HYBRID INSURGENCIES AFTER STATE FAILURE: CASE STUDIES OF THE TALIBAN AND MEXICAN CARTELS¹

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INTRODUCTION

“One-and-a-half billion people live in areas affected by fragility, conflict, or large-scale, organized criminal violence, and no low-income fragile or conflict-affected country has yet to achieve a single United Nations Millennium Development Goal (UNMDG). New threats—organized crime and trafficking, civil unrest due to global economic shocks, terrorism—have supplemented continued preoccupations with conventional war between and within countries.”

World Bank, 2011 World Development Report:
Conflict, Security and Development

In the first decades after the fall of the USSR, the field of international relations in the United States was split between hopeful predictions of world peace and bleaker predictions of a “coming anarchy.”⁵ It has since become

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⁵ Haggard, summarizing past work on the decline of US power, noted that the “triumphalism of the immediate Post-Cold War period in the United States has faded,” and that there is a

clear that the pessimists were at least partly correct: failed and failing states are increasingly destabilizing the international system, as the UN Security Council has mentioned international organized crime in about 60% of its resolutions from 2012 to 2017, increasing from about 7% in 2000.⁶

The original pessimists have since been joined by other scholars who identify a rising trend of seeming anarchy connected to international organized crime.⁷ As such, the fields of international relations and comparative politics theory are beginning to take notice of and trying to account for these trends.

But are these trends truly indicative of a state of international anarchy? Certainly, these authors do not refer—and if they do, not exclusively so—to the traditional realist notion of anarchy among states, in which there is no central power governing interstate relations.”⁸ Scholars increasingly refer to a “new” anarchy within rather than between states. Killebrew, for instance, identifies this new anarchy in the rising number of failed states around the world in the twenty-first century.⁹ We find this use of the term questionable in the context

prominent debate within US IR discourse between a “new [realist] pessimism” and a “liberal hopefulness” (Haggard himself favors a third position, liberal pessimism). Meanwhile, other scholars, including Robert Kaplan and Stephen Metz, had already predicted a global rise in instability within states, with Metz even going so far as to associate this with increased insurgent activity—in both cases, another form sort of pessimism. See Stephan Haggard, “Liberal Pessimism: International Relations Theory and the Emerging Powers,” *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 1.1 (2014): 1-3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.3>; Robert D. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* (New York, NY: Random House, 2000): xi; Steven Metz, “The Future of Insurgency,” report, *Strategic Studies Institute*, US Army War College (December 10, 1993): 24-25, <https://perma.cc/5MYH-C56H>

⁶ Mario Silva, *State Legitimacy and Failure in International Law* (Leiden, NLD: Brill Nijhoff, 2014): 1; “Organized Crime and Its Role in Contemporary Conflict: An Analysis of UN Security Council Resolutions,” report, *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime* (September 2018), <https://perma.cc/9GZD-BYP2>

⁷ Robert Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” *Prism* 2.3 (2011): 34-35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26469130>; Ioan Grillo, *El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), loc. 13-15 of 551. See James Cockayne, “Hidden Power: The Strategic Logic of Organized Crime: Sicily, New York and the Caribbean, 1859-1968, and Mexico and the Sahel,” doctoral thesis, King's College London (2015), <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1827521172>

⁸ Moonhawk Kim and Scott Wolford, “Choosing Anarchy: Institutional Alternatives and the Global Order,” *International Theory* 6.1 (2014): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971913000304>; Steven L. Lamy et. al., *Introduction to Global Politics*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 81.

⁹ Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” 35.

of contemporary trends in global insurgency and international crime. Criminal organizations with strong hierarchies and clearly defined leadership, such as the sprawling drug empires based in the Global South, will often finance themselves through illicit activity.¹⁰ However, insofar as these organizations control territory, tax civilian populations under their control, provide basic public services, and attempt to seek legitimacy, they constitute state-like, hierarchical organizations that are equally far from the traditional interstate conception of anarchy. While perhaps appropriate in the heyday of the state as an institution, theories like Kaplan's—based on the simple anarchy-hierarchy divide that Waltz advocated for in 1979—are no longer adequate to describe a world where hundreds of millions live in weak states beset with organized crime and insurgent groups.¹¹

Another way of categorizing rising instability has consisted of theories which group insurgencies into binary categorization schemes, such as *greed* or *grievance*; having either a *political* (state-building/state-weakening) or *criminal* (profit-driven) motivation; and operating either under a paradigm of *commercial* or *ideological* struggle.¹² In trying to simplify and improve upon the difficulties faced by the current state of insurgency theory, we first observed that traditional states of opposition often align roughly with each other: that is, the “greed” label from civil war theory may subsume the “criminal” and “commercial” insurgency concepts, while the “grievance” label could subsume the “political” and “ideological” concepts. But we believe that defining systems of binary oppositions—occasionally growing into larger systems of discrete oppositions—is futile. As we researched this paper, we witnessed again and again how numerous authors either tied themselves into knots trying to fit insurgent groups into a number of discrete categories of anti-state violence, or otherwise simply gloss over the complexity of insurgent groups.¹³

¹⁰Cockayne, “Hidden Power,” 287.

¹¹Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 115.

¹²Derek R. Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels: Mexico’s Commercial Insurgency,” report, *School of Advanced Military Studies*, US Army (2017): 5-6, <https://perma.cc/8KJ2-ERZS>; Paul R. Cooper, “Greed and Grievance? Why Did FARC-EP Leadership Become Involved in the Illicit Trades of Coca-Cocaine and Money Laundering?,” master’s thesis, University of Texas at San Antonio (2014): 3-4, <https://search.pro>

¹³Fitzpatrick sees a “false dilemma” between “crime or insurgency” and “greed or grievance,” and proposes a third category—commercial insurgency—to make up for this gap, a theory which he himself seems to admit is a relatively underdeveloped theory. Meanwhile, Kalyvas, in trying to resist “[the difficulties of] merging the study of crime and political violence,” provides the overly complicated formula of “questioning both the “crime as civil war” and “civil war as crime” models and [advocating] a different strategy of cross-fertilization, one based on the micro-dynamics of

However, this simplification alone is insufficient, and rigid, binary-opposition based theories are likewise inadequate to explain a growing number of hard-to-categorize insurgent groups. We suggest instead that insurgent organizations rarely fit into a clear oppositional greed or grievance-based mold, and may frequently make bids for legitimacy and seek profit—regardless of whether they would, at first glance, fall into a single category. To clarify the complicated state of insurgency theory, this paper proposes a new theoretical framework for the phenomenon of state-like in-surgencies in the post-Cold War Global South. We term these organizations “hybrid insurgent groups” because they have qualities which are typically thought to be opposed—that is, having the aforementioned qualities of a greed or grievance or a political criminal motivation, and either operating under a paradigm of commercial or ideological struggle.¹⁴ Accordingly,

civil war research programs.” On the other hand, Kilbrew tries to argue that “crime, terrorism, and [ideological] insurgency differ mainly in scale” in his conclusion, but spends most of his paper noting how distinct groups in Mexico and Colombia morph between those three distinct categories over time. An example of oversimplification can be seen in the US Government Counterinsurgency Guide’s statements: “some insurgent actors will be more interested in financial reward than ideology,” and “the charisma of insurgent leaders can sometimes be more important than ideology in convincing others to join their movement,” which, while inevitably true, are so vague as to fail to provide a good basis for predicting insurgent group behavior. Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels,” 8; Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1518; Kilbrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” 39-40, 41, 49; “US Government Counterinsurgency Guide,” report, *United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative* (January 2009): 6-7, <https://perma.cc/B8RV-VE64>

