

HOW “FREE” IS FREE RIDING IN CIVIL WARS?

Violence, Insurgency, and the
Collective Action Problem

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MAIN POINTS

- Using data from Vietnam war and the Greek Civil war authors revisit the collective action paradigm
- The collective action paradigm has two grounds:
 - 1. the free-riding incentive generated by the public goods dimension of insurgency
 - 2. the risk of individual participation in insurgent collective action

COLLECTIVE ACTION AND CIVIL WAR

- The collective action problem (Olson, 1960s)
- It pays attention to violence
- Focuses on the costs associated with insurgent participation
- Obstacles in launching and sustaining insurgencies → “first movers” or “late joiners”

- Costs of nonparticipation and free riding often equal or exceed those of participation
- Linear, concave and convex functions of participations
- Authors claim: insurgent participation is much less dangerous relative to nonparticipation than is posited by the collective action paradigm and than generally thought

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- War differs from other types of violence: different targeting – higher individual risk
 - Risk also varies across specific types of warfare (conventional, irregular war)
 - Identification problem → selective and indiscriminate violence

THE PHOENIX PROGRAM

- Vietnam war – rate of victimisation of participants in violent collective action
- Analysis of the U.S. Phoenix Program data
- Attempt of the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments to target the Vietcong – TO AVOID CIVILIAN VICTIMS
- “whom we killed was far more important than how many we killed”
- Systematic record of intended victims

- 73, 697 individuals (members of Vietcong) as targets and 21% of those killed
- Unknown method of selecting victims → those most likely to be innocent were most likely to be victimized
- Two groups:
- 1. those on the list:
 - confirmed - 5,88% killed + captured
 - unconfirmed – 52,53% killed + captured
- 2. those off the list

- HOW?
- Innocents were easier to find
- Vietcong agents were able to escape capture or assassination
- Full party members were less likely to be captured but more likely to be killed
- Confirmation took time: everyone entered the base as “unconfirmed”
- “Better to kill mistakenly than release mistakenly”

THE GREEK CIVIL WAR

- Extensive archival sources → exact toll of violence in Argolid (region in southern Greece)
- Procommunist resistance army ELAS vs. right-wing collaborationalist militias supported by the German occupation troops

VICTIMS

- Total rural civilian population – 45, 140
- Estimate of military-age men -13,542
- Estimate of local rebel combatant – 500
- Estimate of local militia combatants - 300
- Male victims of militiamen/Germans - **318**
- Local rebels killed in action – **20**
- Civilian victims of rebel violence – **353**
- A civilian man of military age was more likely to be killed by one of the two sides than was an actual combatant → it was safer to be combatant than civilian

CONCLUSION

- Free riding in civil wars is not attractive option which term implies
- Sometimes the real puzzle in civil wars is nonparticipation rather than collective action
- Recruitment increases when the state is totally absent OR under conditions of extreme violence

THANK YOU!