The Monopoly of Violence

and the Puzzling Survival of Pro-Government

Militias

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Keywords

Abstract

There is long tradition of influential work by sociologists, political scientists, and economists on the expected benefits of monopolizing violence, and the risks identified with failing to do so. Yet recent research on conflict, state failure, genocide, coups, and election violence suggests governments cannot or will not form a monopoly. Governments worldwide are more risk acceptant than anticipated. They give arms and authority to a variety of armed non-state actors, militias, vigilantes, death squads, proxy forces, paramilitaries, and counterbalancing forces. We develop a typology based on the link of the pro-government militia to the state and to society as a device to capture variations among these groups. We use the typology to explore insights from this emerging literature on the causes, consequences, and puzzling survival of pro-government militias, their implications for security and human rights, and to generate open questions for further research.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts around the globe feature governments collaborating with irregular militias, vigilantes, death squads, "self-defense" forces, and paramilitaries. In some countries, these groups are created ostensibly to protect civilians against rebel groups. The Civilian Joint Task Force in Nigeria, or village guards in Turkey are examples. In other countries their aim is seemingly offensive and they are designed to take out perceived opponents of the regime and to spread fear and terror. The Interahamwe Militia during the Rwandan genocide, Arkan's Tigers in the former Yugoslavia, or the Janjaweed in Darfur are examples of these groups. Sometimes governments at the state and national level use irregular armed groups for electoral gains. The Hindu nationalist RSS in India, the Basij militia in Iran, the ZANU-PF militia in Zimbabwe, or the Imbonerakure in Burundi fit that category. And some leaders form parallel forces to protect themselves from unreliable regular forces and from a military coup d'état. The Revolutionary Guards in Libya or in Iran had this purpose. Leaders oftentimes create, align with, or support armed groups that are outside the formal security apparatus and not fully under their control to address a variety of security concerns and to achieve political goals.

The persistence of such forces fits awkwardly with the conventional view of a historical process of disarming, demobilizing, and integrating these armed non-state actors under centralizing nation-states. But governments frequently settle for something less than a monopoly of the means of violence. While social scientists have been slow to recognize the theoretical and policy significance of public-private collaboration in the security sector, research on the variety of armed actors has recently gained momentum. Literature showing governments continued reliance on armed non-state actors stretches across topics such as state failure (e.g, Bates 2008), genocide (e.g., Ahram 2013, Alvarez 2006), coups (e.g., Carey et al forthcoming, Dowdle 2007), counter-

insurgencies (e.g., Jentzsch et al 2015), transborder security policies (e.g., Bapat 2012, Ron 2002), as well as democratization and elections (e.g., Acemoglu et al 2013, Kirschke 2000, Raleigh 2014, Roessler 2005, Romero 2003, Staniland 2015a, Wilkinson 2006). In this review, we develop a typology for pro-government militias as a device to explore what is known of their causes and consequences.

The study of armed non-state actors on the government side opens an analytical window on previously "black boxed" incentives and choices political leaders face on security issues, and on the risks they are willing to accept in performing the first and the foremost of a government's responsibilities. By relaxing the assumption of a unified state actor, researchers can begin to unwrap the complex strategies governments implement to stay in power and advance policy. Differentiating among armed actors allows researchers to review and extend insights to existing theories of the state and the monopoly of violence, to theories of delegation and the outsourcing of "sovereign tasks," to international governance and accountability and to theories of collective action.

We define pro-government militias (PGMs) as armed groups that have a link to government but exist outside the regular security apparatus, and have some level of organization (Carey et al 2013:250). While the term "militia" has a broader application (see Jentzsch et al 2015), there is great variety even among the groups that side with governments. They have generated a multiplicity of labels, including state-sponsored proxy forces (e.g., Ahram 2011b), death squads (e.g., Campbell & Brenner 2002, Mason & Krane 1989, Mazzei 2009), vigilantes (e.g., Huggins 1991b, Kowalewski 1990), civil defense forces (e.g., Clayton & Thomson 2014, Peic 2014), and paramilitary forces (e.g., Carey et al forthcoming, De Bruin 2014, Mazzei 2009). Although there is no agreement on an overarching typology, there is some early work

on identifying types of militias (e.g., Jentzsch et al 2015, Raleigh 2014, Staniland 2015b).

We begin this review contrasting the "Weberian assumption" on the monopoly of violence with the variety, frequency, and dispersion of pro-government militias. These groups are important for an accurate description of the forces states deploy. Theoretically, if the control of violence is the centerpiece of theories of the state, we need to understand the logic of delegating security tasks and the implications of such delegation for core public goods such as security and human rights.We then develop a typology to capture theoretically useful variation, and to provide meaningful implications for research and policy.

THE OLIGOPOLY OF VIOLENCE

Weber defined the state by its monopoly of the legitimate use of violence (1965). Subsequent work identified the centralization and consolidation of violence at the core of state evolution and as desirable because it enabled democracy and development (Acemoglu & Robinson 2012, North et al 2009, Tilly 1992). North, Wallis and Weingast assert that all developed (open access) societies "satisfy the Weberian assumption: their states possess a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence" (2009:21). Successful sovereign states in Europe consolidated violence in standing armies and navies, "disarming the rest of the population" (North et al 2009:169). Arriving at a similar conclusion, Acemoglu and Robinson argue that without centralizing violence the state will not be able to establish the rule of law and a prosperous economy (2012, 80-81). While in other policy areas states often collaborate with private actors for efficiency gains (Donahue & Zeckhauser 2011), security tasks

are a special category of sovereign tasks (Wilson 1989). They belong to the state because only the state has the proper authority for them. Williamson (1999) discusses the probity hazard of outsourcing those tasks inherent to sovereignty. The concept "probity hazard" signals the severe consequences that follow from a loss of control within this category of tasks: "breach of contract/lapse of probity can place the system at risk, probity represents a condition of contractual hazard the mitigation of which cannot be realized through pecuniary penalty … inexcusable incompetence or even betrayal" (Williamson 1999:324). Shirking security tasks may threaten the survival of the state, because "security providers always have the capacity to threaten those they allegedly should be protecting" (Stepputat et al 2007:11). Therefore, the delivery of such tasks should remain with the state. It is intriguing that many government decision-makers are risk-acceptant in this policy area.

Despite the influential work by sociologists, political scientists, and economists on the expected benefits of monopolizing violence, and the risks associated with failing to do so, many governments either cannot or will not form a monopoly in the task of providing security. The Pro-Government Militias Database identifies over 300 pro-government militias between 1981 and 2007 (Carey et al 2013). These groups are distributed across all types of regimes, though most commonly found in semi-democracies (Carey et al 2015). Pereira argues that "The end of the Cold War, economic globalization, and the spread of cheap, light weapons are making the state's monopoly on legitimate violence increasingly tenuous" (2003:388). He even labels the monopolization of violence in northwestern Europe as "exceptional" (ibid.). Focusing on frail and late developing states Ahram (2011b) suggests that governments inherit rather than choose security forces. He accounts for the "rise and fall" of militias with "deep-seated historical factors," (Ahram 2011b:24) in particular decolonization and the

international system. Ahram argues that revolutionary decolonization strengthened local networks of violence, setting the stage for militia organizations. Unless faced with a high external threat, states were set to maintain their decentralized security organization, and on the path to state-sponsored militias. Ahram's policy advice for the international community is to "find ways to accommodate the persistence of nonstate actors" (2011b:24). For (Reno 2007) historical factors in the form of the nature of early patronage-based politics shaped militias' behavior in West Africa.

Even in Europe, the detail of military history is more complicated than a story of an evolving monopoly of violence (see Parrott 2012:3). As Weber was publishing *Politics as a Vocation* after World War I, the United Kingdom, in possession of regular military and police forces, was recruiting World War I veterans to serve in militias in Ireland (the Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary). Its regular forces had failed to bring order, but it was not a failed state. The Auxiliaries did not defeat the Irish nationalists, but they created conditions under which the United Kingdom could withdraw and partition (Bennett 1976). Others recognize the range of regimes and countries that decide on some balance of public-private collaboration to address the challenges they face. Campbell and Brenner (2002) bring together case studies on death squads, vigilantes, and paramilitaries from Weimar Germany, the Philippines, Indonesia, apartheid South Africa, the Balkans, and Kashmir, arguing these actors "cannot simply be ghettoized as a problem only of 'third world' or of 'weak' states … they appear also in many other societies, and may on occasion even figure in the repertoire of strong, industrialized states" (2002:xiii). This work shows the global reach of armed non-state actors on the government side. It shifts attention from evolutionary processes or historical constraints to the role of governments in creating or aligning with these groups and giving up the state's monopoly of violence. It underlines the

importance of disentangling the logistical and political incentives at work. As Staniland argues, "violence management" may be a more useful concept than "violence monopolization" (2012:256). Governments and occupying powers, even those with highly professional militaries, oftentimes tolerate or actively create networks of armed actors that are not part of the state's forces, such as in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, India, and Indonesia.

