Progovernment Militias

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Abstract

Sociologists, political scientists, and economists have long emphasized the
benefits of monopolizing violence and the risks of failing to do so. Yet re-
cent research on conflict, state failure, genocide, coups, and election violence
suggests governments cannot or will not form a monopoly. Governments
worldwide are more risk acceptant than anticipated. They give arms and
authority to a variety of nonstate actors, militias, vigilantes, death squads,
proxy forces, paramilitaries, and counterbalancing forces. We develop a ty-
pology based on the links of the militia to the government and to society as
a device to capture variations among these groups. We use the typology to
explore insights from this emerging literature on the causes, consequences,
and puzzling survival of progovernment militias and their implications for
security and human rights, as well as to generate open questions for further
research.

INTRODUCTION

Progovernment militia (PGM): an armed group that has a link to government but exists outside of or parallel to the regular security apparatus, and has some level of organization

Governments around the world collaborate with irregular militias, vigilantes, death squads, "self-defense" forces, and paramilitaries. Some of these groups, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force in Nigeria and the village guards in Turkey, are supposed to protect civilians against rebel groups. Others, such as the Interahamwe Militia during the Rwandan genocide and the Janjaweed in Darfur, are offensive and spread terror. Elsewhere, governments use armed groups for electoral gains. The Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India, the Basij militia in Iran, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) militia, and Burundi's Imbonerakure fit that category. And some leaders form parallel forces, such as the Revolutionary Guards in Libya and in Iran, to protect themselves from unreliable regular forces and a military coup d'état. Governments create, align with, or support armed groups outside the formal security apparatus and not fully under their control to address a variety of security concerns and to achieve political goals.

The persistence of such forces fits awkwardly with descriptions of a historical process consolidating violence under centralizing nation-states. Governments frequently settle for less than a monopoly of violence. Although social scientists have been slow to recognize the significance of public–private partnerships in the security sector, research on the variety of armed actors is gaining momentum. Literature showing governments using armed nonstate actors stretches across topics such as state failure (e.g., Bates 2008), genocide (e.g., Ahram 2013, Alvarez 2006), coups (e.g., Ash 2016, De Bruin 2015, Dowdle 2007), counterinsurgencies (e.g., Hughes 2016, Jentzsch et al. 2015), and transborder security policies (e.g., Bapat 2012, Ron 2002), as well as democratization and elections (e.g., Acemoglu et al. 2013, Kirschke 2000, Raleigh 2016, Roessler 2005, Romero 2003, Staniland 2015a, Wilkinson 2006).

To sort out the important differences among progovernment militias (PGMs), we construct a typology that draws on the logic of delegation. We use it to explore what is known of their causes and consequences. To accompany the typology, we develop a more substantively detailed and more inductive breakdown of PGM membership that draws on the wider literature on armed groups. PGMs are armed groups that are linked to government but exist outside the regular security apparatus, and have some level of organization (Carey et al. 2013, p. 250). Although "militia" has a broader application (see Jentzsch et al. 2015), and some early work identifies different types of militias (e.g., Jentzsch et al. 2015, Raleigh 2016, Staniland 2015b), "progovernment militia" allows a narrower conceptual focus on the causes and consequences of governments outsourcing security tasks. This term includes groups that researchers refer to as state-sponsored proxy forces (e.g., Ahram 2011b), death squads (e.g., Campbell & Brenner 2002, Mason & Krane 1989, Mazzei 2009), vigilantes (e.g., Huggins 1991b, Kowalewski 1990), civil defense forces (e.g., Clayton & Thomson 2014, Peic 2014), and paramilitary forces (e.g., De Bruin 2014, Mazzei 2009).

The study of armed nonstate actors on the government side opens a window on previously "black boxed" choices political leaders face with regard to security issues, and on the risks they accept. Assuming a unified state actor obscures the complex strategies governments implement to stay in power and advance policy. Differentiating among actors has implications for theories of the state and the monopoly of violence, for theories of delegation and the outsourcing of "sovereign tasks," for international governance and accountability, and for theories of collective action.

We contrast the "Weberian assumption" on the monopoly of violence (Weber 1965) with the variety, frequency, and dispersion of PGMs. Identifying and locating these groups is important, if only for an accurate description of the forces states deploy. Beyond description, if the control of violence is the centerpiece of theories of the state, we need to understand the logic of delegating

security tasks and the implications of such delegation for public goods such as security and human rights. Although PGMs are used as force multipliers and to increase the effectiveness and legitimacy of counterinsurgency campaigns, they also have negative consequences for the fragility of the state and for the welfare of civilians. Our typology captures theoretically useful variation (see Collier et al. 2012), with implications for research and policy.

THE OLIGOPOLY OF VIOLENCE

Scholars see the consolidation of violence as the core process of state evolution—and as desirable because it enables democracy and development (Acemoglu & Robinson 2012, North et al. 2009, Tilly 1992). North et al. (2009, p. 21) assert that all developed (open access) societies "satisfy the Weberian assumption: their states possess a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence." Successful states in Europe consolidated violence, "disarming the rest of the population" (North et al. 2009, p. 169; see also Acemoglu & Robinson 2012, pp. 80–81). Whereas in other policy areas states partner with private actors for efficiency gains (Donahue & Zeckhauser 2011), security is expected to be off-limits and placed in a special category of sovereign tasks (Wilson 1989). Sovereign tasks belong to the state because only the state has the proper authority for them. Williamson (1999) discusses the "probity hazard," or the severe consequences that follow from a loss of control within this category of tasks: "breach of contract/lapse of probity can place the system at risk . . . . In the limit, such breach is punishable as treason" (p. 324). Shirking here threatens the survival of the state (Stepputat et al. 2007, p. 11). It is intriguing that so many government decision makers are risk acceptant in this policy area.

Despite sociologists, political scientists, and economists explaining the benefits of monopolizing violence and the risks of not doing so, many governments do not follow this advice. The Pro-Government Militias Database identifies more than 300 PGMs existing between 1981 and 2007 (Carey et al. 2013). We find these groups in all regimes, though most commonly in semidemocracies (Carey et al. 2015). The end of the Cold War, globalization, and cheap weapons made "the state's monopoly on legitimate violence increasingly tenuous" (Pereira 2003, p. 388). For developing states, Ahram (2011b, p. 24) suggests we "find ways to accommodate the persistence of nonstate actors." The persistence and spread of these irregular groups raises questions about governments' incentives to align with them despite the expectation that they should disappear during the state's evolutionary process.

Even in Europe, military history is not simply a story of an evolving monopoly of violence (see Parrott 2012, p. 3). Historians recognize the range of regimes that choose public–private collaboration to deliver security. Campbell & Brenner (2002) bring together case studies on death squads, vigilantes, and paramilitaries from Weimar Germany, the Philippines, Indonesia, apartheid South Africa, the Balkans, and Kashmir, arguing these actors "cannot simply be ghettoized as a problem only of 'third world' or of 'weak' states" (p. xiii). They show the global reach of armed nonstate actors on the government side and shift attention from evolutionary processes to the role of governments in creating or aligning with these groups. Their work underlines the importance of disentangling logistical and political incentives. As Staniland (2012, p. 256) argues, "violence management" may be a more useful concept than "violence monopolization." Governments and occupying powers, even those with highly professional militaries, tolerate or actively create networks of armed actors. We find them in Iraq, Syria, India, and Indonesia, or with the Red Army and the United States Army in Afghanistan.