¹⁴ To our knowledge, we are not the first to use the term “hybrid insurgency.” Mohamedou uses the idea of a hybrid insurgency to describe the seven layers of identity within ISIS’ self-conception, overall motivations, tactics, and rhetoric. Our definition is different, however, and refers specifically to the binary oppositions noted above, as well as to the relationship of insurgencies to the internationally recognized state in their territory. Insurgencies from one or another end of the spectrum are often said to engage in either state-weakening or competitive state-building. Competitive state-building would imply that the hybrid insurgencies seek to replace as many state structures as possible. On the other hand, state-weakening aims to keep as many state services and simultaneously provide insurgent services for the purposes of making money or supporting legitimacy. In reality, we argue that while some insurgencies may predominantly pursue one strategy or the other, most do a mix of both. See Mohammad-Mahmoud Mohamedou, *A Theory of ISIS: Political Violence and the Transformation of the Global Order* (London, GBR: Pluto Press, 2017): 95, 101. C.f. Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels,” 6; Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 3-4; Cockayne, “Hidden Power: The Strategic Logic of Organized Crime: Sicily, New York and the Caribbean, 1859-1968, and Mexico and the Sahel,” 13-14, 31; Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels: Mexico’s Commercial

we choose to situate these binary (“either-or”) categorizations within a continuous spectrum (See figure 1).¹⁵ For simplicity, we will refer to the ends of the spectrum as *greed-based* and *grievance-based*.

Figure 1: Grouping Types of Insurgencies on the Spectrum

In order to explain the dynamic nature of insurgent groups in the post-Cold-War era, we present two case studies: the drug cartels of Mexico and the Afghani Taliban.¹⁶ Each of these organizations are violent actors that contest military and political power within their respective states, while operating as mega-enterprises with hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenue.¹⁷ The case studies are used to examine how hybrid insurgent groups behave and react to state actions in the post-Cold War Global South. These two organizations and their respective behaviors not only demonstrate the characteristics of hybrid

Insurgency,” 5; Metz, “The Future of Insurgency,” 1518-19.

¹⁵ Cockayne's analysis differs from typical approaches to insurgent groups in his use of ideas from business administration to analyze groups on this spectrum. While a novel and useful addition to political science method, we find that this technique fails to adequately explain the ideological features of these groups, necessitating an argument, like ours, based on the idea of a spectrum. We also note that Korf criticizes the “either-or” greed vs. grievance argument of civil war literature, and that Dishman proposes a spectrum for terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations; however, neither pertain to hybrid insurgencies or insurgency theory, and we add detail to the spectrum that Dishman alludes to. Cockayne, “Hidden Power,” 42-44; Benedikt Korf, “Rethinking the Greed–Grievance Nexus: Property Rights and the Political Economy of War in Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Peace Research* 42.2 (2005): 201-17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343305050691>; Chris Dishman, “Terrorism, Crime, and Transformation,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 24. 1 (January 2001): 43-58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100118878>.

¹⁶ While these insurgencies also operated during the Cold War, this paper focuses on each case as a contemporary insurgency.

¹⁷ Individual Mexican cartels, including the Sinaloa Cartel, are thought to have billions of dollars in revenue, and the annual revenue of all the Mexican cartels together is thought to be around \$30 billion. On the other hand, the Taliban's annual revenue is estimated to be between \$400 million and \$1.5 billion. “Mexico Cartels: Which Are the Biggest and Most Powerful?,” *BBC News*, October 24, 2019, <https://perma.cc/ZRP6-ZB5A>; Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels,” 3; Dawood Azami, “How Does the Taliban Make Money?,” *BBC News*, December 22, 2018, <https://perma.cc/45TT-7JAF>

insurgencies in general, but also illustrate their processes of emergence following the breakdown of state authority.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORY OF HYBRID INSURGENCIES

To understand how qualities of an insurgency that are often thought to be oppositional can coexist, we first establish a theoretical framework for the developmental process of hybrid insurgencies. Outlining three primary stages, we aim to broadly capture the sociopolitical conditions and environment from which these insurgencies emerge. In the first stage, states lacking resources and legitimacy devolve into a temporally and geographically limited state of “anarchy.” Here, we adopt Hirshleifer’s argument that anarchy is “a system in which participants can seize and defend resources without regulation from above.” In Hirshleifer’s view, anarchy is “not chaos, but rather a spontaneous order,” wherein “each contestant balances between productive exploitation of the current resource base and fighting to acquire or defend resources.”^{18 19} Subsequently, anarchy may dissolve into amorphousness, or disappear as the result of the emergence of a new hierarchical structure.^{20 21} Hirshleifer’s framework provides a plausible description of politics within state borders after a state has failed, and before social reorganization has taken place: within failed states lacking a clear center of authority, different actors will struggle to position themselves until a social hierarchy re-emerges. As such, within our model, anarchy refers only to the first stage of the hybrid insurgent group formation process following state failure.

But as Hirshleifer notes, this anarchy does not persist, as anarchy may

¹⁸ Jack Hirshleifer, “Anarchy and its Breakdown,” *Journal of Political Economy* 103.1 (1995): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1086/261974>

¹⁹ We chose Hirshleifer’s articulation of the concept of anarchy over others because of its flexibility: Hirshleifer meant it to apply to situations as diverse as conflict between animals, humans, criminal groups, and states. It is thus logically consistent to talk about anarchy existing in a state after state failure under Hirshleifer’s definition, as it does not rely on the existence of states. This is also an appropriate choice because Hirshleifer is very close to classic “self-help” articulations of anarchy—Waltz agrees with Hirshleifer that anarchy is actually a kind of order, though he does not go on to explore its “breakdown.” Ibid., 26; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 89-91.

²⁰ Ibid., 26, 48.

²¹ “Amorphy” refers to the “[absence of form in which] resources are not sequestered but consumed on the move.” Ibid., 26.

“break down, to be replaced by another pattern of relationships.”²² We argue that insurgent groups do the same, and that as they emerge out of anarchy in the context of state failure, their persistence and continued activity should be conceptualized as a form of social reorganization, not anarchy. This social reorganization should be understood as a “violent equilibrium,” in which insurgent control over territories seized during the period of anarchy results in overt and violent competition with the state. Our use of the term “violent equilibrium” originates from Viridiana Rios’ study of the ongoing conflict between the Mexican cartels and the state, lasting from the democratization of the 1990s to more recent political developments in 2013. She argues that “homicides [are] caused by traffickers battling to take control of a competitive market and casualties and arrests generated by law enforcement operations against traffickers...interact, causing Mexico to be locked into a ‘self-reinforcing violent equilibrium.’”²³ Although Rios’ thesis provides a good starting point, we choose to define violent equilibrium more broadly as a non-negotiable stalemate between a hybrid insurgent group and the state it challenges.²⁴ In such a stalemate, neither actor is able to completely accomplish its goal—the state is unable to eradicate or suppress the insurgent group, and the insurgent group is unable to force concessions from the state, thereby resulting in extended periods of extreme violence.²⁵

Following this competition-driven rise in violence and general instability, the third stage of our model consists of hybrid insurgencies moving toward the center of the spectrum. That is, organizations motivated by the grievance side of the spectrum experience an incentive to seek legitimacy as an authoritative entity above the populace, while groups motivated by greed increasingly bend their ideals to seek greater profit by engaging in criminal enterprises.

