

Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Recruitment: Evidence from a Survey in Colombia

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April 20, 2007

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Jointly presented by the University of Washington International Security Colloquium (UWISC), UW Institute for National Security Education and Research (UW INSER), and the Center for International Studies, Jackson School of International Studies

Presenter

Stathis Kalyvas is Arnold Wolfers Professor of Political Science and Director of the Program on Order, Conflict, and Violence at Yale University. He has authored *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Cornell University Press, 1996), and is co-editor of *Order, Conflict, Violence* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). His articles include “The Paradox of Terrorism in Civil War” (*Journal of Ethics*, 2004) and “Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria” (*Rationality and Society*, 1999). Kalyvas has been a visiting professor at the Juan March Institute, a Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute, and a grant recipient from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation and the United States Institute of Peace.

Theme

This presentation dealt with a major gap in the burgeoning literature on civil war and insurgency. While much research has been conducted on why people become insurgents, little-to-no research has thus far examined why people become counterinsurgents. This gap is all the more surprising given that civil war often involves two or more organizations – the state, local counterinsurgent or paramilitary militias, as well as the insurgents themselves – competing for the same recruits.

By conducting extensive fieldwork in Colombia, Professor Kalyvas and his collaborator, Ana Arjona of Yale University, have been able to go beyond simplistic explanations that ascribe unitary motivations to large numbers of participants in civil wars. Second, as noted above, they have been able to remedy the selection bias involved in focusing solely on “Why do people become insurgents?” as opposed to “Why do some people become insurgents, while others become counterinsurgents?” Third, Professor Kalyvas and Ms. Arjona have been able to emphasize the considerable role in civil wars played by local actors – paramilitaries or militias – that are neither the state nor insurgents.

In particular, through interviews and surveys with former insurgents and counterinsurgents, Professor Kalyvas and Ms. Arjona were able to test seven theories of civil war and their implications for recruitment during civil war. Most of the theories did not withstand the empirical tests that Professor Kalyvas and Ms. Arjona devised and conducted. To the extent that one can predict who fights for which side during a civil war, “local sovereignty” appears the best predictor. That is, people join the group that rules the area in which they live. This stands in contrast to prevailing theories of rebellion that emphasize, for example, “greed” and/or “grievance.” Instead, one must

recognize that civil war is not a “black box” whose outcome and nature can predicted at its outset, but rather a complex phenomenon whose dynamics contain considerable endogeneity.

Audience

The audience consisted of approximately 35 people. Audience members came from multiple academic units across campus including the Departments of Sociology and Political Science as well as the Information School. Attendees included undergraduate and graduate students as well as a good representation of faculty.

Questions

Questions posed both by the discussant, Jason Scheideman, a PhD student in political science, as well as the audience more broadly, revolved around four key themes. The first was the conceptualization of militias and paramilitary groups. The audience sought to understand what distinguishes these groups not just from insurgents, but also from the government. Second, the audience probed the ways in which Professor Kalyvas and Ms. Arjona distinguished their theory from existing theories. Third, the audience sought to understand better the dynamics of civil war itself – for example, the mechanisms by which control can change and shift. Fourth, a member of the audience asked Professor Kalyvas for policy prescriptions relevant to General David Petraeus and the American government, with respect to the current conflict in Iraq.

Implications for National Security

In contrast to conventional war, civil war appears the primary mode of organized armed conflict today. It is difficult to conceive of anything more important toward understanding civil war than to understand who fights for whom during civil war, and why. This presentation permits one to understand the array of groups with whom one can join during civil war, and equally as important, the reasons why one might choose to do so. Moreover, the research behind this presentation poses serious challenges to existing theories of who does or does not become an insurgent. Professor Kalyvas and Ms. Arjona’s research provides an extremely rich source of data, and well-developed theorizing about causal processes, for understanding the sources and nature of civil war.