The emerging literature on PGMs is as diverse as the groups described. Yet it suggests a few general incentives that might explain the continued use of these groups, including the need

for cheap additional forces, access to local intelligence, and deniability for violence. With the expected benefits come risks to the state and to civilians. The challenge is to map the diversity of these groups on key dimensions to inform further analysis.

A TYPOLOGY OF MILITIAS

PGMs are complex organizations with a variety of purposes that differ across a range of characteristics. They vary in the proximity and formality of their link to government (Carey et al. 2013). Some governments openly support and even institutionalize these irregular forces. Others deny any links, and the connection only surfaces long after the group ceases to exist. Some PGMs act as the president's personal guard. Others represent the armed wing of a ruling party or are organized and controlled by the military. Some groups boast hundreds of thousands of members. Elsewhere fewer than a hundred people constitute a PGM.

Can certain general characteristics of PGMs tell us whether they are more likely to protect or to prey on civilians, whether they are designed to evade accountability, or whether they present a high probity hazard? Labels such as paramilitaries, civil defense forces, or vigilantes vary regionally and culturally and are not useful for comparison (see Campbell & Brenner 2002). Mazzei (2009, p. 4) notes the "rhetorical" content of the labels. These complications accompany significant empirical issues. Exhaustive, exclusive, and meaningful categories are hard to find. Categorizing these groups is empirically as well as normatively contested terrain. Our aim is a theoretically informed typology yielding empirical expectations about the survival and behavior of militias. We use the typology to frame findings and controversies in this research, and we compare it to alternative approaches.

The typology's two dimensions draw on attributes of the group rather than attributes of the context (e.g., postcolonial, conflict, failed state) in which they are found. One dimension is the link to the government, the other the link to society (see Engels 2010 for a categorization of African armed groups on state and society relationships). Both dimensions influence the control of these groups, which is the fundamental problem behind the drive to monopolize violence.
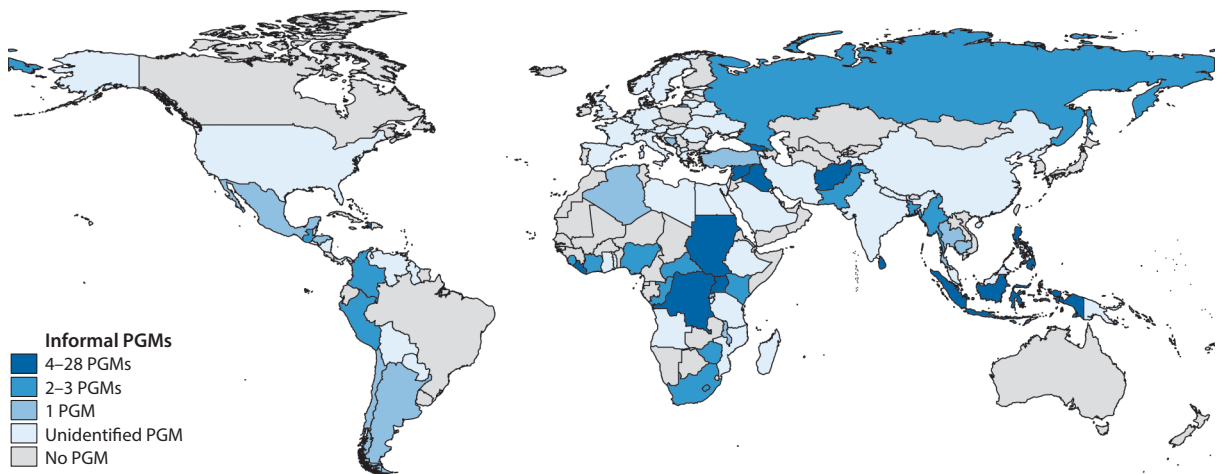
The link to the government has two categories, semiofficial and informal (see Carey et al. 2013). For semiofficial PGMs, the government may establish the group by law and members may receive regular compensation. The Home Guard in India and the Revolutionary Guards in Libya are examples of semiofficial PGMs. Informal militias have no formalized link, even though their connection to the government might be widely known within the country, or it might be denied by the government. Examples include the Interahamwe Militia in Rwanda and the Shabiha militias in Syria.

The link to society has two categories, defined by whether or not the group is locally recruited and locally active. These categories are theoretically relevant for control issues raised by armed groups, and they resonate with research on rebel groups suggesting that local support restrains their abusive behavior (Walter 2017). Both the link to society and the link to the government affect goal variance and the ability to monitor the PGMs, which help us understand the causes and consequences of these groups.

In the following, we explain the choice of dimensions, discuss the research questions and implications, and finish with the limitations of the typology and alternative approaches.

Link to Government: Informal versus Semiofficial Progovernment Militias

The link to the government is an essential feature of a PGM. Francis (2005, p. 3) conceptualizes civil militias in Africa on a public–private continuum. We collapse the continuum into two categories. Semiofficial PGMs have a formalized link to government and are comparable to what Dowdle

Semiofficial PGM: has a formalized and official link to the government, though separate from the regular military and police force. The government might have established the group by official decree or law, and members may receive some regular compensation

Figure 1

Informal progovernment militias (PGMs), 1981–2007. Data exclude Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia.

(2007) labels "paramilitary forces," but without police forces. They resemble what Yoroms (2005, p. 34) identifies as state-legitimate vigilantes or auxiliary forces and what De Bruin (2015) labels counterbalancing forces. De Bruin excludes groups under direct military control and outside a 60-mile radius of the capital, and includes some forces within the regular security apparatus, such as militarized police.

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

Figures 1 and **2** show the global distribution of informal and semiofficial PGMs between 1981 and 2007. These and the subsequent maps were created using CShapes (Weidmann et al. 2010). PGMs are most frequent in Africa and Asia. Informal PGMs are more common than semiofficial PGMs. The maps represent conservative estimates, as umbrella groups are often captured as only one group, and because the news sources might not distinguish individual groups (Mitchell & Carey 2013). The maps reveal PGMs in Western European countries, which is partly explained by a NATO policy. During the Cold War, these countries had a "Gladio" group supported by NATO to counter a potential Soviet invasion (Ganser 2005). They are a difficult case and, absent a Soviet invasion, as far as we know, they were largely inactive. While they had a formalized link to the state, acknowledgment of that link was not public, distinguishing them from other semiofficial groups and from informal groups.

The militia–government link influences the degree of militia discretion. The link suggests specific expectations about the groups' behavior and their consequences.

Control and state weakness. A key claim in the literature is that these groups are linked to state failure. Does the government control the militia or does the militia control the government?