²² *Ibid.*, 26.

²³ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁴ This use of the term “violent equilibrium” also corresponds closely with Metz’ prediction that a rise in insurgent activity would lead to a “spate of stalemates” consisting of coexistence between insurgencies and the state. Metz, “The Future of Insurgency,” 24.

²⁵ The goal of territorial control is a commonality among hybrid insurgencies. Controlling territory for any motivation enables legitimacy, a parallel state structure, and a monopoly on violence. See Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1529.

Figure 2: The Formation of a Violent Equilibrium

Anarchy: Lack of
Resources & Legitimacy
Break Down Governments

Center of Ideological-
Commerical Spectrum
Hosts **Hybrid** Actors

The analytical core of this paper is thus a reconceptualization of “anarchy” in the context of the challenges posed by hybrid insurgencies to failing states. By focusing on the social reorganization of a political system or state—that is, the emergence of a power struggle between new political actors following the breakdown of anarchy—we are able to apply the greed-versus-grievance argument to insurgency theory. In addition, we seek to criticize binary classifications within the existing literature, arguing that many common concepts should be located along the spectrum we propose, as opposed to existing as discrete concepts.²⁶

DEFINING INSURGENCY

According to the Central Intelligence Agency, “an insurgency is a political-military campaign by nonstate actors who seek to overthrow a government or secede from a country through the use of unconventional—and sometimes conventional— military strategies and tactics.”²⁷ This definition encapsulates most aspects of insurgency. However, we argue that an insurgency may neither seek to overthrow a government nor to secede from a country. Instead, insurgent organizations may aim to establish control over resources or territory, which may (but does not have to) include fundamentally changing, or even becoming, the

²⁶ Paul Collier, “Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44.6 (2000): 839-853, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002700044006008>; Paul Collier, Anke Hoefler, and Måns Söderbom, “On the Duration of Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research* 41.3 (2004): 253-273, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343304043769>; see Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, “Justice Seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil War,” report, *World Bank* (1999), <https://perma.cc/2GJS-DQ7L>

²⁷ Seth G. Jones, “The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad,” *International Security* 32.4 (2008): 9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30129790>

state.²⁸ This stands in contrast to seeking secession or control of the government, which typically occurs within the political system. In attempting to achieve these objectives, an insurgency often finds itself creating a parallel, state-like structure.

The scenarios this paper refers to are those of failing states, which are characterized by their failure to provide basic services such as education, healthcare, food, and hygiene to their governed populations. This definition also includes the failure of governments to control crime and enforce laws. When these fundamental needs are not met, increasing grievances against the state mobilize the populace to shift their focus to developing alternative structures. When the public comes to realize that the cost of maintaining the reigning state is greater than the wealth output being generated and distributed to the population, a drastic decrease in state authority and dependency is nearly inevitable. Anarchy, then, may be seen as preferable to a failing state, and the population may act on this sentiment when opportunities to challenge the existing order emerge. If this action turns violent, a failed state's negative externalities could propel further dissatisfaction and deepen the inequities affecting already-disenfranchised communities. These marginalized groups' frustrations fuel the development of hybrid insurgencies that seek to redefine social hierarchy by creating parallel state structures that redirect wealth for their benefit.

The creation and maintenance of these parallel structures serve as a challenge to the legitimacy of the state, which weakens its overall power and degrades its authority. As Kalyvas has noted, there is a clear overlap here with traditional definitions of organized crime, which he describes as "a phenomenon comprising hierarchically organized groups of criminals with the ability to use violence...for acquiring or defining the control of illegal markets in order to extract economic benefits from them."²⁹ The core of this definition is the presence of a

²⁸ Cooper, "Greed and Grievance?," 94.

²⁹ Scholars of recent intrastate conflicts have often struggled to choose between many available macro-conceptual frameworks, often drawing on different disciplines. These various fields exist to address large-scale, organized, intrastate, state-challenging violence, and may include organized crime, historical sociology, comparative politics, and international relations and strategy. While the definitions of these terms are sometimes disputed, we agree with Schutte's assertion that "most civil conflicts in the post-World War II era share a common type of warfare: insurgency." This follows the simple, widely accepted definition of civil war originally offered by Small and Singer (1982), as "any armed conflict that involves (a) military action internal to the metropole, (b) the active participation of the national government, and (c) effective resistance by both sides," and adapted by later scholars to include the stipulation that conflict deaths exceed 1000. It also relies upon Fearon and Laitin's definition of insurgency as "a technology of military conflict characterized by small,

coherent and hierarchical organization operating with a certain degree of stability and continuity.”³⁰ We follow Kalyvas’ approach to a large degree, arguing that the interpretation of insurgency as “competitive state-building” should be expanded to include the broader concept of “state-weakening.”³¹

GREED AND GRIEVANCES

In the post-Cold War academic literature on civil wars and insurgencies, many scholars have adopted a binary greed vs grievance classification scheme, which approaches rebellions and non-state actors with an “either-or” attitude, meaning conflicts are motivated by either greed or grievance, but not both.³² Specifically, it contrasts politically or ideologically motivated civil wars with a groundswell of public support (grievance-based), and those that are considered to be more like “private looting, without popular support, where ‘greedy’ [...] bandits compete for who can best tax and exploit a desperate population (greed-based).”³³ Most place non-state actors in binary categories, rather than along a spectrum; for instance, Collier and Hoeffler assert that many violent non-state actors are involved in illegal businesses out of greed³⁴ and that motivations are resource acquisitions,³⁵ while others, such as Cooper and Thoumi, posit that

lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas,” which could be used to accomplish a wide variety of ends. See Sebastian Schutte, “Geography, Outcome, and Casualties: A Unified Model of Insurgency,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59.6 (2015): 1101–1102; Melvin Small and J. David Singer, *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982): 1816–1980, quoted in Nicholas Sambanis, “What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48.6 (2004): 816, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002704269355>; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97.1 (2003): 75, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000534>

³⁰ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1519.

³¹ Daniela Campello, “The Politics of Financial Booms and Crises: Evidence from Latin America,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 47.2 (2014): 268, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013488539>

³² Korf, “Rethinking the Greed-Grievance Nexus,” 201.

³³ *Ibid.*, 201; Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 3–8.

³⁴ See Collier, “Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity”; Collier and Hoeffler, “Justice Seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil War.”

