

Pro-Government Militias Database (PGMD) Codebook

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Project Website & Email:

www.sowi.uni-mannheim.de/militias

militias@uni-mannheim.de

Principal Investigators:

Neil J. Mitchell

School of Public Policy

University College London

n.mitchell@ucl.ac.uk

Sabine C. Carey

Political Science

University of Mannheim

sabine.carey@uni-mannheim.de

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Introduction

The Pro-Government Militias Database (PGMD) contains information about organised armed groups that are identified by documentary, media and other publicly available sources to be pro-government but are not part of regular state security forces. Consistency across sources is checked, but no further claims are made about the accuracy or completeness of this information from these publicly available sources. For some groups there is substantial reporting and information, for others less information is available and there is more missing data.

The information covers 178 countries during the time period from 1981 to 2007 and is not restricted to on-going conflicts. The main unit of observation is the pro-government militia (PGM).

Other labels used for such groups are “militias”, “paramilitary groups”, “irregular forces”, “death squads” or “vigilantes.” Additionally, the dataset includes some private military companies, which are also labelled “military contractor”, “private security company” or “private military firm,” if they satisfy the definition of pro-government militias outlined below and were identified in the search process.

Operational Definition of a Pro-Government Militia (PGM)

We define a pro-government militia as a group that

1. is identified by the source as pro-government or sponsored by the government (national or sub-national),
2. is identified as not part of the regular security forces,
3. is armed and
4. has some level of organisation.

Criterion 1: The group is identified by the source as pro-government or sponsored by the government, either national or sub-national. Evidence that a group does not oppose the

government or that the group shares an enemy with the government is not sufficient for it to be considered pro-government.

Our focus is on national governments and the individual ministerial or institutional links between the government and the militia, but if a group is identified as allied with or backed by a sub-national government and the national (e.g. federal) government is neutral in its position towards this group, it is included as a PGM. However, if sources describe the national (e.g. federal) government as opposed to this group, then it is not classified as a PGM.

We focus on domestic groups, meaning pro-government groups that are active within their own borders. Groups can be sponsored, trained or originate from other countries, but they need to be linked to the government of the territory they are based and active in. For private military companies, this means that they are recorded as being present in the country they are operating in, i.e. the country for which they contracted to operate on the government's side.

Criterion 2: The group is not the regular state security force as described in government information or other sources on armed forces and police, although the group may operate with the regular state security forces, or even be composed of members of the security forces organized clandestinely as an unofficial or informal group (death squads). This relationship with the regular forces might include, in addition to sharing of personnel as in the above example, information sharing, joint operations or training. Not identified as PGM are therefore the police, regular military forces or special units that are part of the military.

Criterion 3: The group is armed and equipped for violence, but does not have to commit violence to be included. This criterion is not limited to firearms; some groups are equipped with machetes or clubs.

Criterion 4: The group has some evidence of organisation (for example an identifiable leader, or name, or a geographical, ethnic, religious or political basis) to exclude a "flash" or spontaneous mob.

When an existing group fails to fulfill any of these criteria, then the group is coded as terminated as a PGM according to our definition. The motives of the individual members

of the PGM, or motives of the PGM as a group, whether financial, ideological, religious, or ethnic, are not a criterion for identifying a PGM according to our definition.

Importance of the Project

Pro-government militias can supplement the regular state security forces, and are sometimes referred to as force multipliers. Because of the increasing role of non-state actors generally, and the significant presence that they have had in conflicts across countries and cultures, it is important to collect information on these types of groups and seek to improve transparency on their links to governments. Militias or irregular armed groups are sufficiently common to be described in international law. Article 4 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War provides some protection for “members of other militias and members of other volunteer corps ... belonging to a Party to the conflict...”. Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court separates the organised violence of these types of groups both from mob violence and from the government authorities. By focusing on these organisations, the PGMD allows researchers and policymakers to obtain a more comprehensive estimate of the repressive apparatus of a country than that provided by relying on the size of formal security forces alone.

The Missing Data Problem

The PGMD contains open source information about pro-government armed groups obtained from LexisNexis searches of news sources from around the world. The sources include transcripts translated into English in BBC World Summaries of local news, Agence France Presse, Xinhua General News Service, and major international newspapers. Search terms included “government militia”, “paramilitary”, “government death squads”, “government irregular forces”, and “vigilante” and returned numerous documents, many of them off-topic. While this broad search strategy was heavily labour-intensive, we reduced the risk of missing information. Still, we expect that one problem with the dataset is the likely under-representation of pro-government militias.