Informal PGM: has no formalized link to the state, even if its connection to the government is widely known within the country; might be denied by the government
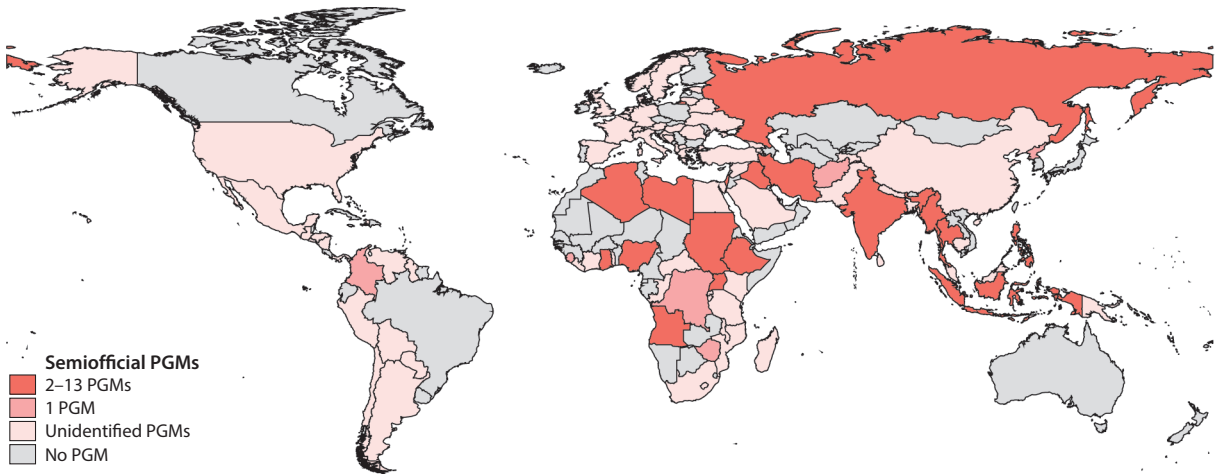
Figure 2

Semiofficial progovernment militias (PGMs), 1981–2007. Data exclude Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia.

Control depends on goal variance and the balance of information between the government and its militia. Agents with private agendas in conflict with the government principal and with an information advantage over the principal will be difficult to control (e.g., Miller 2005). We expect a more formal link lessens goal variance, increases transparency, decreases the information gap, and creates a degree of accountability. These groups may be less likely to attract opportunists and extremists, and recruits may value their position due to the provision of compensation. Groups that are more loosely connected, that are not created by the government, and that operate at arm's length from the government are more likely to have private goals and create control problems. Weak control could result from a strategic choice to give discretion to the (informal) security apparatus, or from government weakness in failing states.

The literature suggests PGMs can be both a contributor to and consequence of state failure. A government's failure to provide security motivates the creation of militias. For example, on the initiative of market traders and with the support of state governments, several vigilante groups, such as the Bakassi Boys, emerged in Nigeria in the late 1990s in response to violent crime (Jones 2008, p. 6). But while fighting crime, the vigilante groups killed and tortured hundreds of people without being held accountable (Human Rights Watch 2002). The federal government eventually banned the vigilantes, yet it was difficult to demobilize them. They had the backing of state governors, who used them against political opponents (Harnischfeger 2003, p. 27). Although these groups filled a security vacuum, they challenged the authority of the state apparatus and put citizens at risk.

Klare (2004, p. 116) emphasizes the control problems militias raise: "when armed militias emerge," state failure usually is irreversible. Bates (2008) simply uses militias as an indicator for state failure (see Fearon 2009). Reno (1999) finds a weak state might often have strong informal political networks. State weakness may produce "bottom up" militias. Alternatively, governments in weak states might mobilize militias as a cost-effective solution to their security problems. Ahram (2013, p. 497) suggests that governments with low coercive capacity resort to militias to carry out genocide.

Compared to informal militias, semiofficial militias are less likely to be related to state failure. The bureaucratic and financial costs of a formalized relationship may deny failed states this

type of security actor. Dowdle (2007) suggests that paramilitary organizations only exist when governments allocate substantial resources to security. Somewhat higher levels of economic development increase the probability of semiofficial militias, whereas informal militias are more likely to be found in poorer countries (Carey et al. 2015, 2016). These groups may even contribute to stability through coup-proofing (e.g., Belkin & Schofer 2003, Pilster & Böhmelt 2012). De Bruin (2014) suggests that leaders often use parallel forces to reduce the risk of a coup. But since counterbalancing makes battlefield coordination more difficult, leaders who also face a high risk of war are less likely to modify the security sector in this way. As **Figure 1** indicates, militias are not necessarily connected to state failure (see also Ahram 2011a, Campbell & Brenner 2002, Mazzei 2009, Raleigh 2016), and a government's risk of betrayal is lower with semiofficial militias. Semiofficial PGMs are more easily monitored, and high goal variance is less likely.

Control and predatory behavior.   The link with the government shapes the militia's behavior toward civilians. In delegating tasks to nonstate organizations, governments yield control and lessen accountability. Two levels of delegation increase the danger of opportunistic behavior harmful to civilians. First, the external or agency level of delegation occurs *between* organizations, from the state to the militia. Second, the internal or agent level of delegation from leader to individual agents occurs *within* organizations. At the agency level, governments have most control when delegating security tasks within the formal chain of command. Even this does not guarantee control. The most professional militaries have "bad apples," as the Abu Ghraib events illustrate. Investigating when states' military organizations follow the laws of war, Morrow (2007, p. 571) emphasizes significant principal–agent problems or what he labels "the central role of noise." Furthermore, the logic of delegation does not imply that violence against civilians is only a consequence of control problems. Violence might be ordered or implicitly condoned by the principal and carried out by the agent, notably under conditions where the principal has a strategic motivation to harm or kill civilians (e.g., Downes 2006, Mitchell 2004, Valentino 2004). Under these conditions, regular armed forces, police forces, or semiofficial or informal militias will commit violations (on the variation of sexual violence across wars and armed groups, see Butler et al. 2007, Cohen & Nordås 2015, Mitchell 2004, Schneider et al. 2015, Wood 2009). When the government delegates, control decreases as the amount of "daylight" between the government and the agency increases (see Fiorina 1985). The amount of daylight is greater with informal PGMs, and we expect the risk for civilians is higher with these groups.

At the internal agent level, members within militias may be more or less well-controlled by their leaders. Particularly in informal militias, recruitment procedures are likely to be lax, training more rudimentary, and discipline less predictable. Although semiofficial groups commit violations—including reported rape by the Village Guards in Turkey (Vick 2002) and by the Afghan Local Police, the local militias legalized in 2010 (Goodhand & Hakimi 2014)—there is a greater risk with informal groups. These groups are less equipped to enforce a code of conduct and may attract members unconcerned about reputational damage resulting from the use of violence (Kaldor 2007, Ron 2002). Ron (2002, p. 297) describes members of Serbian groups as often "unemployed Serbian males in search of booty and cheap wartime thrills" who are "[i]n some cases recruited directly from prisons." The Shabiha militia in Syria or anti-Kurd death squads in 1990s Turkey also recruited from prisons and criminal gangs. Prisons, under the control of the state, offer a recruitment pool high in individuals who are prone to violence and for whom militia service has low opportunity costs.