³⁵ Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Dominic Rohner. “Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War.” *Oxford Economic Papers* 61.1 (2008): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpn029>; Collier, Hoeffler & Söderbom, “On the Duration of Civil War,” 253–273.

rebellions are fundamentally grievance-based.³⁶

The greed-versus-grievance argument has previously been generalized to insurgency theory. In “The Future of Insurgency,” the foundational theory of commercial insurgency, Metz argued for the emergence of two types of insurgencies following the Cold War: “spiritual” and “commercial.” He characterizes spiritual insurgency as driven by “problems of modernization, the search for meaning, and the pursuit of justice.” By contrast, commercial insurgency is driven “less by the desire for justice than wealth. Its psychological foundation is a warped translation of Western popular culture, which equates wealth, personal meaning, and power.”³⁷ Although Metz’s argument may be accurate, the binary nature of his classification is insufficient in appropriately explaining the phenomenon of hybrid insurgencies. This represents a general pattern: hybrid insurgencies grow more sophisticated over time, and depart from their foundational motivation to have other motivations. Solely maintaining two distinct categories of an insurgency’s motives, as Metz does, ignores the historical and empirical reality of strategies that insurgencies can and often do take, which simultaneously moves them closer to the center of the spectrum and expands their reach. Further, Metz neglects to expand upon how insurgencies become parallel, coexisting pseudo-states and governments—to the extent that he does characterize the duration of insurgencies, he relies upon a simple characterization of violence, stating that, “for many countries of the world, simmering internal war is a permanent condition.”³⁸ This fits well with what Metz terms his “psychological” approach: instead of focusing on the strategies insurgencies can use to change the norms and framings held by the populations they would rule, he focuses on the pre-existing “feelings” of those populations,³⁹ writing:

“The preeminent task of those who would use insurgency as a roadway to power is mobilization of support. It takes a powerful incentive for people to place them-selves in serious danger, whether as active participants in an insurgency or pas-sive supporters. In the

³⁶ Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 36-37, 58-59; Francisco Thouni, “Competitive Advantages in the Production of Trafficking of Coca-Cocaine and Opium Heroin in Afghanistan and the Andean Countries,” in *Innocent Bystanders: Developing Countries and the War on Drugs*, ed. Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (Washington DC: World Bank Publications, 2010): 362.

³⁷ Metz, “The Future of Insurgency,” 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5, 10.

modern world, this incentive is often discontent and frustration born of a failed search for personal meaning. When large numbers of people define personal meaning through psychic fulfillment, the outcome may be spiritual insurgency. When people define personal meaning materially, the outcome may be commercial insurgency.”⁴⁰

On the other hand, Kalyvas argues that this distinction is invalid, because “criminal activities are not a simple sideshow of civil wars, but a key activity of many rebel organizations.”⁴¹ In this context, criminal refers to profit-motivated. He further argues that although rebel organizations with ideological objectives may be primarily motivated by grievances, greed may still be playing a significant role. Similarly, Korf argues that greed and grievance are not absolute categories, but may be causally linked; as such, insurgencies may fit more than one classification at once.⁴² Dishman similarly alludes to the idea of a spectrum of profits and politics for terrorist groups transforming into transnational criminal organizations.⁴³ We believe that an analysis that avoids a questionable attempt to analyze subjective, pre-existing, and essentialized feelings of discontent is a more stable basis for the analysis of insurgency. As such, we agree with Korf and Dishman, and assert that the binary classifications between greed and grievance, spiritual and commercial, and ideological and commercial do not suffice as a framework for analysis of hybrid insurgencies.

PROFIT AND LEGITIMACY

As hybrid insurgencies develop parallel social structures and generate increased levels of violence within states, they become increasingly motivated by the twin desires of profit and legitimacy. Profit provides economic capacity and can itself create political legitimacy, but it can also drive insurgencies toward the greed-based side of the spectrum. Profit is therefore more significant in the initial developmental stages of hybrid insurgencies without resources, an insurgency cannot establish itself as an organization. In the later stages, legitimacy becomes

⁴⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁴¹ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1521.

⁴² Korf, “Rethinking the Greed-Grievance Nexus,” 201-202.

⁴³ Dishman, “Terrorism, Crime, and Transformation,” 43-58.

crucial for crafting parallel state structures, as well as controlling more resources and generating more profit to sustain the insurgency. Tilly defines legitimacy as “conforming to an abstract principle by the governed, and that governments monopolize the concentrated means of violence.”⁴⁴ For insurgencies, increased legitimacy allows them to achieve economic gain and political control. Once an insurgency has established a stable source of profit, it can then create structures to help it achieve legitimacy. The authority and societal control available to such a developing insurgency allows it to foster a synergistic relationship between legitimacy and profit, growing its power and allowing it to devote more resources to developing parallel state structures and hierarchies. Both legitimacy and profit move insurgencies along the spectrum: the pursuit of profit allows insurgencies to remain sustainable and cohesive in the short-run, while legitimacy increases organizations’ public presence and authority. Together, legitimacy and profit define the material motives behind hybrid insurgencies’ behavior and determine their state-building and state-weakening strategies.

The Desire for Profit

Profit is one of the primary drivers for any organization’s behavior, whether they are states, non-state actors, businesses, or individuals. Insurgencies are no exception. Although our notion of the profit motivation is similar to the greed argument in civil war literature, it is different insofar as we contend that all insurgencies are motivated by greed to some degree, and that profit-driven behavior not only influences an insurgency’s proximity to the spectrum’s greed-driven end, but prolongs a violent equilibrium.

The need for profit drives insurgencies to generate profit in the most effective ways, preferably outside of state control. This includes illicit businesses which meet these requirements. Thus, many insurgencies depend on criminal activities, such as the drug trade, to finance their insurgency. Insurgencies have a unique opportunity to trade in criminal, unregulated markets, which internationally recognized states generally avoid. As Sullivan argues, involvement in these criminal markets allows for increased capabilities in terms of financial gain, flexibility in action, and political legitimacy.⁴⁵ Considering the illegal

⁴⁴ Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 169-186, quoted in Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 54.

⁴⁵ Sullivan, “Counter-Supply and Counter-Violence Approaches,” 187.

businesses insurgencies often choose as avenues of profit, geography and the markets available often determine the business of choice. In the Global South, many insurgencies are dependent on the drug or arms trades to finance their activities. For instance, the Mexican cartels engage in the heroin and marijuana trades, and the Taliban engages in opium production and trafficking, as well as marijuana taxation.⁴⁶ A state will attempt to maintain control over its territories and to enforce law, which insurgencies challenge through participation in illicit markets. In order to maintain their illicit businesses and the markets that they access, insurgencies must seek control of territories and industries. But as Naylor argues, market-based crimes produce income flows that create a “positive impact on GNP” and simultaneously function as a “parallel market in which relative contraband is available at a higher price than on a legal-but-controlled market.”⁴⁷ By participating in organized criminal activity, insurgencies are able to compel the government to consider them as strong economic contributors (assets) that bring substantial prosperity to the state.⁴⁸ This allows them to rapidly generate profit outside of the state’s control while competing with and delegitimizing the state.

As Berdal and other scholars argue, an insurgency’s pursuit of profit often coincides with socio-political grievances.⁴⁹ We similarly emphasize that insurgencies require a grievance-based motive to pursue their self-interests—making their criminal enterprises not only profit-driven, but ideological as well.

