

Local Self-Defence Militias as Counterinsurgents

The Possibility, Willingness and Rationality of Selective Violence against Insurgents

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Abstract

How do local self-defence militias (LSDMs) influence violence against civilians in civil conflicts? Compared to other types of pro-government militias (PGMs), LSDMs are active in their home area. This results in abundant local information that can be used to identify and target insurgents and their supporters selectively. Furthermore, LSDMs are part of the local community, resulting in strong social ties, making indiscriminate violence against the community less likely. Finally, since LSDMs are dependent on popular support and cannot move on to a new area after violent acts, they are incentivised to retain local support by abstaining from civilian targeting. Therefore, I hypothesise that LSDMs are more likely to employ selective violence, and that their deployment decreases civilian fatalities in civil conflicts. To empirically test this claim in a global sample, I use 1) a logistic regression to assess the likelihood of selective violence of PGMs (H1), and 2) a negative binomial regression to evaluate the expected number of civilians killed by the government (H2). The results for the first hypothesis suggest an increased likelihood of selective violence for LSDMs (60%) compared to 50% for other PGMs, although they do not allow inference beyond the observed sample. The analysis of the second hypothesis shows that states using LSDMs decrease their civilian deaths by 30 per year (75%). Consequently, this study contributes to an improved understanding of the different types of PGMs, and informs policies on intra-state security administration.