In short, shirking may result from the external agency relationship, suggesting "a runaway bureaucracy" (McCubbins et al. 1987)—or it may result from the internal agent relationship, suggesting "a runaway agent." A key hypothesis is that the more loosely connected the group is to

the state, the more likely it is that PGM members use violence for their own benefit, for example, to loot or to settle private disputes.

Control and deniability. A key claim in the literature is that militias provide deniability. But some types of militias deflect blame better than others. The degree of control influences the ease with which governments can deny responsibility for the violence these groups perpetrate. In contrast to the conventional depiction of the principal–agent relationship, delegating security tasks creates a moral hazard for the leader. The principal is tempted to blame "rogue" agents, encouraging excessive violence and predation by militias to achieve a strategic goal. Governments can shift responsibility onto semiofficial groups, but to a lesser degree than with informal PGMs. The nature of the militia–government link shapes the principal–agent relationship such that the government either can't or won't control the groups. The selection of recruits from prisons or elsewhere, along with the discretion these agents have, influences the likelihood of violence.

Outlining the moral hazard for a principal using militias, Mitchell et al. (2014) find that informal PGMs make government-sponsored killings, torture, and disappearances more likely, whereas semiofficial PGMs do not, in general, influence the risk of such agent-centered human rights violations. Koren (2016) finds that including both types of PGMs in the analysis of extreme violence improves forecasts of state-led mass killing. With an analysis of armed nonstate actors (not just PGMs) in Asian countries, Englehart (2016) finds civilians at risk from their violence. Though critical of a principal–agent approach, both Stanton (2015) and Cohen & Nordås (2015) suggest that in civil wars, semiofficial militias are less likely to commit violence than are informal militias. Alvarez (2006, p. 18) emphasizes the plausible deniability such forces offer governments, arguing that the type of personnel in militias, together with less control, produces "violence without limits" (2006, p. 22). Rudbeck et al. (2016) point to deniability and reducing the costs of repression to explain the varying success with which governments in Egypt, Kenya, and South Africa used militias. Carey et al. (2015) show that governments are most likely to have informal links with armed groups if their country is distant from but highly dependent on aid from democracies. Similarly, Kirschke (2000) and Roessler (2005) argue that during externally driven democratization in sub-Saharan Africa, leaders distanced themselves from the violence by using informal repression against the opposition.

Open questions drawn from the government–militia link. Are militias causes or consequences of state failure? Are militias linked to higher levels of predatory violence? These questions are theoretically significant, raise interesting measurement issues, and have important policy implications.

To examine predatory violence, we need reliable actor-linked information, ideally on a cross-country and cross-temporal scale. Coding violence against civilians is often restricted to civil wars and based on news sources, which rarely provide an unbiased sample (see Gohdes 2014, Gohdes & Price 2013). Human rights organizations are also unlikely to give equal coverage across groups, regions, and topics. Coding problems are accentuated for the violent behavior of militias. Irregular forces are often not well known at the time of their activities and generally attract less attention than do regular forces or rebel groups. This makes it difficult to assess the real risk of militia violence (Ahram 2011a, Stanton 2015). Collecting reliable data on militia activities requires more attention to data-generating processes, possibly examining particular areas or time periods only (see Price et al. 2015).

Research shows militias both filling a security vacuum (e.g., Ahram 2011a, Barter 2013) and undermining the state's ability to provide security and welfare for its citizens (e.g., Bates 2008, Reno 2007). One avenue of research is work on the likelihood of betrayal by PGMs (Otto et al. 2015). Another is how states recover the monopoly of violence. Besides case examples

(e.g., Giustozzi 2011), we have little understanding of when and why the link between the militia and the state breaks and what then happens to these groups. What is the impact of these groups on conflict duration as veto players or spoilers (Cunningham 2006, Jentzsch et al. 2015)? Is adding groups on the government side similar to fragmenting groups on the rebel side (Bakke et al. 2012)? During the postconflict period, the death or criminal or political "afterlife" of militias is unexplored territory. New data on side-switching by armed groups (Otto et al. 2015) allow us to investigate why rebel groups defect to the government side and why PGMs turn against the state. Former rebels are useful to governments because they reduce rebel numbers and provide intelligence. On the supply side, rebels switch as an alternative to captivity (e.g., counter-gangs in Kenya in the 1950s) or to leverage state resources in competition with rival rebel groups (Staniland 2012). Using survey data from ex-combatants in Colombia, Oppenheim et al. (2015) find that those individuals most likely to switch are economically and not ideologically motivated.

The government–militia link and the control issue raise questions about the effectiveness of PGMs. Do semiofficial PGMs prevent coups? Are informal or semiofficial PGMs more effective counterinsurgents? Does control deteriorate during peace negotiations? Does deniability work? The degree of control must influence the prospects of domestic or international legal consequences for leaders resulting from crimes committed by PGMs. Future research might investigate the effectiveness of domestic and international institutions in holding governments and members of militias accountable for war crimes and human rights violations, and whether semiofficial or informal status makes a difference. The effectiveness and the wrongdoing of militias are partly a function of their link to the government, but they also depend on the members these groups attract, the type of cleavage or loyalties mobilizing them, and the social and political institutions in which they develop.

Link to Society: Local or Community Militias

The second dimension of our typology is the militia's link to society. Some groups form on a village or neighborhood basis and are likely to share an identity with the insurgents. These origins have implications for control and the predatory nature of the group. Whatever the link to the government, local PGMs—stationary groups drawn from the area in which they operate—might be subject to informal social and economic accountability mechanisms, which shape their behavior toward civilians (e.g., Clayton & Thomson 2017, Peic 2014). Ties to the local population influence control problems and the behavior of PGMs.

A key claim of the literature is that locally based militias, unlike those without links to their communities, limit indiscriminate and predatory violence. Militias that draw from the local population and are active only within their area of origin should present fewer control problems (e.g., Barter 2013; Clayton & Thomson 2014, 2017; Peic 2014; for the rebel literature, see Walter 2017). Citing examples from Europe and America until the mid-twentieth century, Okumu & Ikelegbe (2010, pp. 4–5) point out that historically "quasimilitary" militias were part-time local defense organizations responding to emergencies. Yoroms (2005, p. 35) calls groups recruited, stationed, and active within their communities "community militias," and Jentzsch et al. (2015, p. 4) refer to "community-based militia formation and mobilization." This literature agrees locality matters. A delegation perspective suggests that horizontal accountability helps us understand why.

Using information from the Pro-Government Militias Database, we code the primary characteristic of the PGM members. **Figure 3** maps the number of local militias in countries across the globe between 1981 and 2007 (Mitchell & Carey 2013).