⁴⁶ Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 41; Grillo, “El Narco,” loc. 56 of 556; Gretchen Peters, “Haqqani Network Financing: The Evolution of an Industry,” report, *Combating Terrorism Center*, West Point (July 2012): 45, <https://perma.cc/E3D7-PXFF>; “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team on Specific Cases of Cooperation between Organized Crime Syndicates and Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Eligible for Listing under Paragraph 1 of Security Council Resolution 2160 (2014),” report, *United Nations Security Council* (2015): 9, <https://perma.cc/9XWS-YTGE>

⁴⁷ R.T. Naylor, “Towards a General Theory of Profit-Driven Crimes,” *British Journal of Criminology* 43.1 (2003): 86, 90, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/43.1.81>

⁴⁸ Daniel Rosenblum and Maggie Jones, “Did the Taliban’s Opium Eradication Campaign Cause a Decline in HIV Infections in Russia?,” *Substance Use and Misuse* 48.6 (2013): 471, <https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2013.778282>; Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 2, 81; Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” 39.

⁴⁹ Mats Berdal, “Beyond Greed and Grievance—and Not Too Soon,” *Review of International Studies* 31.4 (2005): 691, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210505006698>; Peter Andreas and Joel Wallman, “Illicit Markets and Violence: What Is the Relationship?,” *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 52.3 (2009): 225, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-009-9200-6>

An insurgency may continue to engage in a violent equilibrium by choice. It may be more beneficial, financially and politically, to remain locked in a stalemate with the existing state, perpetuating a violent equilibrium in which neither the state nor the insurgency achieves a monopoly on violence, because the state of a violent equilibrium allows an insurgency to continue its drive for profit. During this process, generating wealth and access to resources allows insurgencies to provide basic services to populations within territories under their control. Wesley, for instance, suggests that providing resources, such as services or protection, can garner insurgencies popular support.⁵⁰ Therefore, as insurgencies provide services typically provided by the state, like education and protection, they garner support from the lacking local population. This support legitimizes their movement, which allows them to further increase their profits through extractive means. Engaging in criminal markets thus allows insurgencies to build state-like structures, which include methods of enforcing the rule of law. In a Weberian framework, these actions can be seen as generating legal-rational authority.^{51 52} This grey area enables an insurgency to remain both politically viable and legitimate, sustaining moral leverage on the state, but to continue operating to continue its revenues of profit. expounded in the data analysis section.

The Desire for Legitimacy

While the desire for profit often leads insurgencies to take legitimizing actions, successful insurgencies must also seek legitimacy as an end in and of itself. Within liberal theory, it is traditionally thought that states are defined by their legitimacy.⁵³ Erman and Möller suggest that “state legitimacy” involves official and lasting recognition by other states as well as non-governmental

⁵⁰ Michael Wesley, “The State of the Art on the Art of State Building,” *Global Governance* 14.3 (2008): 379, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-01403008>

⁵¹ Bich Thi Ngoc Tran, “The Relationship between State Effectiveness and State Legitimacy: A Quantitative Test,” master’s thesis, Illinois State University (2018): 6, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2067466421>

⁵² Rousseau, Locke and Hobbes posit that the state derives legitimacy through a “social contract” with the population, which grants it a “monopoly on violence.” This entails both enforcement of law or justice, and protection. Wealth, we argue, allows states to perform these services, thus granting it legitimacy. Thus, insurgencies who grant these same services can also derive legitimacy from them. *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵³ Terry Macdonald, “What’s So Special about States? Liberal Legitimacy in a Globalising World,” *Political Studies* 56.3 (2008): 547, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2008.00750.x>.

organizations, intergovernmental organizations, and the people living within a state's territory.⁵⁴ In conclusion, government expenditure levels will change in response to a decline in external debt servicing ability, because the alternative, defaulting on the debt, would imminently threaten the survival of the electoral authoritarian incumbent. Instead, they will attempt to implement austerity policies or targeted rent distribution and repay their debt for as long as they can. Legitimacy, therefore, must be earned, and it allows insurgencies to develop parallel state structures while improving public access to goods and services. States and insurgencies can gain legitimacy through enforcement of justice as determined by the state or insurgency. However, enforcement of justice does not equate to the rule of law; law must be established and clarified before it can be enforced, while justice is more spontaneous and subjective. Often, insurgencies and their offshoots will base their claims to legitimacy from demonstrations of "street justice" or tit-for-tat retributory violence, in attempts to cement their status as authoritative organizations. As profit is generated, insurgencies can create parallel state institutions—including bodies and methods to enforce the law. This capability then furthers their claim to violence and authority, creating legal-rational legitimacy through the enforcement of law and justice.⁵⁵ Cooper asserts that political entities including insurgencies obtain legitimacy from the basis of their projected beliefs, whereupon corresponding actions win them popular support.⁵⁶ As such, possessing greater access to crucial resources and providing protection for civilian populations can also grant legitimacy to insurgencies.⁵⁷

While motivations for obtaining legitimacy can vary between insurgencies, a key factor in determining these motivations is the need to compete for resources, such as weapons, supplies, food, equipment, and territory.⁵⁸ Tilly defines what states do as four primary different activities: state making, war making, protection, and extraction.⁵⁹ Legitimacy allows insurgents to act more like states,

⁵⁴ Eva Erman and Niklas Möller, "Political Legitimacy for Our World: Where Is Political Realism Going?" *Journal of Politics* 80.2 (2018): 526–527, <https://doi.org/10.1086/694548>

⁵⁵ According to Weber (1974), there are three sources of state legitimacy: charisma, tradition, and legal-rational authority. Legal-rational authority refers to "rationality of the rule of law of the state." Tran, "The Relationship between State Effectiveness and State Legitimacy," 6.

⁵⁶ Cooper, "Greed and Grievance," 5–6.

⁵⁷ John P. Sullivan, "Counter-Supply and Counter-Violence Approaches to Narcotics Trafficking," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21.1 (2010): 182, 190, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592311003589245>

⁵⁸ Cooper, "Greed and Grievance," 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

meaning they have more capabilities to eliminate or neutralize enemies inside and outside of their territories (enforcement of domestic laws and territorial integrity), eliminating rivals of clients (economic protection), and acquiring resources for economic gains (resource extraction). Despite ideological insurgencies placing a more apparent emphasis on state-building and legitimacy to become parallel state structures, commercial insurgencies also seek out legitimacy and profit through these four activities and their subsequent economic gains. Establishing legitimacy thus eases access to resources for insurgencies. In turn, community relationships can strengthen loyalty and resource accessibility to insurgencies that can prove beneficial (even more so in rural areas).⁶⁰ These relationships can serve to provide protection; populations often cultivate a “folk perception” that these insurgency groups are “social protectors” against the failing state.⁶¹ In essence, legitimacy allows insurgencies to act more like states. Often, this legitimacy is bought with resources, including provisions of resources and services that are classically state services. For example, in Mexico, the Zetas have placed advertisements in billboards offering “a good salary, food, and attention to your family” or benefits, such as life insurance.”⁶² Increasing legitimacy can also perpetuate increased access to resources, reinforcing the cycle of profit-making and legitimacy-seeking.