This emerging literature on pro-government militias is as diverse as the groups described. In this review we draw on area studies, case and historical approaches as well as on large-N comparative work. The challenge is to map what this literature tells us of the diversity of these groups on key dimensions to guide further analysis.

A TYPOLOGY OF MILITIAS

Pro-government militias are complex organizations, with varied and often multiple purposes, that differ across a range of characteristics. They vary in how close or formalized their link to government is (Carey et al 2013). Sometimes governments openly support and even institutionalize these irregular forces. At other times they deny any links and the connection only surfaces long after the group ceased to exist. Some PGMs act as the president's personal security guard. Others represent the armed wing of a ruling party or are organized and controlled by the military. In some countries these groups boast hundreds of thousands of members. Elsewhere less than hundred people constitute a PGM.

Can some characteristics of PGMs tell us something about whether they are more likely to protect or to prey on civilians, whether they are designed to evade accountability or to intimidate rebels and the civilian population, whether they present a

high probity hazard, or whether they are associated with times of war or times of peace? Labels such as paramilitaries, civil defense forces, or vigilantes vary regionally and culturally, and are not useful for comparison (see Campbell & Brenner 2002). The particular label attached to them is likely to be contested. Mazzei points out "self defense group and death squad are rhetorical devices used by the organizations to insinuate virtuosity and legitimacy" (2009:4). These normative complications accompany significant empirical issues. Exhaustive, exclusive, and meaningful categories for these complex political entities are hard to find. It is an empirically as well as normatively contested terrain. But it is a terrain fertile with intellectual and methodological challenges and insights. We aim to develop a theoretically and empirically meaningful typology yielding expectations about the survival and behavior of militias. We use the typology to frame current debates, findings, and controversies in this research and compare it to alternatives in the literature.

Our typology has two dimensions. Both tap characteristics inherent to the group, rather than characteristics of the context in which they are found. One dimension is the dominant link to society, the other the link to the state (see Engels 2010, for a categorization of African armed groups on state and society relationships). The link to the state indicates the degree of formalization and has two categories, semi-official and informal links (see also Carey et al 2013). Semi-official PGMs have a formalized and official link to the government, although separate from the regular forces. The government might have established the group by official decree or law and members may receive some regular compensation for the time devoted to the organization. The Home Guard in India or the Revolutionary Guards in Libya fall into that category. Informal militias have no formalized link to the state, even though their connection to the government might be widely known within the country, or it might be denied by the

government. Examples include the Interahamwe Militia in Rwanda or the Shabiha militias in Syria.

The second dimension of our typology captures the link of the pro-government militia to society, using information on membership. We identify four categories on this dimension: (1) local and neighborhood-based membership, (2) ethnic, religious or nationalist membership, (3) ideological or party-political membership, and (4) non-civilians, which include (former) policy, military, and mercenaries. Table 1 labels each of the eight stylized types of pro-government militias that follow from our categorization, and presents the level of risk we expect such groups to pose for the stability of the state, and for civilians. We list an example for each category. In the following, we explain the choice of dimensions and discuss what implications we draw and what research questions we generate from classifying militias in this way. We finish with the limitations of the typology and the alternatives.

Link to the State: Informal versus Semi-Official Pro-Government Militias

The link to the state is an essential feature of a pro-government militia. Francis (2005:3), focusing on "civil militias" in Africa, conceptualizes militias on a public-private continuum. We collapse the continuum into two categories. Semi-official PGMs are comparable to what Dowdle (2007) labels "paramilitary forces," although he includes police forces, and closely resemble "First Generation civil militias" (Francis 2005:2) and "legitimate militias" (Francis 2005:3). According to Francis, "Legitimate militias are public 'institutions' regulated by and under the control of the state. They are however private in the sense that they are drawn from the civilian populace." (ibid.)

Semi-official PGMs also resemble what Yoroms (2005:34) identifies as state legitimate vigilantes or auxiliary forces within his framework of a "state-centric theory of militias," and the counterbalancing forces identified by de Bruin (2015). De Bruin's classification includes groups with a formalized link to government such as presidential guards and state-run popular militias. But in contrast to semi-official PGMs, de Bruin excludes groups under direct military control and outside a 60 miles radius of the capital, and includes some forces within the regular security apparatus, such as militarized police.

Informal militias have no officially sanctioned link to the government. The connection might be clandestine, but does not have to be. The group's leader could report to or be a member of the state, the group might receive weapons or training from the government, or carry out joint operations with the police or military. Informal militias include what others have labeled death squads, paramilitaries, proxy militias, or surrogates if they are on the government side (e.g., Alvarez 2006, Campbell & Brenner 2002, Huggins 1991a:4, Mason & Krane 1989, Mazzei 2009, Schneckener 2006). They are similar to "Second Generation civil militias" (Francis 2005:2), although not restricted to weak or failed states.

Figures 1 and 2 show the global distribution of pro-government militias, aggregating the number of groups per country between 1981 and 2007. These and the subsequent maps were created using CShapes (Weidman et al. 2010). Figure 1 plots informal and Figure 2 semi-official PGMs. Pro-government militias are most frequent in Africa and Asia, with informal PGMs being more common than semi-official PGMs. The maps are based on conservative estimates, as umbrella groups are often captured as only one group, and because of reliance on news sources (Mitchell & Carey 2013). The

maps reveal PGMs present in Western European countries. During the Cold War, many

