access to alternative sources of protection and service provision. Collective action capacity increases rebel control where the state or local power brokers cannot provide basic services and security from civil war violence. Under these conditions, the community accepts rebel control at low levels of governance because even minimal protection improves community security. Rebels' surplus benefits associated with higher collective action capacity outweigh the expected governance costs. As access to the state increases, collective action capacity deters rebel territorial control. The community leverages its bargaining power to hold rebels accountable to prohibitively expensive standards of governance.

I first test the theory's local-level implications using quantitative and qualitative analysis of unique evidence from the communist insurgency in the Philippines, collected during fieldwork in 2014-2015. I investigate the observable correlation between rebel control and community collective action capacity in a regression framework using Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) military intelligence assessments from 2011-2014. The assessments record communist insurgent control at the village level—based on the presence of communist party-affiliated political committees, estimates of armed personnel and firearms, and information gathered from local contacts—a rare opportunity to measure the elusive concept of rebel territorial control with precision. I operationalize collective action capacity by focusing on social ties as a mobilization technology. I measure village collective action capacity from its micro-level foundations in kinship networks, using household head family names from a government census conducted during 2008-2010. Kinship networks represent the primary currency of social capital in the Philippines; the foundation of collective action and clientelist systems designed to access political power and distribute economic resources. In 1849, the Spanish colonial Governor, facing difficulty tracking household tax contributions, directed local officials to assign new unique surnames to each family in their municipality. This peculiar history of name reassignment along with strict naming conventions suggests households sharing a surname within the same municipality can be confidently identified as members of the same family line, which allows identification of kinship networks.³ In the Philippines, collective action capacity *increases* the level of rebel control in villages with low levels of state-provided protection and services, while the effect declines as the community's access to state protection and services increases, consistent with the theory.

To investigate the theory's mechanisms and test the accountability theory of rebellion against plausible alternatives, I turn to qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with village elders in 75 randomly selected villages within 3 conflict-affected provinces (Agusan del Sur, Davao Oriental, and Compostela Valley) on the island of Mindanao. Village elders were targeted as interview subjects because they were present in the community prior to the arrival of communist insurgents, lived through periods of communist control, and were present in the village at the time of data collection. I present plausible alternative theories, draw competing hypotheses testable in the interview data, and use process-tracing and case

³See Cruz, Labonne and Querubin (forthcoming) for an example, and appropriate justification, of this process of building social networks from the census in a peer-reviewed article.

comparison methods to adjudicate between the accountability theory and these alternatives.

The book project will extend the dissertation research in two main ways. First, it extends the theory by incorporating the state and local power brokers (e.g. warlords) as strategic actors competing for territorial control during conflict. Second, it extends the empirical analysis beyond the communist insurgency in the Philippines to explore generalizability to additional cases and types of conflict. I draw upon quantitative and secondary qualitative evidence from the communist (Naxalite) insurgency in India, the Taliban’s insurgency in Afghanistan, and the Syrian Civil War. I also explore the logic of rebel territorial control and governance in ethno-nationalist conflicts in the Moro (Philippines) and Bodo (Assam, India) ethno-nationalist conflicts.

Terrorism in Armed Conflict

TAC assigns rebel groups in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Database (ACD) to terrorism incidents in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), filling a crucial gap in the empirical research examining the use of terrorism in civil wars. With a few exceptions, existing data include *only* groups that have used terrorism without including similar groups that *may* use terrorism. TAC improves on existing efforts to link incidents of terrorism to civil wars. First, we conducted extensive research into rebel group histories, rather than rely on text analysis. Second, we cast a wide net assigning attacks to particular rebel groups, using not only direct matches but also factions/umbrella groups, affiliated groups, and incidents in GTD that are attributed only to generic descriptors that may be shorthand reference to the rebel group.⁴ We categorize these ACD-GTD links to provide a flexible system for researchers to adjust data collection to fit their research purposes and check the robustness of analysis.

In “Don’t Bite the Hand that Feeds,” forthcoming at *International Studies Quarterly*, we argue that rebel groups with alternative funding sources beyond local civilian support, including “lootable” natural resources or external material support, are less vulnerable to the *legitimacy costs* associated with targeting civilians. Because popular discontent with their tactics does not curtail their access to resources, groups with lower legitimacy costs are more likely to use terrorism. We find robust empirical support for the theory. “Regime Types and Terrorism Revisited: The Institutional Determinants of Terrorism,” a working paper with Rick Morgan (V-Dem Institute), advances a novel institutional theory to explain conflicting findings in the literature regarding the relationship between states’ regime type and exposure to terrorism. We argue that distinct dimensions civil liberties—political and private civil liberties and physical integrity rights—have countervailing effects on states’ vulnerability to terrorism, while procedural democratic institutions do not have a strong impact. We find robust empirical support using TAC and the Varieties of Democracy dataset.