APPLYING THE SPECTRUM: TWO CASE STUDIES

This paper will examine two insurgencies—the Taliban and the Mexican drug cartels—as case studies to demonstrate the applicability of our theory. Despite differences in context and circumstance, the methods that these two organizations employ to obtain legitimacy and profit are largely similar. For instance, their involvement with the drug trade establishes massively lucrative industries in their respective states.⁶³ This not only strengthens the state, but also benefits local economies, and suggests that profit can translate into political legitimacy. As insurgencies generate profit and establish wealth, other actors are increasingly pressured to assert their stakes as authority figures, augmenting legitimacy. Specifically, as insurgencies gain power through profit, other actors including military, community and religious leaders, competing intra-insurgency forces and other insurgencies begin to see their authority challenged, resulting in a

⁶⁰ Sullivan, “Counter-Supply and Counter-Violence Approaches,” 182.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶² Grillo, “El Narco,” loc. 105 of 556.

⁶³ Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” 39.

competition between the stakeholders to gain favor of the populace. This, in turn, allows insurgencies to be seen as more legitimate. As seen with the cartel-police relations over plaza drug trafficking paths, as well as the competition for funds among the vast number of Taliban militant groups, these insurgencies struggle to maintain a monopoly for resources in an effort to increase their leverage against the state.^{64 65} Additionally, the profit that insurgencies deliver to local economies increases popular support, which further builds legitimacy. Nevertheless, it should be noted that profit can also hinder legitimacy, and insurgencies must navigate this balance carefully.

Settling on a territory allows “insurgencies acting like nation-states” to seek resources “often considered illicit and criminal in origin” as an upper hand against competing actors’ violent pressures.⁶⁶ A group’s evolution as a criminal organization is often marked by their entry into the “global black economy,” which grants it widespread access to and considerable leverage in drug movement, “human trafficking, prostitution, identity theft, arms trading, [and/or] illicit financial transactions.”⁶⁷ This action can de-legitimize an insurgency; after all, a criminal enterprise is a criminal enterprise, and people will treat it as such if it continues to engage in large-scale illicit activities. However, the economic capital it generates allows it to bolster other aspects of its legitimacy. By boosting popular support for its cause, an insurgency can effectively elevate a sophisticated system of recruitment, intelligence, military, and commerce hierarchies from a sub-national to a national or even transnational level, thus bolstering its legitimacy and existence as a parallel state structure.⁶⁸ This provides insight into the importance of profit to building legitimacy.

MEXICO AND THE DRUG CARTELS

In some ways, the history of the cartels begins in the post-colonial period of Mexican history. The state of Sinaloa itself has a “history of unruliness,” stemming mostly from its success in resisting Spanish colonization in the late

⁶⁴ Grillo, “El Narco,” loc. 63 of 556

⁶⁵ Peters, “Haqqani Network Financing: The Evolution of an Industry,” 65.

⁶⁶ Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 53.

⁶⁷ Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas,” 48.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 40, 46, 48.

19th century.⁶⁹ Following Spanish defeat, weak state infrastructures gave way to competing armies controlling agricultural and mining sectors, rising national debt, and political divisions among elites.⁷⁰ The post-colonial period in Mexico (1821-1876) was characterized by social unrest and political instability, which enabled criminal enterprises to thrive. With the rise of populist *caudillo* leaders such as General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, systems of patronage and mutual dependency weakened the state, and resulted in massive losses of territory to the United States.⁷¹ Although subsequent leaders like Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz sought to modernize and stabilize the Mexican state, corruption and imperialism undermined many of their efforts. This brief period allowed the infrastructure for criminal economic organizations to emerge in territory currently held by Sinaloa. At the same time, opium poppies were first introduced into the Sinaloan mountain regions, providing the ideal product that would serve to fund an insurgency such as a cartel. With its plentiful market potential, Sinaloans saw opium as a means to pull them “out of wretched poverty” and support rural low-income communities.⁷² After the Mexican Revolution of 1910, state power waned, and criminal organizations were able to flourish in the Sinaloan mountain regions. By the 1970s, the drug industry had become much more profitable as a result of international trade, with an influx of American money making it possible to finance entire neighborhoods and even provide “brand-new pickup trucks [for] unpaved roads.”⁷³ The shift to *narcotraficantes* and international smugglers gave rise to the major cartels in the 1990s, and along with them, influential kingpins like Joaquin Guzmán-Loera and Carillo Fuentes.⁷⁴ Together, these factors created fertile ground for an insurgency financed by the illegal drug trade.

Compared to traditional insurgencies, the Mexican cartels are decentralized, and challenging to characterize—there is no single cartel that controls the drug trade from Mexico to the rest of the world. As such, we focus on the largest cartels for this case study, such as Los Zetas and the Sinaloa Cartel. We chose to analyze the Mexican cartels as a single decentralized insurgency because of the similarity

⁶⁹ The Sinaloans resisted the Spanish Conquistadors more successfully than the Aztecs in the 1500s, and Sinaloa served as a prime location for silver and gun contraband during the War of Independence from Spain (1810-1821). See Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 42, 236 of 363.

⁷⁰ Burton Kirkwood, *History of Mexico* (Westport, WA: Greenwood Publishing, 2000): 90.

⁷¹ Ibid, 89, 97-99.

⁷² Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 45 of 363.

⁷³ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 58 of 363.

⁷⁴ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 58, 78, 93 of 363.

of their tactics and their collaboration, much like we view the Taliban and the Haqqani network as a single insurgency in the next section. Cartels such as Sinaloa are largely characterized by their economic objectives. While many of the cartel members are geographically bound, and often share ethnic roots, their primary objective is not bound by ideology. Instead, they vary by cartel and change over time.⁷⁵ In the present day, Mexican cartels not only gain legitimacy through the traditional illicit drug trade, but also from successfully navigating the drawbacks of involvement in the criminal economy. They also derive much of their legitimacy by threatening national security through excessive and gruesome displays of violence.⁷⁶ Before President Felipe Calderón declared a national war against drugs in 2006, cartels such as Los Zetas and Sinaloa had established themselves as extremely violent paramilitary groups, extorting villagers and dumping bodies in city centers.⁷⁷ In recent years, their methods for violence have become increasingly politicized and selective.^{78 79} These new methods include assassinations of anti-cartel politicians, organized marches against the army, popular demonstrations, and blocking infrastructure to inflict economic damage.⁸⁰ These displays pave the way for them to be known as “a second law” in areas under their control—for example, the La Familia cartel has effectively managed to control the police forces, directing their resources to prosecute non-drug related crimes.⁸¹ This is especially true when they regulate everyday aspects of life, such as healthcare costs, to a greater extent than the government is willing or able to.⁸² While the motives of individual cartels vary, their increasing willingness to engage in politically motivated violence suggests a shift away from profit-oriented to more legitimacy-oriented actions. Constant acts of violence that push the government toward favorable outcomes for the cartels increases their credibility—both to communities under their control and external actors.

Modern scholars of insurgency, such as Lessing, have unnecessarily

⁷⁵ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 236 of 363.

⁷⁶ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 233-235 of 363.

⁷⁷ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 123-124, 128 of 363.

⁷⁸ Kalyvas clarifies that selective violence can be massive in scale. It is thus a matter of selective violence as personalized; it can be public, unnecessary, and sudden. However, it is smaller than indiscriminate violence. See Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 142.

⁷⁹ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 235 of 363.

⁸⁰ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 235, 237 of 363.

⁸¹ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1532-1533.