countries in this region had a "Gladio" group, which were groups supported by NATO
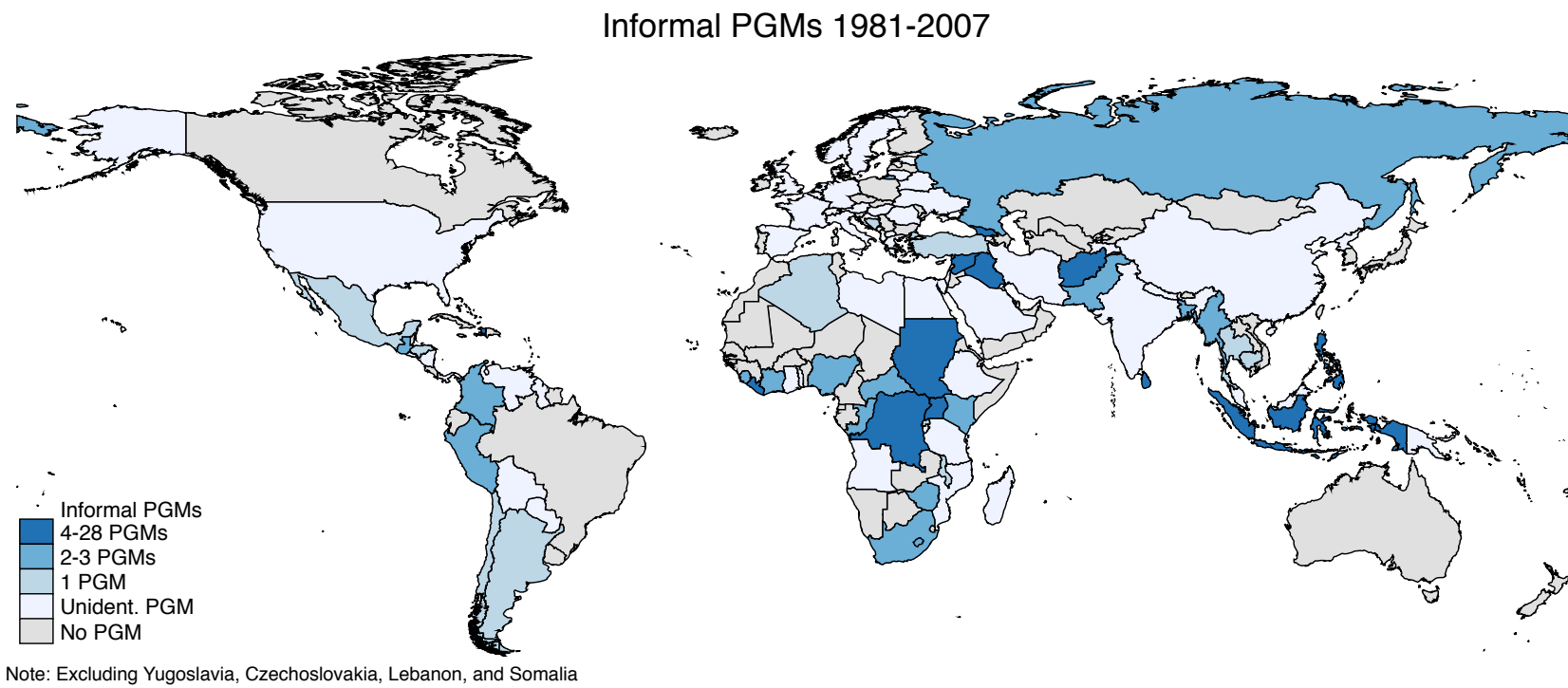
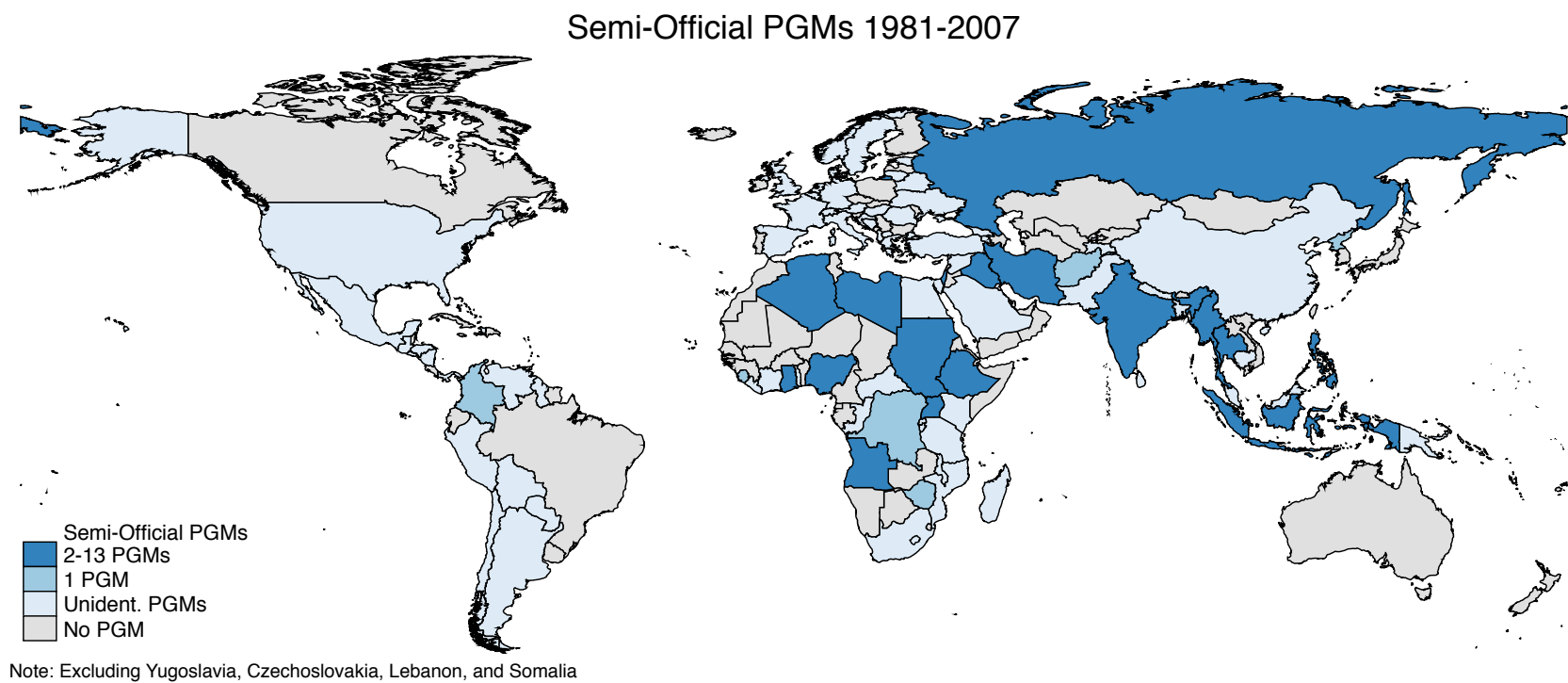**Figure 1. Informal PGMs 1981-2007**

Informal PGMs 1981-2007

Note: Excluding Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia

Figure 2. Semi-Official PGMs 1981-2007

Semi-Official PGMs 1981-2007

Semi-Official PGMs
- 2-13 PGMs
- 1 PGM
- Unident. PGMs
- No PGM

Note: Excluding Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia

in preparation for a Soviet invasion (Ganser 2005). They are a difficult case. While they had a formalized link to the government, acknowledgement of that link was closely held and not public, distinguishing them from semi-official groups, and from informal groups.

The militia-state link provides insights into other characteristics of PGMs. It influences the degree of militia discretion and the ease with which the state exercises control over the militia, which lets us derive specific expectations about the groups' behavior and their consequences.

Control and state weakness versus stability. The control the government exercises over its militias has consequences for state failure and for the treatment of civilians. Control depends on the nature of the relationship between the government and its agents. It depends on the goal variance between the government and the agent and the balance of information between the two. Agents with private agendas, with goals differing from those of the government principal, and with an information advantage over the principal, will be difficult to control (e.g., Miller 2005). Formalizing the link to irregular armed groups increases transparency, decreases the information gap, and creates a degree of accountability. These groups are less likely to attract opportunists and extremists, and recruits may value their position due to more adequate compensation. Groups that operate at an arm's length from the state are more difficult to control and to discipline, therefore more likely to pursue corrupt or private goals. Weak control could be the result of a strategic choice to give discretion to the (informal) security apparatus, or it could result from governments' weakness in failed or failing states.

The literature suggests an endogenous relationship between PGMs and state failure. PGMs can be both a contributor to and consequence of state weakness and state

failure. A government's failure to provide security can motivate groups within society to create militias. For example, on the initiative of market traders and citizens, several vigilante groups, such as the Bakassi Boys, emerged in Nigeria in the late 1990s in response to a massive increase in violent crime (Jones 2008:6). But while fighting crime, the vigilante groups summarily executed and tortured hundreds of people, without being held accountable for these actions (Human Rights Watch 2002). The federal government eventually banned the vigilantes, yet it was difficult to demobilize them. They had the backing of state governors, who used them against political opponents (Harnischfeger 2003:27). While these groups emerged to fill a local power vacuum, they challenged the authority of the formal state apparatus and put citizens at risk while fighting crime.

Klare (2004) emphasizes the control problems raised by militias. He argues that the process of state failure usually becomes irreversible "when armed militias emerge or the official security forces break up into semi-autonomous bands" (Klare 2004:116). The "internal arms race" leads to the privatization of security and to a diversion of funds away from productive activities, accelerating state decay (Klare 2004:120). Bates (2008) uses militias as an indicator for state failure. But in doing so, he assumes rather than tests the consequences for political order and state failure (see Fearon 2009). Reno (1999) finds a weak state might often have strong informal political networks. Under such conditions informal militias might be a result and indicator of weak formal political institutions while simultaneously strengthening informal rule and networks. State weakness may produce "bottom up" militias. Alternatively governments in weak states might mobilize militias as a more cost-effective solution to (perceived) security concerns. Ahram (2013:497) suggests that with genocide, governments in states with low coercive capacity resort to militias to implement violence.

In contrast to informal militias, semi-official militias are less likely to be related to state failure. The bureaucratic and financial costs of a formalized relationship are likely to deny failed states this type of security actor. Dowdle (2007) suggests that paramilitary organizations can only exist when governments allocate substantial resources to security. This argument is supported by the finding that higher levels of economic development increase the probability of semi-official militias (Carey et al forthcoming), while informal militias are more likely to be found in poorer countries (Carey et al 2015). Beyond resources, the government has better levers to control and demobilize semi-official militias. These types of groups may even contribute to stability, according to research on coup-proofing (e.g., Belkin & Schofer 2003, Pilster & Böhmelt 2012). Governments create reliable parallel forces to protect themselves against a coup d'état (Carey et al forthcoming). De Bruin (2014) suggests that leaders oftentimes use parallel forces to prevent a coup, but since counterbalancing makes battlefield coordination more difficult, leaders that also face a high risk of war are less likely to modify their security forces in this way. Dowdle (2007:166) argues that paramilitaries result from clientelistic politics and from an exchange which provides resources to the paramilitaries and security to political leaders. Clientelistic benefits encourage loyalty. In short, a government's risk of betrayal is lower with semi-official militias. Semi-official PGMs are more closely monitored, and are likely to benefit more from remaining loyal than informal militias..

As Figure 1 indicates, and some research suggests, there is no necessary connection between state failure and militias (e.g., Ahram 2011a, Campbell & Brenner 2002, Mazzei 2009, Raleigh 2014). Ahram argues that while militias do not mean state failure, they constrain the ability to monopolize violence. He suggests that working with them is a "better alternative than waiting in vain for strong states to arrive" (Ahram

2011a:188). Local militias active in areas of state decay are Raleigh (2014) "local security providers." But state decay is only one relevant context, according to Raleigh's analysis of African militias (2014: 3) and to the case literature. Comparing East Timor with Aceh, Barter (2013) observes a variety of militias to be found even under the same regime. He suggests that militias that form in regions where the state is weak and rebels are strong respond to "local security dilemmas" (2013:78). Those local groups pursue defensive strategies, whereas those that are organized by the state and where rebels are weak display opportunistic and predatory behavior (Barter 2013).