Local militias also exist outside civil wars, although research often examines the wartime role of such forces, usually under the label of civil defense forces (CDFs). Clayton & Thomson (2017)
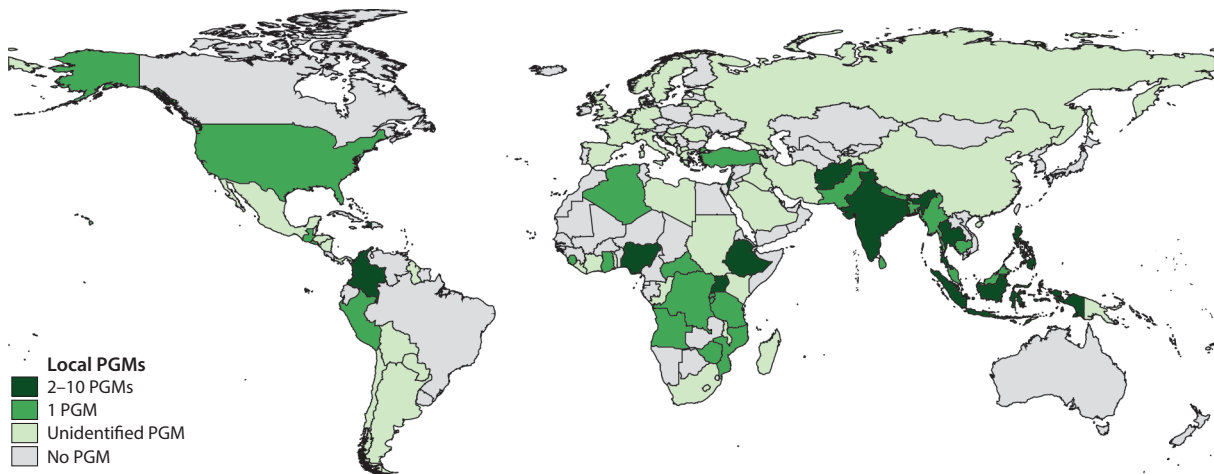
Local PGM: comprises armed civilians, recruited, stationed, and active within their communities

Civil defense force (CDF): a local PGM pursuing defensive strategies. May be semiofficial or informal

Figure 3

Local progovernment militias (PGMs), 1981–2007. During this period, the Philippines had the largest number of PGMs (ten), followed by Indonesia (nine) and then India and Uganda (both four). Data exclude Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia.

define CDFs as PGMs recruited from the civilian population, operating within the area from which they are recruited, and pursuing defensive strategies (see also Peic 2014). CDFs might be formally recognized or created by the government, falling into the category of semiofficial militias, or develop bottom-up within society and maintain looser links with the state as informal militias.

PGMs may change characteristics during their life cycle and therefore switch between our categories. It is probably easier to shift the link to government than the link to society. For example, in the 1970s, peasants in Peru formed the *rondas campesinas* to combat cattle thieves. In the 1980s, these local groups organized against the Maoist insurgent group *Sendero Luminoso* and then received support from the government, primarily in the form of weapons. Schubiger (2013) explores the grass-roots nature of these groups, arguing that indiscriminate state violence also contributed to their mobilization; affiliation with the *rondas campesinas* signaled nonaffiliation with the rebels. In 1991, President Fujimori passed a law giving these "self-defense committees" legal status (Fumerton 2001, Starn 1999), changing them from an informal to a semiofficial PGM. The evolution of the *rondas campesinas* shows that Fujimori saw the benefits of collaboration with them, presumably as force multipliers and as a source of intelligence rather than for deniability, and equipped them with better weapons.

Local membership shapes the predatory nature of PGMs. Within their communities (Yoroms 2005, pp. 35–36), they may be accountable to their fellow citizens. Schuberth (2015) examines the propensity of community-based armed groups to "turn bad." A member of a local militia, with a gun and some authority, might have scores to settle. But community militias have organizational features that suggest fewer agency problems. Given their local nature and a limited operational span, they present fewer monitoring problems than other types of militias. In case of wrongdoing, the agents cannot exit easily. Because they and their families are embedded in local social arrangements, they are vulnerable to sanctions. Even if the government's authorization and equipment to use force are diverted to private goods, Olson's (1993) logic of stationary and roving bandits suggests less predation from civil defense militias. As a result, scholars see the advantages of militias linked to local communities (Ahram 2011a; Barter 2013; Clayton & Thomson 2014, 2017; Peic 2014). Clayton & Thomson (2017) find that civil defense militias possess a specific asset

Table 1 Typology of progovernment militias

Link to society	Link to government	
	Informal	Semiofficial
Local Risk to state and civilians	Medium	Low
Nonlocal Risk to state and civilians	Very high	Medium

in their capacity to identify insurgents, which then reduces levels of state violence against civilians, although these citizen soldiers put themselves in the firing line. Local militias are probably the least violent toward civilians, although case studies highlight how quickly a defensive purpose turns into unchecked and agent-centered violence, particular in the context of counterinsurgencies (Harnischfeger 2003, Romero 2003).

In short, ties to a local community and acknowledged, semiofficial ties to the government lower goal variance and facilitate monitoring and punishment. Studies outlined above suggest that local ties have dampening effects on shirking and opportunism while exposing members to insurgent violence. **Table 1** presents this typology and our expectations for these different types of PGMs. Delegating sovereign tasks to any armed nonstate actor carries risks. But not all actors are alike. We expect local and semiofficial militias to present the lowest risks to citizens and the state.

Membership Characteristics

Not only villages and neighborhoods, but also tribes, churches, and political parties produce PGMs (Clayton & Thomson 2017, Mazzei 2009, Staniland 2015b, Stanton 2015). The specific characteristics of militia membership promise valuable insights into the survival, behavior, purpose, and success of the group.

Ideological, religious, and ethnic cleavages assist mobilization. Scholars use these cleavages to understand the support for peaceful political opposition and political parties, or armed opposition and rebel group formation (Cederman et al. 2010, Lipset & Rokkan 1967). The challenge is to distinguish primary cleavages from those that "proved temporary and secondary" (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, p. 1), as was done for political party alignment. Work on militias and on political organizations suggests PGM members might be (*a*) motivated and mobilized by ethnic or religious differences, (*b*) motivated and mobilized by ideology, nationalism, or a particular political party, or (*c*) composed primarily of noncivilians, including (off-duty) police, military personnel, or mercenaries. Sometimes these links converge and reinforce each other. For example, members of the Popular Committees in Syria can be described as ethnic/religious recruits or political party activists and include members of the security forces. This more inductive approach incorporates the wider literature and helps us to draw out the risks associated with delegation to these types of groups, as shown in **Table 2**. In moving from location to analyzing the key "identity" links to society, we focus again on the central problem of control.