⁸² Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 118 of 365.

rede-fined insurgency as “state-weakening.”⁸³ As he writes, “whereas rebels fight states, and cartels fight with one another, to *conquer* mutually prized territory and resources, cartels fight states ‘merely’ to *constrain* their behavior and influence policy outcomes.”⁸⁴ However, this argument elides crucial similarities between traditional conceptions of grievance-based insurgencies and greed-based insurgences. Although the cartels do not seek to take over states in their entirety, they have to take on aspects of the state and create parallel state structures in order to pursue their financial aims. For instance, the cartels have repositioned themselves in legitimizing, state-building roles in pursuit of profit. The Zetas, dominant in eastern Mexico, have begun taxing the oil and gas industry while simultaneously extorting industry unions and selling off contraband gas.⁸⁵ This taxation creates a legitimate source of profit, and supplants the state—many citizens of Juarez have argued that since they pay taxes to the cartel, they should not have to pay taxes to the state.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, La Familia has laid claim to and taxed mining and illegal logging industries—industries traditionally controlled by the Mexican state.⁸⁷ More recently, the La Familia cartel has been observed to hand out food aid to families suffering from the economic aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, while other cartels have enforced COVID-19 quarantines.⁸⁸ Additionally, cartels are increasingly beginning to participate in traditional business ventures such as corn farming and cattle rearing, which suggests a growing emphasis on legitimizing profit.⁸⁹ As an example, cartels have emerged as significant players in the avocado trade in Michoacán.⁹⁰ Despite the cartels’ use of illicit and violent methods to gain control, local farmers initially welcomed their involvement due to the services the cartels provided. These services included protection of land and products, with the cartels charging a tax in exchange.⁹¹ Controlling threats to local industries and taking on the roles of law enforcement enables the cartels to replace the state in

⁸³ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1486.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 237 of 363.

⁸⁶ Ibid, loc. 238 of 363.

⁸⁷ Ibid, loc. 237 of 363.

⁸⁸ Ioan Grillo, “How Mexico’s Drug Cartels Are Profiting From the Pandemic,” opinion, *New York Times*, July 7, 2020, <https://perma.cc/4B4V-P5ZG>

⁸⁹ Ioan Grillo, *Gangster Warlords: Drug Dollars, Killing Fields, and the New Politics of Latin America* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2016), 302.

⁹⁰ Peter O’Dowd and Allison Hagan, “Why Avocados Attract Interest Of Mexican Drug Cartels,” *WBUR*, February 7, 2020, <https://perma.cc/AHH5-27EM>

⁹¹ Ibid.

these respects and potentially gain more dependency as a more reliable source of authority from the populations they serve.

Thus, although scholars such as Lessing have asserted that cartels “do not seek to topple the government and seize formal power” as grievance-motivated actors do, we maintain that cartels should be addressed as both greed *and* grievance-based actors with motivations ranging from the criminal to the political.⁹² Even though cartels do not have an explicit ideology which makes them want to *be* the government themselves, they remain political due to three reasons. First, as Kalyvas argues, “the absence of a formal ideology does not necessarily imply the lack of a group identity.”⁹³ This group identity implies shared grievances and a shared dissatisfaction with the political and economic organization of the existing Mexican state. Second, many cartels provide state-like services, including food, income, benefits, life insurance, and housing.⁹⁴ The demand for services from cartel members and members of the public implies a gap in state services, but more importantly, reflects grievances—whether they are economic, political, or social. As we argue, the provision of state services is an innately political act. Finally, if we consider the Weberian definition of statehood, controlling territory and enforcing justice within is an inherently political act. As Grillo writes, “the Zetas were not thinking like gangsters, but like a paramilitary group controlling territory.”⁹⁵ While the cartels clearly originated as greed-based criminal organizations, these factors strongly suggest that we should consider the cartels as hybrid insurgencies with unique political motivations and grievances.

AFGHANISTAN AND THE TALIBAN

The history of the Taliban is inextricably linked to the Cold War, and the proxy conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States in Afghanistan. During the early 1960s, a mature political system had begun to emerge during the reign of King Mohammed Zahir Shah, with political parties of all ideologies contesting power and influence. However, as Jalali argues, the political system provided a platform for many ideologies, but suppressed more mainstream

⁹² Lessing, “Logics of Violence,” 1488.

⁹³ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1527.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1528.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1532.

moderate movements, leading to the rise of extremism.⁹⁶ Two of the most influential were the Marxist-Leninist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, and a loose coalition of conservative Islamist parties. In 1973, Sardar Mohammed Daud Khan led a successful coup against the ruling monarchy, and drove conservative forces underground.⁹⁷ But Daud's government did not last long, as the People's Democratic Party—with the aid of the Afghan army—overthrew the Daud regime in the 1978 Saur Revolution. Shortly thereafter, coup leaders set up the Revolutionary Council, now the highest political authority of the newly named Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA).⁹⁸ The new communist government was weak, and by the spring of 1979, un-rest had spread to many of Afghanistan's provinces. As a result, the Soviet Union decided to militarily intervene to prop up the failing communist re-gime. However, Islamism conservatives remained defiant, forming guerrilla units known as the Mujahideen and maintaining a sustained insurgency throughout the 1980s with support from the United States. As a result of sustained pressures and increasing losses, Soviet forces finally withdrew in 1989. As a result, the DRA would collapse three years later.

Two years after the war, the founder of the Taliban, Mohammed Omar began to recruit followers in *madrasas*, or Islamic colleges. Many of the fighters that Omar recruited were former *Mujahideen* fighters with experience from the Soviet conflict.⁹⁹ He was dissatisfied with the non-Islamic nature of the post-communist government, and sought to promote his own fundamentalist ideas of Islamic law.¹⁰⁰ In addition to these ideological motivations, material grievances spurred the Taliban's rise to power, such as the Afghan's state's inability to provide basic state services.^{101 102 103} Ethnic grievances have played a role, as most members of the Taliban are ethnically Pashtun.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Ali Ahmad Jalali, *A Military History of Afghanistan: From the Great Game to the Global War on Terror* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017): 345.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 347-348

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁹⁹ "The Afghan Taliban: Organizational Overview," *Stanford University*, <https://perma.cc/65R7-9V92>

¹⁰⁰ Shantanie Mariet D'Souza, "Taliban: The Rebels Who Aspire to Be Rulers," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3.1 (2016): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797015626043>

¹⁰¹ Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," 8.

¹⁰² Jalali, "A Military History of Afghanistan," 434.

¹⁰³ D'Souza, "Taliban: The Rebels," 21.

¹⁰⁴ Kriti M. Shah, "The Pashtun, the Taliban, and America's Longest War," *Asian Survey* 57.6 (2017): 981, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2017.57.6.981>

Notably, the Taliban rise to power was—in many ways—remarkably peaceful; when dealing with rival militias, they would often send a delegation of clerics to negotiate terms of disarmament and the implementation of Sharia law. If the militias failed to accede to their demands, the Taliban would send a new delegation that included pious locals (often elderly) to negotiate again. They would only resort to violence if both sets of demands were rejected.¹⁰⁵ This legitimizing strategy allowed the Taliban fighters to be seen as committed Islamists while building alliances and support. This strategy paid off—by 1995, the Taliban had over 25,000 fighters, and had taken over twelve provinces.¹⁰⁶ In 1996, they would take over Kabul, the capital, and declare the formation of an Islamic regime.¹⁰⁷ By 1998, the Taliban had gained control of almost all of Afghanistan.¹⁰⁸ Over the next few years, the Taliban regime would establish a government based on Sharia law, and sought to centralize and strengthen bureaucratic structures of control.¹⁰⁹ ¹¹⁰ However, due to their treatment of women, as well as a wide array of documented human rights abuses, the Taliban never achieved significant international recognition, with only three foreign governments conferring legal recognition.¹¹¹ Following the September 11th attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, a coalition led by the United States would invade Afghanistan, toppling the Taliban regime in less than three months.¹¹² But despite their defeat, the Taliban almost immediately began regrouping to re-emerge as an insurgency once again.