Control and predatory behavior. The link between state and militia shapes the group's behavior towards civilians. In delegating sovereign tasks to non-state organizations, governments yield control and lessen accountability. Two levels of delegation increase the danger to civilians by encouraging predatory and opportunistic behavior. First, the external or agency level of delegation occurs between organizations, from the state to the militia. Second, the internal or agent level of delegation from leader to individual agents occurs within organizations. At the agency level governments have most control when delegating security tasks within the state structure to regular forces within the chain of command. Of course this does not guarantee control. Even the most professional militaries have control problems, as the depiction of "bad apples" at Abu Ghraib illustrates (Mitchell 2012, Morrow 2007). Investigating when states follow the laws of war, Morrow points to the central importance of principal-agent problems, or what he labels "the central role of noise" (2007:571). Furthermore, the logic of delegation does not imply that violence against civilians is always and only a consequence of control problems. Violence might be ordered by the principal and carried out by the agent, notably under conditions where the principal has motivation to

harm or kill civilians (e.g., Mitchell 2004, Valentino 2004) and does not fear accountability. Under these conditions regular forces, semi-official or informal militias will commit violations.

If the government chooses to delegate a security task to non-state groups, as the amount of "daylight" between the government and the agency increases, control decreases (Fiorina 1985). The amount of "daylight" is greater with informal PGMs, therefore the risk for civilians is higher with these groups. At the internal agent level, within militias members may be more or less well-controlled by their leaders. Particularly in informal militias, recruitment procedures are less rigorous, training is more rudimentary, and sanctions are less predictable. While semi-official groups commit violations – for example there were reports of rape by the Village Guards in Turkey (Vick 2002) and by the Afghan Local Police, the local militias legalized in 2010 (Goodhand & Hakimi 2014) – there is a yet greater risk with informal groups. These may attract extremist or opportunist members (Kaldor 2007, Ron 2002), who are less concerned about reputational damage resulting from the use of violence. They are likely to be less concerned to impart a sense of probity in carrying out the task to members of the groups and less equipped to enforce a code of conduct. Therefore, the more loosely connected the group is to the state, the more likely it is that PGM members use violence for their own benefit, for example to loot or to settle private disputes. Ron's investigation of Serbian groups describes members as often "unemployed Serbian males in search of booty and cheap wartime thrills. In some case recruited directly from prisons" (2002:297). Irgun members, one of the militias that operated on Israel's side in the 1948 war, were described by "the mainstream Zionist leadership" as "misguided terrorists… young fanatics crazed by the sufferings of their people into believing that destruction will bring healing" (Morris 2008:30). In short, shirking may result from the

external agency relationship, suggesting "a runaway bureaucracy" (McCubbins et al 1987). Or it may result from the internal agent relationship, suggesting "a runaway agent." Both types of delegation lead to a loss of accountability for violence.

Control and deniability. The degree of control also influences to what extent governments can deny responsibility for the violence these groups perpetrate. Potential control problems create a moral hazard for the leader. The temptation is to shift responsibility for violence to "rogue agents," encouraging often excessive violence and predation by militias to achieve a strategic goal. This dynamic can make militias particularly dangerous for civilians. While semi-official groups allow governments to shift responsibility, it is to a lesser degree than with informal PGMs. The formalization of the link to government shapes the principal-agent relationship where the government either can't or won't control the militias (Mitchell 2004). The discretion given these agents influences the likelihood of violence.

Mitchell et al (2014) outline the moral hazard of the principal when using militias. They find that informal PGMs make government-sponsored killings, torture, and disappearances more likely, while semi-official PGMs do not, in general, influence the risk of such agent-centered human rights violations. Though questioning the relevance of a principal-agent approach, both Stanton (2015) and Cohen and Nordås (2015) suggest that during civil wars, semi-official militias are less likely to commit violence compared to informal militias. Alvarez (2006:18) emphasizes the plausible deniability such forces offer governments, arguing the type of personnel in militias, together with less control, produces "violence without limits" (2006:22). Carey et al (2015) show that governments are most likely to have informal links with armed groups if their country is distant from but highly dependent on aid from democratic countries. This constellation provides incentive to deny the use of violence. Kirschke (2000) and Roessler (2005)

argue that during externally driven democratization in sub-Saharan Africa, leaders distanced themselves from the violence by using informal repression against the opposition.

While some research suggests that armed groups with informal links to government increase the risk for civilians, Stanton (2015) and Cohen and Nordås (2015) question the delegation logic by comparing the violence committed by militias to those committed by regular forces. They draw the implication that governments that have militias will then not use regular forces to commit violence against civilians. Therefore, militias are conceived as substitutes (Cohen & Nordås 2015, Stanton 2015) rather than collaborators and force multipliers to regular forces (e.g., Alvarez 2006, Carey et al 2015). The disagreement is also about where the logic applies. Regular forces may be so poorly trained that they suffer similar agency problems to militias (Mitchell 2004, Morrow 2007). Empirically, the next steps would be to extend the analysis both within and outside civil wars, and to control for the size of the different forces involved. Government forces might commit more violence simply because there are more of them and, when committing human rights violations, these forces are likely to attract more attention from the sources used to code the data.

Open questions drawn from the state-militia link.   Are militias causes or consequences of state failure and are militias linked to higher levels of predatory violence? These are questions with theoretical salience, with interesting measurement issues, and with important policy implications. There is rich variation among pro-government militias and the "probity" and humanitarian risks of delegating the sovereign task of security to them are expected to be similarly variable.

For predatory violence, it is particularly difficult to gather reliable actor-linked information on a cross-country and cross-temporal scale. Coding violence against civilians is often restricted to countries satisfying the arbitrary civil war threshold, and based on news sources, which rarely provides a representative and unbiased sample (see Gohdes 2014, Gohdes & Price 2013). Reports from international human rights organizations are also unlikely to give equal coverage across groups, regions, and topics. Coding problems are accentuated when trying to identify and code the violent behavior of militias. With some exceptions, such as Iraq and Syria, irregular forces are often not well known at the time and generally attract less attention from the media or human rights organizations compared to regular forces or rebel groups, making it difficult to assess the real risk of militia violence (Ahram 2011a, Stanton 2015). Beyond clarifying theoretical arguments, collecting reliable data on militia activities requires more attention to data generating processes, possibly by focusing on particular areas or time periods only (see Price et al 2015).

Existing research points towards a tension between militias filling a vacuum of state control to provide basic protection of civilians (e.g., Ahram 2011a, Barter 2013), and militias being integral to state failure by undermining the state and its ability to provide security and welfare for its citizens (e.g., Bates 2008, Reno 2007). Bates (2008) suggests simultaneity between the rise of militias and state failure in Africa. Measuring state weakness and failure is not straightforward (e.g., Iqbal & Starr 2015) and the failure may not be uniform across a country. One avenue of research is work on the likelihood of betrayal by PGMs (Otto et al 2015). More empirical work is needed to clarify the relationship between state failure, weakness, instability, and militias. Why do some weak states allow and why do others encourage the formation of militias? Relatedly, how do states recover the monopoly of violence and by what means? Besides

case examples (e.g., Giustozzi 2011) we have little systematic understanding of when and why the link between the militia and the state breaks off and what then happens to these groups. Presumably semi-official militias are easier to demobilize or to integrate into the regular military than informal PGMs, while those groups might turn into private armed forces of warlords (Marten 2006) or become criminal gangs. The death or criminal or political "afterlife" of militias is unexplored territory. New data on side-switching by armed groups by Otto et al (2015) allow us to investigate why rebel groups join the government side and why PGMs turn against the state. A better understanding of what happens when these groups cease to be pro-government militias is important for evaluating the medium and long-term consequences of using militias to provide security in weak states.

The state-militia link and the control issue raise further questions about the effectiveness of PGMs. Are semi-official PGMs indeed effective in preventing coups and when do militias successfully strengthen a government's rule? Are informal or semi-official PGMs the more effective tool in counterinsurgency campaigns? Could semi-official, or informal, PGMs be a more cost-effective strategy for states with limited resources? Finally, the degree of control most likely influences the prospects of domestic or international legal consequences for leaders resulting from crimes committed by PGMs. Future research might investigate the effectiveness of domestic and international institutions in holding governments and members of militias accountable for war crimes and human rights violations, and whether semi-official or informal status makes a difference. The wrongdoing of militias is partly a function of their link to the state, but it may also depend on the membership they attract and on the type of pre-existing social cleavages that they form around and social and political institutions in which they incubate.