As we rely on news sources to describe the link of a group to a government, the other difficulty is the potential misspecification of a PGM's relationship to the government by the source. Using multiple sources through LexisNexis across time is likely to reduce this problem. If the source is ambiguous about the relationship between the national government and the group, or if different sources contradict each other in their classification of the link between the government and the group, more information is sought from country-specific sources and academic research.

Structure of the Database

The PGMD consists of a relational data structure that links sixteen tables representing different aspects of the data, from information about the armed groups themselves, such as their membership and target characteristics, to the documentary evidence researchers used to create the dataset. The relational structure allows separate data matrices to be constructed for any combination of these tables.

The main unit of analysis of the PGMD is the pro-government militia. The PGMD codes a variety of group characteristics, which are time-invariant for the lifetime of the group. This online relational data structure is the most comprehensive version of the data. In addition to this version, we have prepared two downloadable datasets:

1. The PGMD Summary file uses the group as the unit of analysis and contains basic information on each group;
2. The PGMD country-year file uses the country-year as the unit of analysis and contains basic information on the activity and existence of PGMs per country and year.

In the following we first describe the information contained in the complete online database before describing the downloadable datasets.

PGMD Variables

Basic Information

Country name

The country where the PGM is active and the country to whose government the PGM is linked. If a PGM operates in a disputed border region that is subject to competing claims by more than one country, then this region is treated as being part of the country that the PGM is from and claims sovereignty over.

PGM name

The name used in the source to identify the PGM or name of the private military company (PMC) where a group can be identified as such. If the PGM is unnamed, the coders have assigned a descriptive name. Repeated non-specific mentions of militias in a country are included under one PGM if there is no necessary reason to consider that the source is referring to a new or separate militia.

Name assigned by coder

This variable indicates with a Yes/No value whether the PGM name was assigned by the coder rather than taken from the sources.

Date formed or first mentioned

This variable records the exact date when the PGM was formed or first mentioned or the contract started. The group might have been newly created on this date or an already existing group might have become a militia as defined in our criteria outlined above. For example, if a rebel or opposition armed group becomes pro-government because of a change in government, then this variable codes the date of becoming pro-government, not the earlier date in which the group formed as a rebel organisation. The information is recorded as precisely as possible. If a source refers to a range of time instead of a specific time point (for example referring to 'the 1980s' instead of a specific year), then the earliest time point of the given range is coded (e.g. 'the 1990s' is coded as 1990, etc). The format in which the date is presented is YYYY-MM-DD.

Details of Formation

This text field presents additional information and details about the origins of the PGM whenever available.

Date dissolved

This variable records the date when the PGM was dissolved or the contract ended. A group is coded as being dissolved when it no longer fulfils the above identified criteria. This includes the disarmament or banning of the group by the government or its integration into the regular security forces. If a president or party ceases to be in government, then the PGMs affiliated with them also cease to be PGMs. Groups can also cease to be classified as PGMs as a result of a border change. For example, armed groups linked to the Indonesian government were active in East Timor, fighting the independence movement. These pro-Indonesia groups end in our dataset with the transition government that was put in place in East Timor in December 1999, although some of these groups were still active within Timor-Leste after 1999. They were then linked to the Indonesian government, so no longer fit our definition of a domestic pro-government militia. The information is recorded as precisely as possible. If a source refers to a range of time instead of a specific time point (for example referring to 'the 1990s' instead of a specific year), then the earliest point of the given range is coded (e.g. 'the 1990s' is coded as 1990). The format in which the date is presented is YYYY-MM-DD.

Termination

This text field presents additional information and details about the termination of the PGM whenever available.

Successor group

In some cases a group undergoes a name change or the group itself is transformed into a new PGM. If a PGM has a successor group, then the name of this successor group is listed in this field.

PMC

This variable identifies whether the group is a private military company or a private security company. If the group is identified as a PMC, then all recorded information about this group refers to the PMC's activities in that particular country. For example, if a report lists year X as the year in which the PMC was formed, but lists year Y as the year in which the PMC became active in the country of interest, then we record year Y as date of formation.

Link to Government

Government relation

This variable describes the relationship that the PGM has with the government. While all groups in the database are pro-government, they vary with respect to the degree of formality of the link. In some instances the government tries to keep the group at arm's length, while in other cases governments openly include these groups in legislation, reports and official documents. As an effort to capture this type of proximity to the government we use two categories, informal and semi-official PGMs. The main distinction between these two groups is how formally acknowledged the link is between the government and the PGM.