Works in Progress and Planned Research:

Named Entities Project. A number of important data collection efforts have enabled scholars to test theories of inter- and intra-state armed conflict quantitatively in datasets that

⁴For example, an attack by “Kurdish Separatists” that occurs in Turkey may be attributable to the PKK.

include information across countries, conflicts, and over time. While crucial to advancing our knowledge, existing datasets have limited scope to comparatively successful political organizations able to challenge the state through large-scale protest, insurgency, terrorism, or other means of violent or nonviolent political opposition. To understand the onset of civil war, and the belligerents' subsequent conduct, we must understand 1) the conditions under which political opposition organizations emerge; 2) why some pursue (de facto or de jure) sovereignty while others attempt to achieve reforms within existing political regimes; 3) why some adopt violent means while others do not; and 4) the conditions under which they are successful in obtaining political objectives. Organizational-level civil wars datasets, by including only groups in armed conflict, defined by a threshold scale of violence, lack crucial variation in the strategies and tactics that opposition organizations may adopt to pursue their goals. Most include only anti-government rebel groups or pro-government militias, but not both, despite the fact that side-switching is common in civil wars. While other data collection efforts have focused on organizations/movements using alternatives to armed conflict, there is no systematic linkage across the various lists of violent and non-violent non-state political organizations required to answer questions central to the research programs examining intrastate conflict, political violence, protest, repression, as well as state formation, state-building, and state failure.

This project addresses this lacuna by drawing upon linked data knowledge bases, such as Wikipedia, to construct a more comprehensive list of independent non-state political organizations. We record political organizations' characteristics, goals, strategies, survival, and successes/failures in obtaining political objectives. We also track organizations' edge relationships (ancestors-descendants, factions/umbrella, contemporaries with shared/competing objectives and constituencies, alignments/alliances, rivalries, etc.). We link this corpus of non-state political actors to a companion effort designed to expand the set of states and political entities seeking or approximating statehood (de facto states), breaking down the artificial conceptual barrier between political entities that obtain de jure sovereignty from those that obtain only de facto sovereignty. Linking this list to the broader set of non-state political organizations further transcends conceptual barriers between groups that obtain de facto statehood from those that pursue political objectives without seeking sovereignty. The resulting database includes a corpus of state and non-state political organizations and records variation on dimensions crucial to re-evaluating and contributing to existing research addressing the causes and consequences of political conflict (including not only armed conflict and political violence but also nonviolent political conflict), international security, state repression, and the origins and demise of states, regimes, and governments.

Gray Zone Conflict and State Sponsorship of Rebel Groups. Under what conditions do states support rebel groups? What are the consequences for the conduct and duration of civil war and for the escalation of conflict between the supporting and target states? The *market for sponsorship* theory argues that a state's decision whether to support a rebel group in its adversary's territory is shaped not only by constraints on alternative coercive foreign policy strategies, but also on the risk that other international actors may sponsor the rebel group instead. If multiple, non-aligned states/transnational groups are in conflict with a common adversary, there exists a competitive market for the adversary's

political concessions, and by extension for a rebel group's services as an in-country partner. I hypothesize that security competition in the regional international system increases the likelihood of state sponsorship, the likelihood of multiparty civil war, and conflict duration. The theory is tested using UCDP Armed Conflict Data, San-Akca (2016) data on state support for rebel groups, and Thompson and Dreyer (2011) data on interstate rivalry. Future work will investigate the role of state sponsorship in shaping the use of nonviolent vs. violent strategies in intra-state political conflict. I argue that multilateral inter-state rivalries, through sponsorship, escalate violent conflict by "crowding out" non-violent organizations/strategies, as states align with violent groups to enhance bargaining leverage. Empirical tests use the aforementioned state sponsorship and rivalry data, as well as NAVCO data on violent and non-violent movements (Chenoweth and Lewis 2013).

The Welfare Non-State. The Welfare Non-State Working Group is a collaborative effort to develop a framework bringing together insights from across as-yet isolated literatures on governance by NGOs, International Institutions, Multi-national Corporations, rebel organizations, militias, and other non-state actors. The project will yield insights for scholars interested in governance, conflict, state-building and state failure, and the role of non-state actors in governance and development. My specific contribution applies insights from the general framework to understanding rebel organizations' governance, and vice versa.

Conclusion:

My research agenda advances our understanding of the causes and consequences of armed conflict in the modern world. The book project investigates the local political dynamics within civil wars. By emphasizing civilians' influence in conflict processes, focusing in particular on the under-examined origins of belligerent territorial control, it yields new insights regarding the conduct of civil war. Subsequent research supplements the focus on local processes with a new perspective on the international political forces shaping civil and international conflict. By investigating the intersection between interstate and intrastate conflicts, my research revisits seminal international security topics as yet analyzed primarily through the lens of the state-centric model of the international system. The focus on "gray zone" strategies of conflict engages with evolving 21st century international security challenges.

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