Table 1   **A typology of pro-government militias**

Link to society	Link to state	
	Informal	**Semi-official**
Local	Community militias	Formalized CMs
Risk to state	Low	Lowest
Risk to civilians	Low/medium	Lowest
Example	Anti-Aceh-Separatis Front (Indonesia)	Civilian Defence Patrols (Guatemala)
Ethnic/nationalist/ religious	Ethnoreligious militias	Formalized EMs
Risk to state	High	Medium
Risk to civilians	Very high	High
Example	Interahamwe Militia (Rwanda)	Crimean Cossacks (Ukraine)
Ideology/political party	Political militias	Formalized PMs
Risk to state	High	Low
Risk to civilians	Very high	High
Example	ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe)	Pemuda Panca Marga (Indonesia)
Non-civilians, incl. (former) policy, military, mercenaries	Off-Duty militias	Parallel Forces
Risk to state	Low	Low
Risk to civilians	Very high	High
Example	AUC (Colombia)	Operation Vigilance (Nigeria)

Link to Society: The Importance of Membership Characteristics

The second dimension of our typology is the militia's link to society. As with other organizations, multiple demographic, economic, religious, and ethnic cleavages can be used as markers. Scholars sort out dominant from secondary cleavages in describing the support for peaceful political opposition as with the development of political parties or armed opposition as with rebel group formation (Cederman et al 2010, Lipset & Rokkan 1967). The challenge is to distinguish primary cleavages from those that "proved

temporary and secondary" (Lipset & Rokkan 1967:1), as was done so effectively for political party alignment.

Sometimes cleavage loyalties converge. For example, the members of the Popular Committees, or al-Lijan al-Sha'biyah militias, in Syria can be described as ethnic/religious recruits or political party activists and include members of the security forces. Furthermore, the most salient marker may change over time. Thirty years ago Horowitz (1985:13) noted social scientists' surprise at the "increasing prominence of ethnic loyalties" in conflicts. Changing cleavage loyalties may reflect what a leader judges will mobilize support. Yugoslav communists may become Serbian nationalists, insurgencies may appeal on Maoist or indigenous ethnic references in India, or with the German invasion Stalin shifted the basis of mobilization in the Soviet Union from ideological communism to nationalist "Mother Russia."

PGMs, like rebel groups, are configured by the social and political environment and grow out of existing institutions, churches, political parties, and rural communities (Clayton & Thomson 2015, Mazzei 2009, Staniland 2015b, Stanton 2015). While political change can be rapid and abrupt, and there are inevitably difficult cases requiring judgment, the basic characteristics of the militia membership should provide valuable insights into the survival, behavior, purpose and success of the group. We identify four categories of membership: (1) local, (2) ethnic, nationalist, or religious, (3) ideology or political party identification, or (4) non-civilian, which include (former) police, military and mercenaries.
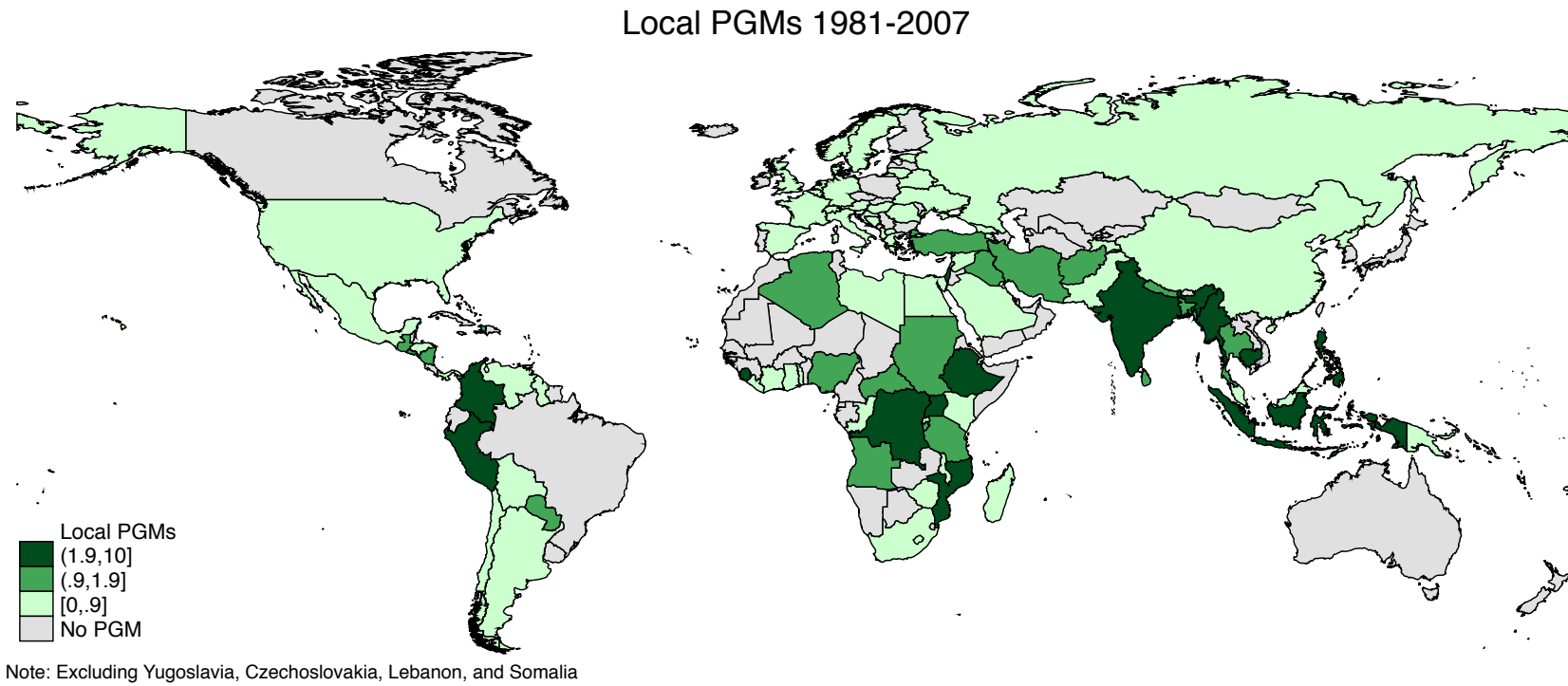
Local links to society: Community militias.   Militias that are drawn from the local population and are only active within their area of origin have received particular attention by scholars (e.g., Barter 2013, Clayton & Thomson 2014, Clayton & Thomson

2015, Peic 2014). Citing examples from Europe and America until the mid-20th century, Okumu and Ikelegbe (2010:4/5) point out that historically "quasimilitary" militias were part-time local defense organizations responding to emergencies. We adopt the term "community militias" from Yoroms (2005:35) for groups made up of citizen-soldiers that are recruited, stationed, and active within their communities. Their members often receive basic military training, assist the state in protecting and defending the status quo, often complementing regular forces, and help "to decentralize the cumbersome processes of security watch." (Yoroms 2005:36). In a similar context, Jentzsch et al (2015:4) refer to "community-based militia formation and mobilization."

Figure 3 maps the number of community militias in a country between 1981 and 2007 (Mitchell & Carey 2013). Indonesia has had the most (10), followed by the Philippines (6), India and Uganda (both 4).

While community militias are neither conceptually nor empirically limited to civil wars, research often examines the role of such forces within armed conflict, usually under the label of civil defense forces (CDFs). Clayton and Thomson (2015) define civilian defense forces as pro-government militias recruited from the civilian population, operating within the area from which they are recruited, and pursuing defensive strategies (see also Peic 2014). CDFs might be formally recognized or created by the government, falling into the category of semi-official militias, or they develop bottom-up from within society and maintain only loose links with the state as informal militias. Some groups change their link to the state. For example, in Peru during the 1970s the *rondas campesinas* were formed by peasants initially to combat cattle thieves. In the 1980s, these local groups organized against the Maoist insurgent group *Sendero Luminoso* and received support from the government, primarily in form

Figure 3. Local PGMs 1981-2007

Local PGMs 1981-2007

Local PGMs
- (1.9,10]
- (.9,1.9]
- [0,.9]
- No PGM

Note: Excluding Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia

of weapons. In 1991 President Fujimori passed a law to give these "self-defense committees" a legal status (Fumerton 2001, Starn 1999).