We assign PGMs a primary membership characteristic, accepting that these characteristics are not exclusive and may change over time. Thirty years ago, Horowitz (1985, p. 13) noted the "increasing prominence of ethnic loyalties" in conflicts. Changing loyalties may reflect what a leader judges will mobilize support; Yugoslav communists become Serbian nationalists. Yet we expect that in most cases we can identify whether PGMs recruit their members on ethnicity or religion, ideology, nationalism or political party affiliation, or whether the members primarily represent (off-duty) members of the security forces. In the following, we discuss how the characteristics of PGM members influence control problems.

Table 2 The association of progovernment militias with society

Membership characteristics	Link to government	
	Informal	**Semiofficial**
Ethnic/religious	Ethnoreligious militias	Formalized ethnic militias
Risk to state	High	Medium
Risk to civilians	Very high	High
Example	Interahamwe Militia (Rwanda)	Crimean Cossacks (Ukraine)
Ideological/nationalist/political	Political militias	Formalized political militias
Risk to state	High	Low
Risk to civilians	Very high	High
Example	ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe)	Pemuda Panca Marga (Indonesia)
Noncivilians, including (off-duty) police, military, mercenaries	Off-duty militias	Parallel forces
Risk to state	Low	Low
Risk to civilians	Very high	High
Example	AUC (Colombia)	Operation Vigilance (Nigeria)

Ethnic or religious links to society: ethnoreligious militias. For many militias, ethnicity is the dominant link to society (**Figure 4**). Cederman et al. (2010, p. 98) define ethnicity as "subjectively experienced sense of commonality based on the belief in common ancestry and shared culture." Ethnicity and religion may facilitate coordination, create a sense of belonging, and provide boundary lines for political exclusion or "out-grouping." Jentzsch (2014) describes the "magical war" the Naparama militia in Mozambique offered its members. Substantial evidence suggests the importance of ethnicity to conflict (Cederman et al. 2010, Gurr 1993). Stanton (2015) codes militias for coethnicity with rebels and finds civilians are safer with militias sharing an ethnic identity. Mueller (2004, p. 95) observes ethnicity as a basis for organization; however, he argues that in the former Yugoslavia, the militias' violence was not about ethnic hatreds but "the focused predation of comparatively small groups of violent thugs and criminals recruited and semicoordinated by politicians." Rather than a characteristic that motivates people to form militias "bottom-up," Mueller suggests that leaders use ethnicity "top-down" to mobilize militias. Kalyvas (2008, p. 1,051) shows that governments in civil wars often structure collaboration along ethnic lines. This collaboration may extend across borders. Ron (2003, p. 186) describes Israel collaborating "discretely" with ethnoreligious militias that shared a common enemy—not ethnic kin groups—in Lebanon. If "out-grouping" theory is right, and in the absence of the selection and monitoring features of local militias, mobilizing along ethnic or religious lines is likely to lead to more extreme forms of violence and instability, particularly for informal militias. Isaacs' (2016) research points to the endogenous relationship between religious rhetoric and violence. In Walter's (2017) "new new wars," religion on the rebel side is the central factor, which points to the strategic value of exploiting ethnicity and religion to mobilize and legitimize armed nonstate actors on the government side. Yet ethnoreligious PGMs pose a threat to the state, if the goal of protecting religious or ethnic institutions and leaders diverges from state priorities.

Ethnoreligious PGM: mobilizes members primarily along ethnic or religious lines

Ideology-based links to society: political militias. Staniland (2015b) criticizes "apolitical" work on militias, arguing that ideology is a neglected factor explaining a government's relationship with an armed group. Supporting this line of inquiry, Oppenheim et al. (2015; see also Gutiérrez Sanín & Wood 2014) provide evidence on the role of ideology in recruitment to armed groups
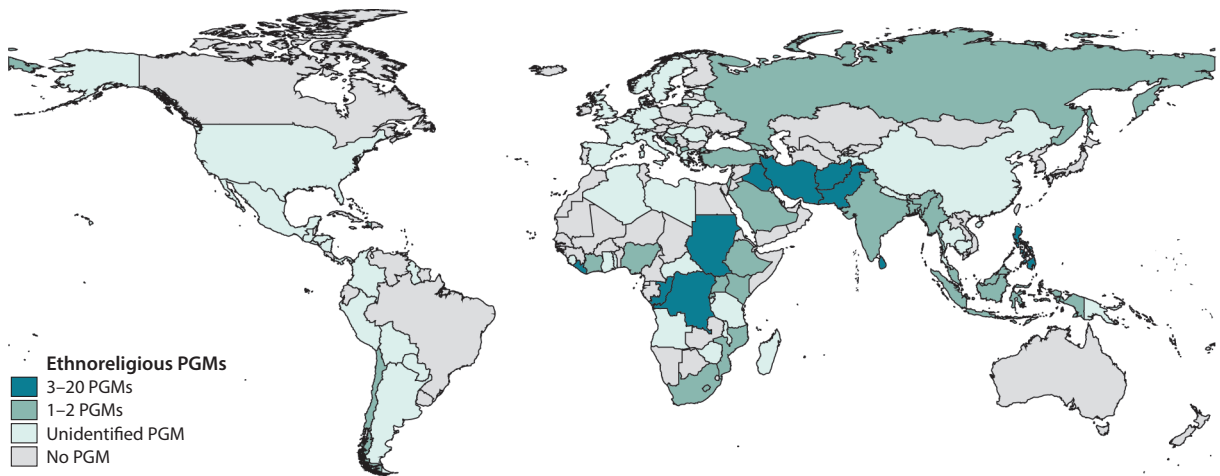
Figure 4

Progovernment militias (PGMs) whose members were primarily mobilized along ethnic or religious lines, 1981–2007. Twenty ethnoreligious PGMs were coded for Sudan, six for Afghanistan, and five for the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, and Sri Lanka. Data exclude Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia.

and in the likelihood of a group holding onto its members. Although ethnoreligious militias are "ideological" in the sense of beliefs providing legitimacy and goals for action, and also "political," we reserve the label "political PGM" for groups that are primarily mobilized by nonreligious ideology, nationalism, or political parties. Perry (2006) documents the tasks militias performed for the Chinese Communist Party during the twentieth century. Occasionally, the process of parties turning (in)to militias is reversed. With elections imminent, armed groups that fought the Taliban in Afghanistan reorganized as political parties. This was prohibited by electoral law, but in the 2005 elections only some candidates with militia connections were disqualified (Giustozzi 2009, p. 92).

As with interest groups generally, ideology provides "a purposive incentive" to join PGMs (Moe 1980). We find anticommunist groups in Central America, Colombia, and Indonesia. The Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had armed groups in Chiapas in the 1990s. President Mugabe's ZANU-PF has a militia and a youth wing known as the Green Bombers. Wilkinson (2006) describes the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activists' incentives to instigate violence where minority Muslim votes had no value for it or its coalition partners. The literature suggests that political parties value an armed wing particularly in the run-up to elections. **Figure 5** plots the frequency of political PGMs between 1981 and 2007.

Political PGM: draws members primarily from the ruling political party or along ideological or nationalist lines

Noncivilian PGM members: off-duty militias and parallel forces. Finally, some PGMs have a noncivilian membership (**Figure 6**). They might be off-duty police or military acting outside their formal organization, or former members of the regular security apparatus and mercenaries. Noncivilian PGMs tend to be clandestine, small, and very violent (Campbell & Brenner 2002, Huggins 1991b). Even the names of these groups are designed to intimidate, e.g., Death to the Kidnappers in Colombia, Ninjas in Algeria and Indonesia, and Green Tigers in Sri Lanka. Most groups in this category have an informal link to the government, aiding deniability for contro-versial violence. Few semiofficial PGMs recruit primarily noncivilians. Research on these groups highlights their detrimental impact on human security (Campbell & Brenner 2002).

Noncivilian PGM: draws members from regular police or military, including former members of the regular security apparatus and mercenaries
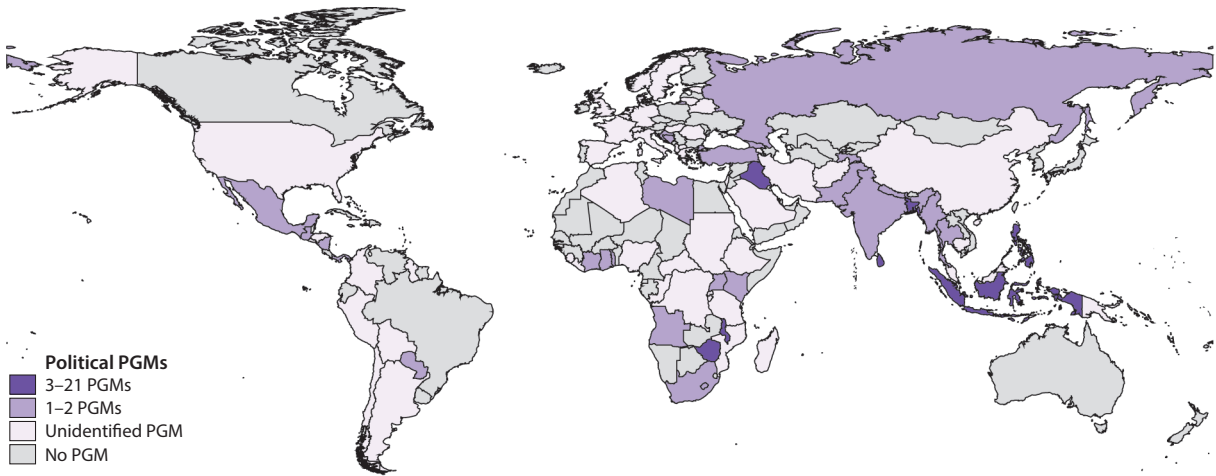
Figure 5

Political progovernment militias (PGMs), 1981–2007. During this period, Indonesia had the largest number of political PGMs (21), followed by Zimbabwe (five) and then Sri Lanka and the former Yugoslavia (both four). Data exclude Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia.

Open questions drawn from the society–militia link. How do ideology, politics, and religion shape the behavior of PGMs toward civilians and toward the government? Are membership characteristics important to the probity risk run by governments, to the longevity of the groups, and to the nature of their afterlife? **Table 2** summarizes how the primary membership characteristics of PGMs are expected to shape the risks militias pose for civilians and for the stability of a state. Militias with membership based on in-group and out-group differentiation are likely to be particularly violent toward civilians. Harff (2003) analyzes the impact of exclusionary ideologies on the risk of
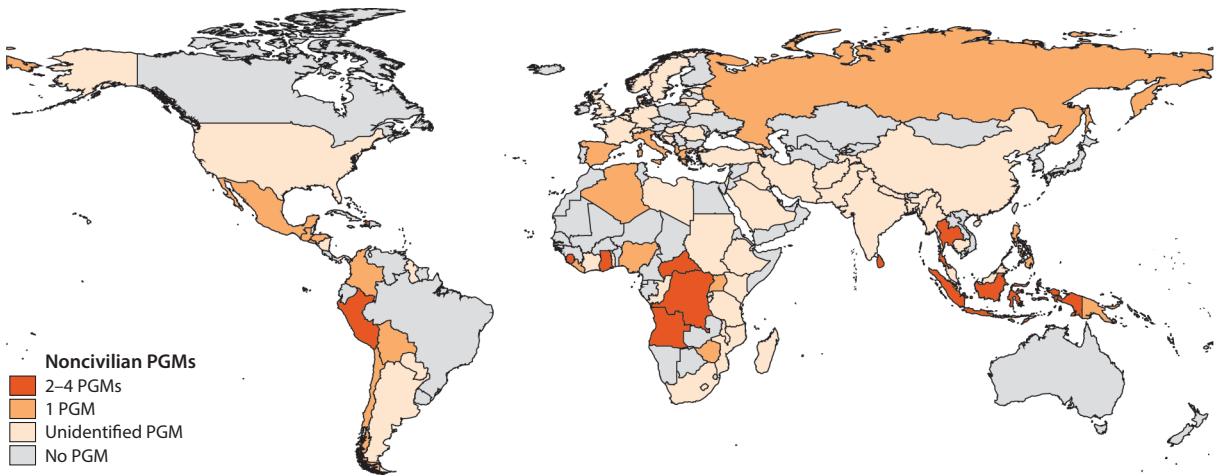
Figure 6

Noncivilian progovernment militias (PGMs), 1981–2007. During this period, noncivilian PGMs were most common in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which had four. Haiti, Indonesia, and Sierra Leone each had three. Data exclude Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Lebanon, and Somalia.

genocide. Asal & Rethemeyer (2008, see also Isaacs 2016) examine the impact of religion on terrorist group activities. Wucherpfennig et al. (2012) show the impact of ethnic exclusion on armed group solidarity and resilience. Finally, noncivilian militias might be disposed to violence because their members are likely to be most skilled in, and not averse to using, extreme forms of violence.

Membership characteristics influence the probity risk for the state for two reasons. First, PGMs with low potential membership—local or noncivilian militias—pose less risk to state stability than those with the potential of recruiting large parts of society. Ethnoreligious and political militias can potentially draw in much larger numbers and might value loyalty to individual leaders over the stability of the state.

Second, the members PGMs attract and the bond between members influence the risk they pose for the state. The exclusionary frame of ethnoreligious and political militias may become a liability for a state. The loyalty of these PGMs is to ethnic, religious, or ideological leaders and their goals, rather than to state institutions per se. This goal variance makes these groups a higher risk to the foundations of a state than local or noncivilian militias are.

Important questions of how governments mitigate these risks remain unanswered. If governments place different degrees of trust in different types of PGMs, is this reflected in the quantity and quality of arms supplied? Further, the literature has barely begun to investigate the risks to members of these groups themselves (see Clayton & Thomson 2017 for an exception).