The prevailing literature treats the modern Taliban as a predominantly ideological insurgency. For instance, Jones argues that the primary motivations of the Taliban are ideological, and that this ideology has remained remarkably consistent throughout their organization's history.¹¹³ Similarly, Euben

¹⁰⁵ Nasreen Ghufuran, "The Taliban and the Civil War Entanglement," *Asian Survey* 41.3 (2001): 468, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2001.41.3.462>

¹⁰⁶ "The Afghan Taliban," *Stanford University*.

¹⁰⁷ Ghufuran, "The Taliban and the Civil War Entanglement," 472.

¹⁰⁸ D'Souza, "Taliban," 22.

¹⁰⁹ Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Q. Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts From Al-Banna to Bin Laden* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009): 409.

¹¹⁰ Ghufuran, "The Taliban and the Civil War Entanglement," 476-477.

¹¹¹ "The Afghan Taliban," *Stanford University*.

¹¹² Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," 7.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

and Zaman also characterize the Taliban as primarily ideological, rather than economic.¹¹⁴ However, as we argue, economic motivations often further ideological motivations, and vice-versa— it is far too simple to categorize insurgent groups as either greed-based or grievance-based. No insurgency can be purely ideological, as the Taliban regime rose to power, it had to be able to economically sustain itself and its fighters.¹¹⁵ These economic motivations can be seen in the practices of the Haqqani network, one of the most powerful semi-autonomous factions of the Taliban.¹¹⁶ During the early years of the Taliban insurgency, the Haqqani network was able to procure necessary supplies from outside sources, such as the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence agency and the United States.¹¹⁷ However, in the 1990s, sources of outside support began to diminish with the withdrawal of the Soviets, and the Haqqani network began to shift to illicit enterprises to fund their operations, including extortion and drug trafficking.¹¹⁸ Upon the assumption of power by the Taliban, the Haqqani network was absorbed into the Taliban regime in 1996.¹¹⁹ However, the network remained economically and operationally autonomous from the Taliban, even as they generally collaborated on military campaigns and the fulfilment of broader political objectives. This holds true into the present day— as Peters argues, the network has “evolved over type network exhibiting robust relationships with regional political, military and economic circles, and that members of the group have a financial incentive to remain the dealmakers and the enforcers in their area of operations.”¹²⁰ In many ways, the Haqqani network can be seen as one of the funding arms of the Taliban: they have penetrated key business sectors, including import, export, transport, real estate, and construction within Afghanistan and beyond. Many network leaders own partial shares in real estate and front companies.¹²¹ In addition to its engagement with legal businesses, the Haqqani network also participates in the black-market economy. For instance, the network runs a protection racket that targets businesses operating in its zone of influence, ranging from small local shopkeepers to international companies—

¹¹⁴ Euben and Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, 411.

¹¹⁵ “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,” 1.

¹¹⁶ Peters, “Haqqani Network Financing,” i, 24.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15-16, 18.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

“effectively selling insurance against itself.”¹²² With the wide reach of the network, even the NATO coalition’s construction projects are not immune to extortion. The Haqqani network also launders money for the Taliban, using gas stations, auto parts dealerships, lum-beryards, and other front businesses to move funds. Robbery and kidnapping are also avenues for revenue, as well as the drug trade—in particular, the network specializes in smuggling precursor chemicals used to process raw opium into heroin.¹²³ More indirectly, the implemented taxes on opium and marijuana production.¹²⁴

Although common Haqqani fighters “appear less motivated by money than by a blend of ideology, honor, revenge and the notion that they are taking part in a historic and grand battle,” the activities of the network belie that notion.¹²⁵ While the Mexican cartels can be described as a hybrid insurgency with greed-based origins that has taken on grievance-based aspects, the Taliban are the opposite. Interestingly enough, this can be seen in Taliban attitudes towards the drug trade—as Swartz argues, “since 2001, the insurgency had decreased their requirements of strict Sharia law because of reliance on the financial backing of drug smugglers.”¹²⁶ Although a traditional paradigm of commercial and ideological insurgency would reject the idea that an “ideological” insurgency can prioritize economic considerations over ideology, our model not only accommodates such a result, but predicts it. This is not simply an ephemeral trend—as a 2015 report prepared for the UN Security Council noted, this involvement in criminal (profit-seeking and illegal) activities has significantly increased in recent years.¹²⁷ As the report argues, “this trend...encourages those within the Taliban movement who have the greatest economic incentive to oppose any meaningful process of reconciliation with the new Government.”¹²⁸ As the Taliban continue to wage war against the Afghan government, we will likely see more and more instances of economic realities coming into conflict with founding ideologies. Of course,

¹²² Ibid., 39.

¹²³ Ibid., 40, 44-50, 53-54; Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 13.

¹²⁴ “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,” 9.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹²⁶ Brandon J. Swartz, “Afghanistan Connection: Heroin Production, Distribution, and Consumption,” Master’s thesis, Michigan Technological University (2011): 20, <https://doi.org/10.37099/mtu.dc.etsd/443>

¹²⁷ “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,” 1.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 3.

this is not to say that the Taliban will become a cartel unto itself. As we have noted, like all hybrid insurgencies, the Taliban engage in both profit-seeking and legitimization, with profit-seeking taking precedence over legitimization for insurgencies with greed-based origins, and vice-versa. The Taliban, more than other insurgencies, are distinctly aware of the need for legitimization—they once held power, and they seek to hold it again. As a result, they have proclaimed themselves to be a government-in-exile or shadow government, rather than solely a military opposition, and take actions consistent with that characterization.¹²⁹ In regions under their control, the Taliban collect taxes and provide public services, including healthcare and religious education. Similarly, the Taliban have also established a mobile judicial system based on Sharia law, which has earned a reputation of impartiality within the country.^{130 131 132}

CONCLUSION

From our case studies, we can see that each insurgency occupies a different point on the spectrum of insurgency. Each group may have “opposing” traits and a combination of each of the traits listed, but none can exist at the extreme polar ends of the spectrum. No insurgency is static—over time, their position along the spectrum can change, and sometimes drastically (See figure 3).

Figure 3: Placing the Case Studies on the Spectrum

Overall, modern insurgencies represent a state-weakening and state-building phenomenon within the international system, posing vast challenges for political integration and the mitigation of internecine violence. Understanding these

¹²⁹ Antonio Giustozzi, “Hearts, Minds, and the Barrel of a Gun,” *Prism* 3.2 (2012): 71, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26469730>

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹³² Peters, “Haqqani Network Financing,” 22.

“hybrid” insurgencies means moving beyond simple, binary understandings, and acknowledging the wide array of motivations along the spectrum of insurgency.

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