The characteristic of local membership has implications for levels of violence and the predatory nature of PGMs. Belonging to their communities (Yoroms 2005:35/36), they are embedded in horizontal accountability towards their fellow citizens. A member of a community militia, with a gun and some authority, might have local scores to settle and some opportunities to take advantage. But CMs have organizational features that lend themselves to fewer agency problems and violence against civilians. Given the local nature and a limited operational span, they should have fewer monitoring problems than other types of militias. In case of wrongdoing, CMs agents cannot exit easily. With themselves and family members in the area, they are vulnerable to sanctions. Comparing militias in West Africa, Reno (2007) argues that militias of local political authorities that benefited from patronage politics at the national level, could afford predatory behavior towards local communities since they did not depend on local resources. But where local political elites were marginal to the capital-based patronage networks, they needed the support of local authorities for resources and protection. Militias linked to these local political elites could not risk alienating the local population and were therefore less violent and "protector militias." Even if the government's authorization and equipment to use force is diverted to private goods, following Olson's (1993) logic of stationary and roving bandits, predation should be lower in the case of civil defense groups. As a result, various scholars see the advantages of militias linked to local communities (Ahram 2011a, Barter 2013, Clayton & Thomson 2014, Clayton & Thomson 2015, Peic 2014). Clayton and Thomson (2015) find that these civil defense militias possess a specific asset in their capacity to identify insurgents, which then reduces levels of state violence against civilians, although these

citizen soldiers put themselves in the firing line. Yet more research is needed to find out when even local militias turn to extreme forms of violence.

Ethnic, nationalist or religious links to society: Ethnoreligious militias.　　　For many militias, ethnicity may be the dominant link between the group and society. They resemble what Yoroms (2005:37) labels civil society militias, although in our context they require a link to the state. Ethnicity, ethnonationalism, and religion may facilitate communication and coordination, create a sense of belonging, and are potent psychological sources of "out-grouping," providing boundary lines for political exclusion. The Minorities at Risk project focused on the importance of ethnicity to conflict (Gurr 1993). Cederman et al (2010) show rebel groups mobilize on this cleavage. Stanton (2015) codes militias for co-ethnicity with rebels and finds civilians are safer with militias sharing an ethnic identity. Mueller (2004:95) observes ethnicity, like ideology is a basis for organization. But he argues that in the former Yugoslavia, the militias' violence was not about ethnic hatreds but "the focused predation of comparatively small groups of violent thugs and criminals recruited and semicoordinated by politicians." (ibid.) His study suggests that leaders use ethnicity "top-down" as a tool to mobilize militias, rather than a characteristic that intrinsically motivates people to form ethnic militias "bottom-up". Kalyvas (2008:1051) shows that governments in civil wars often structure collaboration along ethnic lines if they have the resources to do so. Ethnic kin groups may also foster state sponsorship of foreign militias. Ron (2003:186) describes Israel collaborating "discretely" with particular ethnoreligious militias with a common enemy – not ethnic kin groups - in Lebanon. If "out-grouping" theory is right, and in the absence of the selection and monitoring

features of communal militias, mobilizing along ethnic, nationalist or religious lines is likely to lead to more extreme forms of violence and instability, particularly for informal militias. They may also pose a threat for the state, if the goal of protecting religious, national or ethnic institutions diverges from state priorities. Following Kalyvas (2008), ethnic groups might defect from the government to join the rebels if they offer better club goods.

Again based on the PGMD, Figure 4 shows the distribution of pro-government militias whose members are identified along ethnic, religious, or nationalist lines. 21 ethnoreligious PGMs were coded for Sudan, followed by Afghanistan (8), Philippines (7), and the DRC, Iraq, and Indonesia (all 6).

Ideology-based links to society: Political militias.   Staniland (2015b) is critical of existing work on militias claiming that it is "apolitical." He points to ideology as neglected factor both as an influence on a government's tendency to align with an armed group, and as a marker for the groups themselves. In many countries political parties form militias or draw armed groups within the service of the party. Perry (2006) documents the wide variety of tasks that the Chinese ruling party used militias for during the 20th century. Occasionally, the process of parties turning (in)to militias might be reversed. The leaders of the armed groups that helped topple the Taliban in Afghanistan shifted from military to political competition. With elections on the horizon, armed groups adjusted to a new type of competition and organized as political parties. Although the electoral law prohibited candidates linked to armed groups, in the 2005 elections only a minority of candidates with militia connections was prevented from competing (Giustozzi 2009:92).
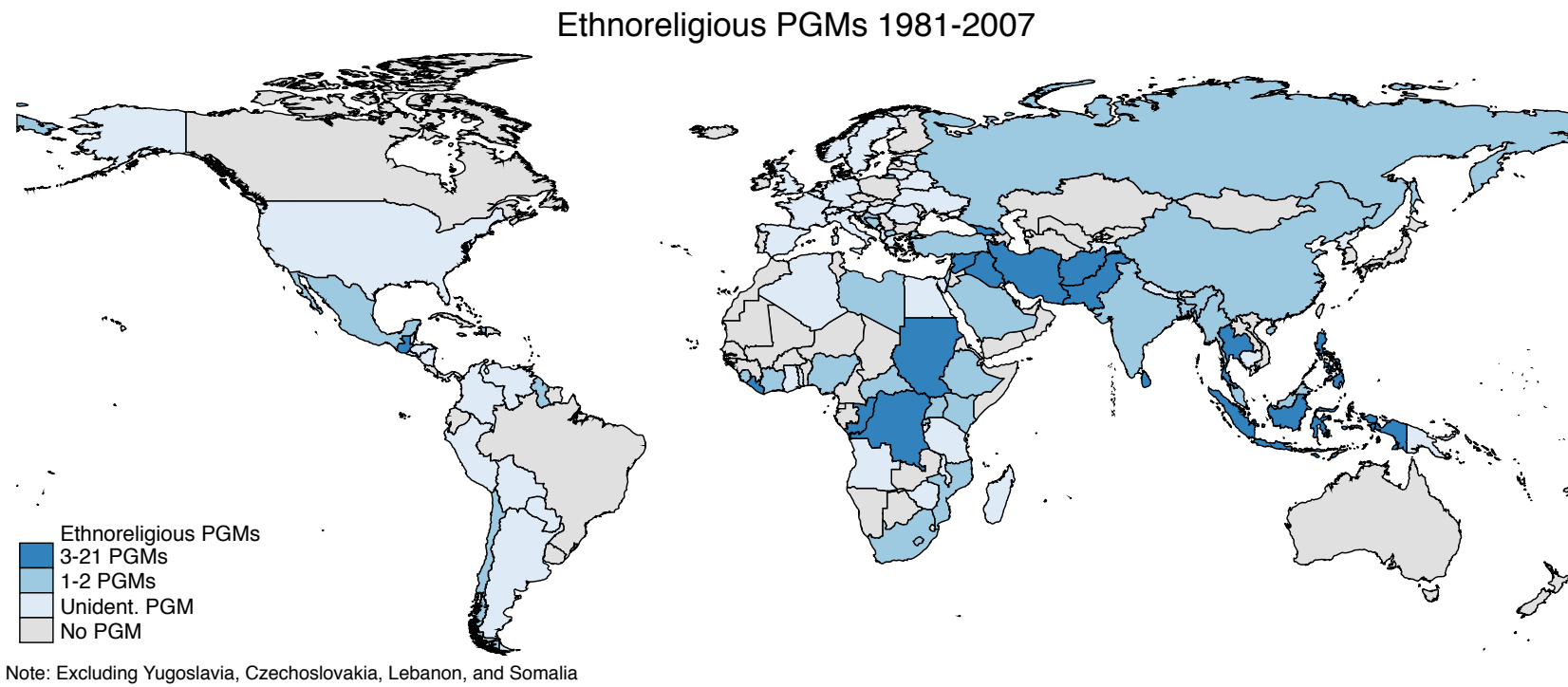
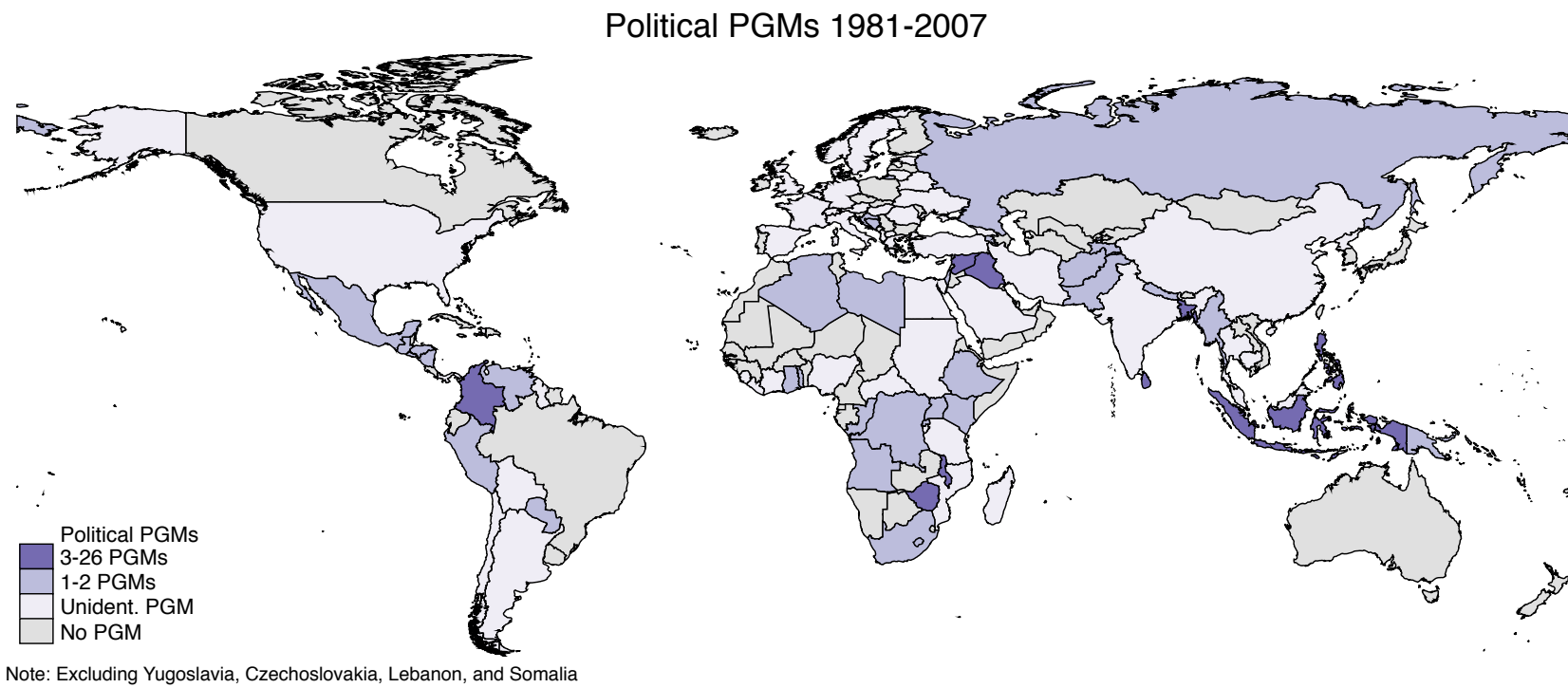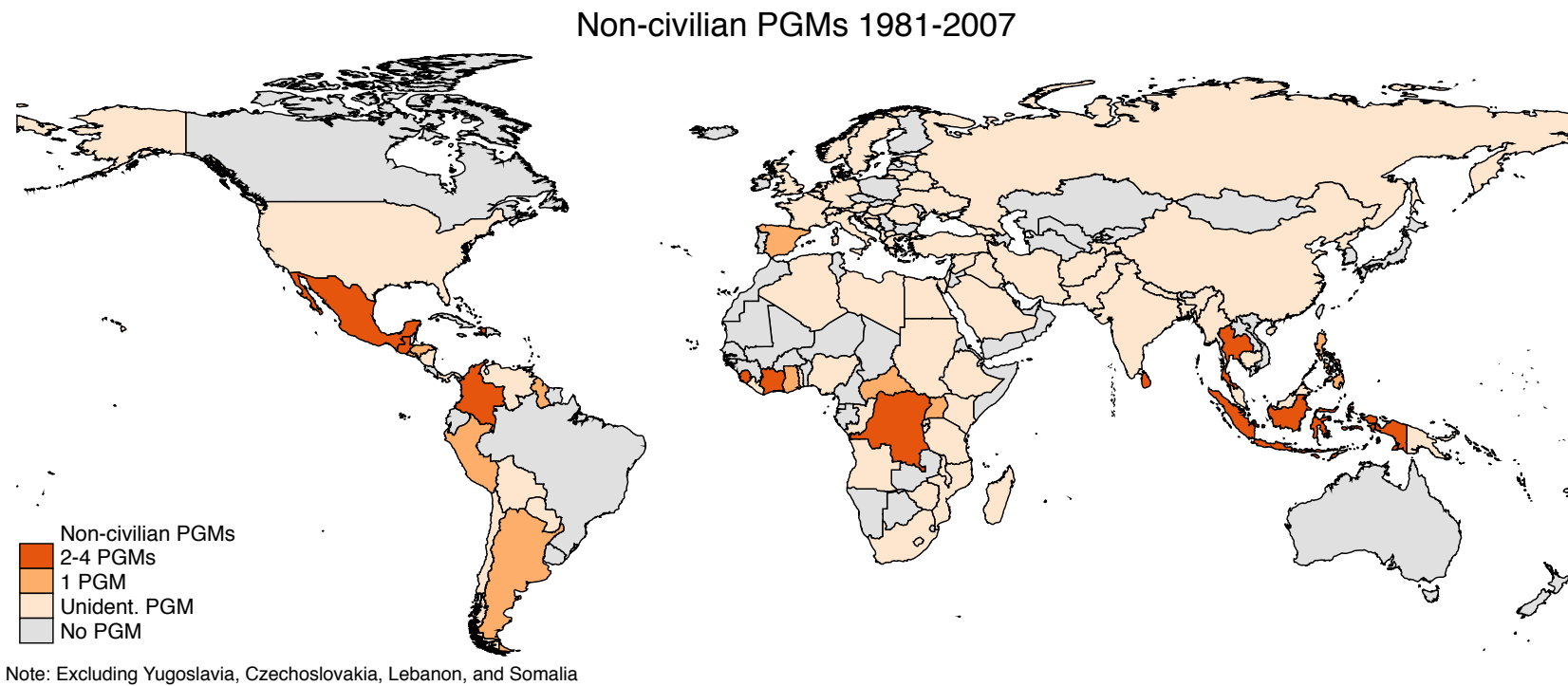## Figure 4. Ethnoreligious PGMs 1981-2007