The association with society might help explain the puzzling survival of PGMs. As research on rebel groups suggests, ethnoreligious cleavages might be most enduring, particularly if the opportunity costs of leaving these groups are low, e.g., in countries with high unemployment levels and youth bulges (Urdal 2006; see also Wucherpfennig et al. 2012). For youth militias connected to political parties in Sierra Leone, "a sense of togetherness" was a motivation for mobilizing (Christensen & Utas 2008, p. 527). Where such solidary, purposive, or other private benefits are insufficient, what role do coercion and fear play in recruitment? For the Afghan Local Police, coercion and economic necessity drove recruitment (Goodhand & Hakimi 2014, pp. 40–41). Coercion is evident where militias recruit children. Kalyvas & Kocher (2007) note the risks of not joining armed groups. Schubiger (2013) highlights the mobilizing role of fear of indiscriminate state violence for Peruvian peasant groups. Militia survival may also depend on subsidies from other institutions, such as churches, political parties, and domestic or foreign governments. Finally, we need to investigate when militias do not survive. Distinguishing between militias "dying" and militias falling off the news agenda is problematic given the available data.

ALTERNATIVE CLASSIFICATIONS OF MILITIAS

We chose the militia's links to the government and to society for the typology and the more inductive framework. These links are conceptually and empirically independent of each other with implications for the group's survival and behavior. Two alternative dimensions of interest to scholars are whether the group was initiated from the bottom up within society (Barter 2013, Blocq 2014, Jentzsch et al. 2015) and the context within which the group is active (e.g., Raleigh 2016).

Noting the dynamic nature of these relationships, Jentzsch et al. (2015) distinguish between state-orchestrated and community-driven groups. This distinction partially overlaps with informal and semiofficial militias. Bottom-up groups must be informal PGMs—at least initially—although not all top-down PGMs need to be semiofficial. For example, death squads of off-duty security sector personnel are usually covert and informal, although likely to be initiated by state actors (e.g., Huggins 1991b). Truly grass-roots groups are probably a rare phenomenon. Citizens are unlikely to cooperate for mutual protection themselves. If there are solutions to coordination, "it is elites who construct them" (Weingast 1997, p. 246). Nevertheless, governments may

see a political benefit in claiming a counterinsurgent group is bottom-up (e.g., Salwa Judum in India). Demonstrating local support and commitment to defeating the rebels gives a government's counterinsurgency campaign more legitimacy. Governments may be tempted to create artificial bottom-up groups.

Raleigh (2016) distinguishes militias in Africa by context, including groups not on the government side. She differentiates organizations found in failed states (Local Security Providers) and distinguishes those within a civil war context (Emergency Militias) from those outside this context (Competition Militias). The typology establishes a discontinuity between war and peace. Other research suggests a continuity of violence across these periods (e.g., Christensen & Utas 2008, p. 518). Yet Raleigh's categorization recognizes that militias are not confined to civil wars and that they can have a strategic purpose in democratizing and democratic countries. Acemoglu et al. (2013) reinforce this point, stressing the "symbiotic relationship with specific politicians holding power: paramilitaries deliver votes to politicians with preferences relatively close to theirs, while politicians they helped elect leave them alone and possibly... support laws and policies that they prefer" (Acemoglu et al. 2013, p. 7). We need to know more about the role PGMs play in democratization processes and what form of exchange, money or impunity, passes between militias and politicians.

CONCLUSION

What makes governments sufficiently risk acceptant to forego the monopoly of violence? If a conflict lasts longer and the insurgents are more resilient than expected, governments might become more risk acceptant. After all, "the tendency to bet on long shots increases in the course of the betting day" (Kahneman & Tversky 1979, p. 287; see also McDermott et al. 2008). Peic (2014) describes CDFs as a last resort. In the 1920s, when the Iraq Mandate faced mounting losses and became a political issue at home, T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia) questioned why the government sacrificed British and Indian troops when it could recruit local militias—which it later did (Mitchell 2012, p. 165). Eighty years later, with the insurgency under way and losses mounting, the American "surge" in Iraq depended on handing weapons to ethnoreligious Sunni Awakening militias. Ash (2016) finds that, under threat of irregular removal such as a coup, leaders seek loyal agents and links to militias. Investigating what shapes the willingness of government leaders to bet on a militia, and the specific form the militia bet takes, is a promising direction for research. When Israeli Defense Minister Arial Sharon and Prime Minister Menachem Begin's government collaborated with the Lebanese Christian Phalange militia in 1982, they accepted a risk an earlier Prime Minister had rejected. They valued the immediate benefits of, for example, transferring casualties from their regular forces to the PGM over potential long-term consequences for the government. When a similar collaboration was proposed in the 1950s, a more risk-averse Prime Minister Sharett noted, "we will get bogged down in a mad adventure that will only bring us disgrace" (quoted in Schiff & Ya'ari 1984, p. 14), giving more weight to longer-term costs than to short-term benefits.

A disparate literature addresses the causes and consequences of PGMs. The logic of delegation helps organize and consolidate what we know about these groups. Key findings show that the looseness of control is linked to the weakness of the state (e.g., Carey et al. 2015, Dowdle 2007, Klare 2004, Reno 1999). Loose control increases the likelihood of excessive violence against civilians, in part because informal groups can be used to avoid accountability (e.g., Alvarez 2006, Carey et al. 2015, Kirschke 2000, Rudbeck et al. 2016; but see Cohen & Nordås 2015). Groups with a formalized link to government present a lower risk not only for civilians but also for the state. PGMs recruiting and operating within their local communities and subject to horizontal accountability mechanisms are expected to use less violence than other types (e.g., Ahram 2011a,

Barter 2013, Clayton & Thomson 2017, Peic 2014). The bottom-up mobilization of militias raises questions about the role of the state in fostering collective action (e.g., Barter 2013, Mueller 2004, Starn 1999). Examining the beliefs and loyalties mobilizing their members provides insights on the pool of participants and on their violent behavior (e.g., Isaacs 2016, Ron 2003, Stanton 2015).

Interest in PGMs centers on the state's fundamental problem of controlling violence. Without such control, as Hobbes and the failed-state literature would point out, there is no incentive for industry and creative endeavor. In this review, we derived expectations about the risks PGMs pose for the state and for civilians, and identified new research questions. Much is left to discover about the demand and supply of these groups, as well as the incentives for governments to use them and for citizens to join them. Without underestimating the data challenges involved, we need to identify the militias that pose the highest risks for state failure and predatory violence. Do local and semiofficial militias mitigate risks to citizens and the state? Is the government's level of trust in these groups indicated by the quantity and quality of arms supplied? Who is accountable for militias' violence? Does their goal variance lengthen conflicts? Does adding groups on the government side mimic the dynamics of fragmenting groups on the rebel side? Do PGMs make "adventurous" (Avant 2005) behavior by governments more likely? In short, we want to know the consequences of PGMs for civilian wellbeing, regime security, and the international community. And we want to know more about the nature and evolution of their links to government or society, their death, and their "afterlife." To answer such questions, new efforts to collect reliable and valid information on militias must carefully weigh the costs and benefits of country-specific versus more global data. As we develop our knowledge of what happens when security is not a sovereign task, we may get a better understanding of whether it ought to be.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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