**Michael A. Rubin, PhD**
michaelarubin.com
mrubin@ucsd.edu

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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, my book project 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 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 (with Page Fortna and Nick Lotito).

A third set of projects investigates increasingly common "gray zone" interstate conflicts, in which states compete using subversive strategies short of war. The first stage of the project focuses on the linkages between inter- and intra-state conflicts by explaining the causes and consequences of one particular "gray zone" conflict strategy: state sponsorship of rebel groups and nonviolent opposition in an adversary's territory (proxy 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.

## 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] It extends research conducted as part of my dissertation and related article, "Rebel Territorial Control and Civilian Collective Action in Civil War (R & R, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*), supported with funding from the NSF.[3]

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,

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

[2] For 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.

[3] Award Number: 1535598.

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 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.[4] 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

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[4]See 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.

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 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 insurgencies in Nepal and 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 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.[5] We categorize these UCDP-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," *International Studies Quarterly* (2018), we argue that because popular discontent associated with targeting civilians does not curtail their access to resources (lower *legitimacy costs*), rebel groups with alternative funding sources beyond civilian support are more likely to use terrorism. Empirical findings suggest groups with "lootable" natural resources, especially, use more terrorism. Works in progress leverage TAC to explore the effects of rebel governance/service provision and territorial control, respectively, on their use of terrorism.

"Terrorism and the Varieties of Civil Liberties," (under review) with Rick Morgan (V-Dem Institute), explains how countries' exposure to terrorism varies with distinct government actions on separable civil liberties dimensions. We argue that distinct dimensions civil liberties—political and private civil liberties and physical integrity rights—have countervailing effects on states' vulnerability to terrorism, and find robust empirical support using TAC and the Varieties of Democracy dataset. The findings help to explain persistent debate, and conflicting empirical findings, in the literature regarding the role of government protections

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[5]For example, an attack by "Kurdish Separatists" that occurs in Turkey may be attributable to the PKK.

and violations against civil liberties in generating domestic terrorism.

## Works in Progress and Planned Research:

**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 interdependence between interstate conflicts 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 nonstate actors' use of nonviolent vs. violent strategies in intra-state political conflict and the conditions under which sponsorship, though a limited from of conflict meant to control escalation, increases the risk of militarized interstate disputes. On the former, I argue that multilateral interstate 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).

**Named Entities Project.** Why do some organized political interest groups pursue their objectives by engaging in peaceful competition through institutionalized channels (*within-system*) while others engage in illicit forms of competition (*anti-system*)? What explains political organizations' repertoire of political competition strategies? To answer these and related questions critical to fundamental political science research programs in political competition and conflict, scholars must compare political organizations that *may* adopt a number of anti-system and within-system strategies, but vary in which strategies they employ. While robust research programs examine variation in behavior and outcomes among specific types of political organizations using similar strategies(e.g. rebel behavior and conflict outcomes; political party competition and election outcomes), efforts to conceptually and empirically examine anti-system organizations alongside within-system organizations are still in their infancy. Focusing only on actors that engage in anti-system politics, for instance, involves selecting on outcomes we may be interested in explaining. Divisions in the literature persist despite the fact that anti-system groups often emerge from within-system political organizations (e.g. political parties turned insurgents), and vice versa (e.g. demobilized insurgents fielding candidates in post-conflict elections). This project contributes to the literature by conceptualizing *politically relevant organizations* (PRO) and drawing upon the world's largest open source repository of named entities, Wikidata, to construct a global dataset designed

to facilitate empirical testing of new and existing arguments regarding the causes, conduct, and consequences of political organizations' behavior.

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.

## 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. Information on additional works in progress and updated drafts of working papers can be found on my website.

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