Ethnoreligious PGMs 1981-2007

Ethnoreligious PGMs
- 3-21 PGMs
- 1-2 PGMs
- Unident. PGM
- No PGM

Note: Excluding Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia

Figure 5. Political PGMs 1981-2007

Political PGMs 1981-2007

Note: Excluding Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia

Figure 6. Non-civilian PGMs 1981-2007

Non-civilian PGMs 1981-2007

Non-civilian PGMs
- 2-4 PGMs
- 1 PGM
- Unident. PGM
- No PGM

Note: Excluding Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia

As with interest groups generally, ideology provides "a purposive incentive" to join the groups (Moe 1980). Anti-communist groups in Central America, Colombia, or Indonesia are examples of militias where ideology is a cleavage loyalty. The Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had armed groups in the state of Chiapas in the 1990s. President Mugabe's ZANU-PF has a militia and a youth wing known as the Green Bombers. But there are cases where ethnic nationalist or religious armed groups are directly linked to political parties and their activities are tied to electoral politics. Wilkinson (2006) describes the electoral incentives that drives the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activists to instigate violence in contexts where minority Muslim votes had no value for it or its coalition partners. But if minority votes matter to the winning coalition, then minorities would be protected. Sometimes political PGMs are so closely connected to the political party that they actively assist leaders to obtain votes in elections (Acemoglu et al 2013, Raleigh 2014). Complementing Wilkinson's subnational analysis in India, more cross-national research is needed isolating conditions under which political parties are likely to find use for militias.

Figure 5 plots the frequency of political PGMs between 1981 and 2007. Indonesia, overall the country with the most PGMs during that time, leads with 26 political PGMs, followed by the Philippines (6), Sri Lanka and Iraq (both 4). Countries with the most political PGMs outside of Asia are Colombia and Zimbabwe (both 3).

Non-civilian PGM members: Off-duty militias and parallel forces. Finally, some PGMs are characterized by a non-civilian membership. They might be regular police or military if they act outside their formal organization, or former members of the regular

security apparatus and mercenaries. Such militias are likely to be clandestine, small, and extremely violent (Campbell & Brenner 2002, Huggins 1991b). Even the name of these groups may be intimidating, e.g. Death to the Kidnappers in Colombia, Ninjas in Algeria and Indonesia, and Green Tigers in Sri Lanka. Most groups in this category have an informal link to the state, aiding deniability for controversial violence. Few semi-official PGMs recruit primarily non-civilians.

Just under half of the countries with PGMs during 1981 and 2007 have non-civilian PGMs. Figure 6 shows their geographic spread. The countries with the highest number of such PGMs are Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, the DRC, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, each with four non-civilian PGMs.

Open questions drawn from the society-militia link.   We started this review by describing the "probity risks" states run in yielding the monopoly of violence and delegating a sovereign task. What makes government decision-makers "risk acceptant," in the language of prospect theory? That theory would suggest it is most likely when state survival is not assured (e.g., McDermott et al 2008). Peic (2014) describes CDFs as a last resort. But beyond the analysis of communal groups or CDFs, and the case literature on death squads, there has been little systematic analysis of the impact of membership characteristics on militia group survival and behavior.