Informal PGMs

Informal PGMs are described as pro-government, government militia, linked to the government, government-backed, or government-allied. They may be armed or trained by the government. The key difference between informal and semi-official PGMs is that the link to informal PGMs is not officially or formally acknowledged. 'Death squads', even when closely linked to the government, are normally informal and clandestine, and are categorized as informal PGMs. Examples include the Janjaweed in Sudan, the Young Patriots in Cote d'Ivoire, the Ansar-e Hezbollah in Iran and the Interahamwe Militia in Rwanda during the early 1990s.

Semi-official PGMs

A semi-official PGM has a formally and/or legally acknowledged status, in contrast to the looser affiliation of informal PGMs. A semi-official PGM might be sub-ordinate to the regular security forces, but is separate from the regular police and security forces. As such, the link between the PGM and the government is more formal and institutionalized, for example by being recognized and acknowledged in official and legal documents of the state. But the group is identified as a distinct organisation from the regular security forces as with Village Defence Committees in India.

Paramilitary does not enter the PGM dataset when the term paramilitary is used to refer to regular forces, i.e. police units with military status, as in the case of the French gendarmes or Italian carabinieri.

Government link

This variable specifies the nature of the link between the PGM and the government authority. A PGM can have multiple links to government. We identify four possible links:

Person/Minister

The PGM is linked directly to a specific person, such as the president or a minister. For example, this might be the case if a PGM was created directly by the president.

Political party

The PGM is linked to a political party.

State/Military institution

The PGM is linked to an institution of the state, including the military.

Sub-national government

The PGM is linked to a sub-national government, such as a state in a federal system.

Training and equipment

We record whether the PGM has been trained by government forces or has received equipment, such as arms or provisions, from the government.

Shared information or joint operations

We record whether the PGM has received information from the government related to the PGM's mission or whether the PGM has carried out operations jointly with the government, for example with regular police or army units. Information sharing captures the government sharing information with and passing information on to the group. If a group passes information on to the government (which the government might not have requested nor potentially have wanted to have), without the government sharing information, then this does not classify as information sharing.

Shared personnel

We record whether members of the government, for example from the executive branch or regular security forces, are also active members of the PGM. Examples of such personnel overlap are instances where soldiers out of uniform participate in death squads.

Types of material support

We record the sources of material support that the PGM has received. Multiple sources of material support are possible. As the range of sources was unknown prior to the search, coders could add categories of support as they found them. We record a wide range of sources of finance, payment, supply or maintenance, including among others corporations, landowners and foreign governments.

State sponsor

We record if a foreign country is coded as source of finance and support. In such a case we also record the name of the foreign country.

Other connection

This text field captures any other reported connection not identified under the above categories.

PGM Characteristics**Location**

This field records the main location of PGM activities as precisely as the sources allow.

Force strength

This information consists of two fields. We record minimum and maximum figures for the force strengths of the PGM. If only one figure is given by the source, then we record this figure as maximum. If PGM is a PMC, force strength refers to the staff of the PMC that were active in the particular country, not the strength of the PMC as a whole.

Membership

This field records the main characteristics of PGM members. Multiple categories are possible. As the range of members was unknown prior to the search, coders could add categories of members as they found them. Examples of membership include ethnicity, religion, ideology, children, security forces and urban.

Target

This field records the group that is alleged to be targeted by the PGM. Multiple targets are possible. As the range of alleged targets was unknown prior to the search, coders could add categories of target as they found them. The list of possible targets is wide-ranging. It includes, for example, ethnic groups, civilians, unarmed political opposition and armed opposition groups.

Purpose

We record the purpose of the PGM. Multiple categories are possible. As the range of purposes was unknown prior to the search, coders could add categories of purpose as

they found them. Examples of purpose include the protection of state institutions, protection of the leader, protection of national borders and integrity or self-defence and security.

Other

This text field records any information about the PGM that is not captured by the above variables.

Pieces of Evidence

The Database contains over 3,500 key sources that have informed the coding decisions. To improve transparency of our coding decisions, each coding decision is supported with one piece of information. For reasons of parsimony we did not include all reports on PGMs that we found but only included in the database one item for each (or multiple) coding decisions. The pieces of evidence can be accessed via the online PGMD for each PGM.

PGM Activities

For each PGM we record each year for which we found evidence of PGM activity. Examples of such activities include anything from training exercises, to operations and acts of violence. This indicator is used to generate several country-year variables.

Datasets

The online PGMD is the most complete version of the data and allows users to access the information, including the pieces of evidence, using various filters. Two files are available that contain the core information and are downloadable in ready-to-use formats.

PGMD Summary File

The PGMD Summary File uses the pro-government militia as the unit of analysis. It contains the following variables:

<i>Variable name</i>	<i>Variable label</i>	<i>Description</i>
pgm_id	ID of PGM	Unique identifier for each PGM
country	Country name	Name of the country in which PGM is located
gwno	Country code	Three-digit country code, based on Kristian S. Gleditsch and Michael D. Ward. 1999. "Interstate System Membership: A Revised List of the Independent States since 1816." <i>International Interactions</i> 25: 393-413.
pgm_name	PGM name	Full name of the PGM.
type	PGM type	Identifies whether the PGM is an informal or semi-official PGM based on the criteria described above: Informal, semi-official, or unclear (Unclear) whether the PGM is informal or semi-official.
date_formed	Date formed	Exact date of when the PGM was formed or first mentioned, based on the criteria defined above in the variable description. Format YYYY-MM-DD
date_dissolved	Date dissolved	Exact date of when the PGM was terminated, based on the criteria defined above in the variable description. Format YYYY-MM-DD
last_activity	Year of last activity	This variable lists the last year for which we found evidence of PGM activity, based on the variable <i>PGM Activity</i> described above. Note that as the data ends in 2007, for some PGMs the last year of recorded activity will be 2007. This variable <i>is not</i> the same as PGM termination.

PGMD Country-Year File

This dataset uses the country-year as the unit of analysis. It contains the following variables:

<i>Variable name</i>	<i>Variable label</i>	<i>Description</i>
country	Country name	Name of the country in which PGM is located
gwno	Country code	Three-digit country code, based on Kristian S. Gleditsch and Michael D. Ward. 1999. "Interstate System Membership: A Revised List of the Independent States since 1816." <i>International Interactions</i> 25: 393-413.
year	Year	Country year.
activity_all	PGM activity	Collapses <i>PGM activity</i> from the full database into a country-year format. The variable is coded "1" for each observation where we recorded an activity for at least one PGM in that particular country-year.
activity_informal	Informal PGM activity	Like variable <i>activity_all</i> , but only coding activities of informal PGMs.
activity_semiofficial	Semi-official PGM activity	Like variable <i>activity_all</i> , but only coding activities of semi-official PGMs.
presence_all	Presence of PGMs	For each country it codes all years as "1" from the first year (based on the earliest <i>date formed</i>) to the last year (based on latest <i>date dissolved</i>) when the country had at least one PGM. Where there is missing information on <i>date dissolved</i> , the country is presumed to have PGMs until the end of the dataset.
presence_informal	Presence of informal PGMs	Same coding procedure as for <i>presence_all</i> , but only counting informal PGMs.
Presence_semiofficial	Presence of semi-	Same coding procedure as for <i>presence_all</i> , but only counting semi-

	official PGMs	official PGMs.
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Country Notes

Below we provide information about specific countries and PGMs as additional information on the coding decisions.

Afghanistan

For Afghanistan, we assume that our data suffers from under-reporting and therefore underestimates the number of PGMs in the country.

A number of private security/military companies have had contracts in Afghanistan to provide a range of security and security-related services including training of the Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army, logistical support, maintenance, intelligence, de-mining, and poppy eradication. These companies include DynCorp, World Security Initiatives, MPRI, Aegis, Global Risks Group, Armour Group, Ronco, Saladin Security, Gardaworld. One source has identified 90 Afghan and foreign companies by name, but estimates the total number of companies operating in Afghanistan is as high as 140 (see Ulrike Joras and Adrian Schuster eds., *Private Security Companies and Local Populations: An Exploratory Study of Afghanistan and Angola*, Swisspeace, April 2008). In 2007, the Afghan Interior Ministry estimated the number of private security companies at 60 with some 11,000 weapons (“Private guns for hire,” *National Post*, 22/11/2007). These companies are not the principal focus of this research project and search procedures. There is a separate and well-established literature on these companies (see Peter W. Singer. 1997. *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military*. Cornell University Press; Deborah Avant. 2005. *The Market for Force*. Cambridge University Press).

The UN/Japan Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups programmes in Afghanistan have had unintended consequences. By June 2008 the government claimed to have disbanded 300 illegal armed groups (see UN, Afghanistan’s New Beginnings Programme). To avoid these programmes, one option for government officials and heads of militias is the device of a private security company – see Sherzai in the database. Foreign-owned companies also use local militias and by

one estimate '80% of PSC staff in Afghanistan have a militia background' (see Swisspeace 2008, 13).

Bangladesh

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal: The group was connected to a political party, the BNP, which was defeated in the election of 1996. The BNP came back into government in 2001. So they were not a PGM from 97- 2000.

Burundi

The militia 'Sans Eche' is not included in the database. This group is a Tutsi militia, supporting the Tutsi military but fighting against the Hutu government. They supported Buyoya's election campaign in 1993, but he came second in the election. The group was dissolved when Buyoya took power in a coup in 1996, so they ceased to exist at the time when they would have become a PGM.

Chile

The militia 'Trizano' is excluded due to insufficient information. There is some evidence that it is a death squad linked to the government (see eg. NYT 20 Nov 1987).

Colombia

The militia 'Black Eagles' (Aguilas Negras) is excluded due to insufficient evidence on link to government. The Washington Post (2008-09-25): "All this reinforces the suspicion about a connection between some people close to Uribe and some very unsavory characters," said Michael Shifter, a senior analyst who tracks Colombia for the Inter-American Dialogue, a policy group in Washington.

Cote d'Ivoire

The militia 'Patriotic Grouping for Peace' is excluded. Although the group is linked to a member within the government, the group was banned by the government in 2003 (US State Department Report 2006), which is prior to the first date of the group's mention.

Ethiopia

The 'Highlander Militia' is excluded due to insufficient information.

Iraq

The 'Mujahideen Khalq' organization is not included as it is an Iranian exile organization and the target is the Iranian regime.

Kenya

Kenya has a large number of political militias, which are generally linked to individual politicians, but are not clearly pro-government. These groups are not included.

The group 'Kanga Squad' is excluded as it is seen as part of regular police force.

Mexico

The 'Political Investigations' Group is not included as it is based on the testimony of one individual only.

Nigeria

Multiple Nigerian groups are excluded:

- Awkuzu Community Vigilante: not included due to insufficient information about link to government.
- Biu Community Vigilante Group: not included due to insufficient information about link to government.
- Hisba Guards: no indication that the group is armed.
- Operation Sweep: Not included as a special force within the regular security apparatus.
- Operation Zaki: Not included as a special force within the regular security apparatus.

Pakistan

- Jamaat I Islami breaks with President Zia in June 1988 and Prime Minister Sharif in May 1992. Therefore, the group is not a PGM from July 1988 until October 1990.
- MQM: In June 1992 the army cracked down on this group, so cease to be pro-government, and again in 1998. MQM is not a PGM during 1993-1996 and 1999-

2001.

Romania

The 'Vigilante Miners' are not included as there exists insufficient evidence of organisation.

Sierra Leone

- The Civil Defense Force included various ethnic militias (Kamajors, Gbethis, Donsos, Kapras Tamaboro). These are not listed separately as PGMs to avoid double counting.
- Between May 1997 and March 1998 President Kabbah – allied with CDF – was not in capital. Given the annual coding, CDF is listed as pro-government in 1997 and 1998.
- From May 1997-Feb 1998 the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council controlled the capital and were backed by RUF. Therefore, during this time period, the RUF is considered to be a pro-government armed group.
- Sandline employed to counter RUF during this period, but not included in the dataset as RUF formed part of the government during this period.
- The Movement of Concerned Kono Youth MOCKY not included. Though anti-RUF, it is not clearly identified as pro-government.

Sudan

Thourjikany Forces is not included due to insufficient evidence; possibly small splinter group of the South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF).

South Africa

- 31 Battalion and 32 Battalion are excluded as they appear to be part of regular forces.
- Koevoet is not included, as it is unclear whether this is a special unit within the regular forces; the group was integrated into police force in March 1990; active since 1979, evidence refers to activities only outside of South Africa.

Uganda

- The Black Mambas are not included in the database as they appear to be part of the regular forces.
- Operation Wembley is not included in the database as this appears to refer to a mission of regular forces and not a separate group.
- The Violent Crime Crack Unit (VCCU) is not included in the database as this appears to refer to a mission of regular forces and not a separate group.

United Kingdom

There is evidence of collusion between security force units and members of loyalist paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland in late 1980s in particular. Although there were government informers in the groups, the groups are not identified as pro-government and there is no evidence of government ministerial knowledge of the collusion (Guardian 18 April 2003).

United States of America

Evidence suggests that the State Defence Forces are unarmed, except for in Alaska. There is no documentary evidence of operations in which armed groups have been active.

Yugoslavia

The Muslim Defence Force is not included as they are not pro-government.