Table 1 summarizes how our typology shapes our expectations about the risks militias pose for the overall stability of a state and for civilians. Militias with a membership that is based on in-group and out-group differentiation, are likely to be particularly violent towards civilians. They provide an exclusionary frame of reference with implications for political violence. This expectation is supported by related

research. Harff (2003) analyzes the impact of exclusionary ideologies on the risk of genocide. Asal and Rethemeyer (2008) examine the impact of religion on terrorist group activities. Local militias are probably the least violent towards civilians, although case studies highlight how quickly the initial defensive purpose turns into unchecked and agent-centered violence, particular in the context of counterinsurgencies (Harnischfeger 2003, Romero 2003). Finally, it is plausible that non-civilian militias are disposed to violence because their members are likely to be most skilled and not averse to using extreme forms of violence.

Membership type also likely influences the probity risk for the state for three reasons. Firstly, PGMs that are smaller because of a low upper limit of potential membership – local militias or non-civilian militias - are likely to pose a smaller risk to state stability than those with the potential of recruiting large parts of society. Ethnoreligious militias and political militias can potentially draw in much larger numbers and therefore might threaten the stability of the state.

The second reason is that the type of members PGMs attract and the bond that exists between them influence the risk they pose for the state. The exclusionary frame of reference of ethnoreligious and political militias may become a liability for a state. The loyalty of these PGMs is primarily linked to ethnic, religious, or ideological institutions rather than to state institutions *per se*, placing these groups as a higher risk to the foundations of a state than local or non-civilian militias. Finally, PGMs that push a larger agenda are more likely to turn against the state than those who have narrower goals. Militias that primarily recruit based on ethnic, religious, nationalist, ideological identifiers are likely to have broader goals potentially in conflict with those of the state. Important questions of how governments might deal with these risks to the state remain unanswered. For example, do governments indicate trust differentials across the

categories in terms of the quantity and quality of arms supplied? The state may mitigate risk by restricting the types of weapons provided (e.g. shotguns to the Rondas in Peru). To know whether these membership characteristics have the expected consequences, we need to know more about defection and predatory violence. Further, the research literature has barely begun to investigate the risks to members of these groups themselves (see Clayton and Thomson 2014 for an exception).

The link to society might help to answer questions about the survival of PGMs. As the research on rebel groups suggest, ethnoreligious cleavages might be the most enduring, particularly if the opportunity costs of leaving these groups are low, e.g. in countries with high unemployment levels and youth bulges (see Urdal 2006). For youth militias connected to political parties in Sierre Leone "a sense of togetherness" was an important motivation for ex-combatants mobilizing (Christensen & Utas 2008:527). As Olson (1965) suggests where incentives are not sufficiently powerful, what role does coercion play? With the ALP in Afghanistan, Goodhand and Hakimi (2014:40-41) note that the "program puts those who are recruited in extreme danger … many of those who join do so because they have little choice, being forced into militias as a result of coercive pressure or economic necessity." Coercion is evident where militias recruit children. Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) point to the individual risks of not joining armed groups. Militia survival will depend on member loyalty if it is a stand-alone organization. It may also depend on other institutions that can subsidize its existence, such as churches, political parties, domestic or foreign governments.

ALTERNATIVE CLASSIFICATIONS OF MILITIAS

We chose the militia's dominant links to the state and to society for the typology because they are conceptually and empirically independent from each other, and have

important implications for the groups' survival and behavior. Previous research identified aspects of both dimensions as important, although usually not in combination or with the same categories (Engels 2010, Yoroms 2005). Concentrating on these links, we have ignored other dimensions used to organize pro-government militias. Two have received attention in the literature. One strand focuses on whether the group was initiated bottom up from within society or top down by the state or a government actor (Barter 2013, Blocq 2014, Jentzsch et al 2015). A second strand identifies militias by the context within which the group is active (e.g., Raleigh 2014).

Jentzsch et al (2015) distinguish state orchestrated or community-based groups in order to understand militia formation and activity. There is some overlap with our distinction between informal and semi-official militias. Bottom-up groups must be informal PGMS - at least in the initial stage - although not all top-down PGMs need to be semi-official. For example, death squads of off-duty security sector personnel are usually covert and informal although likely to be initiated by state actors (e.g., Huggins 1991b). Bottom up or truly grass-roots groups are likely to be rare phenomena. Collective protection tends to depend on an entrepreneurial leader or elite. As Weingast (1997) notes, citizens are unlikely to solve the coordination dilemma and cooperate for their mutual protection themselves. Individuals have diverse interests, and a propensity to let others take the risks. If there are solutions to coordination "it is elites who construct them" (Weingast 1997:246). There are also "insincere" or artificial bottom-up groups. Governments may see a political benefit is claiming a counter-insurgent group is bottom-up or spontaneous (e.g., Salwa Judum in India).

Examining the development of militia organizations in Africa, Raleigh (2014:4) distinguishes militias "by the political context in which groups emerge and are embedded" and includes groups not on the government side. She differentiates

organizations by levels of development (Local Security Providers) and those within a civil war context (Emergency Militias) from those outside this context (Competition Militias). The typology establishes a discontinuity within and outside civil wars. Beyond the arbitrary thresholds used to determine civil wars, some research suggests continuity of organized violence across these periods rather than discontinuity. In Sierra Leone, for example, Christensen and Utas (2008:518) find that civil war violence was "the natural continuation of pre-war political violence … the offshoot of civil war violence in the post-war democratic election campaign is the sustained logic of political youth violence, albeit in democratic guise." While Raleigh's categorization is complicated with intersecting contextual dimensions - state failure, conflict, and regime type –, it recognizes that militias are not confined to periods of civil wars, and that they can have a strategic purpose in democratizing and democratic countries. Acemoglu et al (2013) emphasize this point in their analysis of paramilitaries in Colombia. They stress the "symbiotic relationship with specific politicians holding power: paramilitaries deliver votes to politicians with preferences relatively close to theirs, while politicians they helped elect leave them alone and possibly … support laws and policies that they prefer." (Acemoglu et al 2013:7) We need to know more of the role PGMs play across different forms of political contest and competition, how they shape democratization processes and what form of exchange, money or impunity, takes place between militias and politicians.

CONCLUSION

An emerging if disparate literature addresses the causes and consequences of pro-government militias. We have organized what we know about these groups within a

typology hinging on state and society relationships. We used this classification scheme to derive expectations about the behavior of these groups and the risks they pose for the state and for civilians, and to generate new research questions.

Reducing variation to two dimensions and eight categories trades off some detail for simplicity. Inevitable, too, are difficult cases that are hard to fit into one category. Individual members may group together on a variety of converging cleavages, and judgment is required in deciding whether it is ideology, ethnicity, or the neighborhood that is the salient marker. But sorting out community, ethnoreligious, political, and off-duty militias and their relationship to the state communicates the rich variation among these groups, the social and belief structures separating them, and the efficiency and political gains expected by state officials who use them. New groups form, and given the early state of research in this field, old groups from earlier periods remain to be unearthed, testing how well the typology travels. Of earlier periods, the transition from colonial regimes (Ahram 2011b), with contrasting models of colonial authority, and ill-matched ethnic-national groups and newly independent states, is likely to be a critical juncture. Attention to the strategic behavior of states in linking to these groups and in seeking to match and fragment rebel group formation suggests a larger actor centered research agenda (Bakke et al 2012, Gleditsch et al 2014, Jentzsch et al 2015). Attention to cleavages may not yield anything of comparable power to the "freezing hypothesis" (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) for political party organizations, but they invite investigation.

Understanding the demand and supply of these groups, and their consequences for civilian wellbeing, regime security, and for the international community is a priority for international relations and comparative politics scholars. Important next steps include gathering more information and new data, sub-nationally as well as cross-nationally, on the nature of pro-government militias, their behavior, and their "afterlife"

and systematically assessing their impact on state, society and the international community. In this way, we can expect progress in ascertaining the size of the probity risks political leaders accept in forgoing a monopoly of violence, in assessing how these groups reduce the cost of conflict or make "adventurous" (Avant 2005) behavior more likely, and in understanding who bears the costs.

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Terms:

Pro-government militias (PGMs) are armed groups that have a link to government but exist outside of or parallel to the regular security apparatus, and have some level of organization.

Semi-official PGMs have a formalized and official link to the government, while still being separate from the regular military and police force. The government might have established the group by official decree or law and members may receive some regular compensation for the time devoted to the organization.

Informal PGMs have no formalized link to the state, even though their connection to the government might be widely known within the country, or it might be denied by the government.

Community PGMs are made up of armed civilians recruited, stationed, and active within their communities.

Ethnoreligious PGMs mobilize their members primarily along ethnic, religious, or nationalist lines.

Political PGMs draw their members primarily from the ruling political party or along ideological lines.

Non-civilian PGMs are characterized by members drawn from regular police or military, including former members of the regular security apparatus and mercenaries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT