



Rebel Governance in Civil War

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BOOK REVIEW

Rebel Governance in Civil War, edited by Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir and Zachariah Mampilly, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015, 328 pp., £64.99 (hardback), £20.99 (paperback), \$80.00 (ebook), ISBN 978-1-107-10222-4

What are the causes, characteristics and consequences of rebel governance? What, indeed, is 'rebel governance?' These are the central questions and concerns of this thoughtful, intelligent and compelling collection edited by Ana Arjona (Northwestern University), Nelson Kasfir (Dartmouth College) and Zachariah Mampilly (Vassar College). Highly respected scholars of insurgent governance in their own right, the three editors have brought together some of the leading thinkers in the field in this exceptionally impressive and coherent examination of the phenomenon. In doing so, they seek not only to address the complex questions above but also to establish and guide the study of rebel governance as 'a new field of scholarly enquiry' (p. 19). The study develops conceptual architecture for understanding rebel governance and provides in-depth case studies from across the globe to inform future scholarship. The book is intended, in part, as 'an attempt to begin a conversation and stimulate a broader research program' (p. 299) and this objective is more than met; indeed, *Rebel Governance in Civil War* has already established itself as a primary frame of reference for researchers examining the dynamics of insurgent rule.

A core strength of the book is the exacting curation undertaken by the three editors. The 12 contributions have clearly been solicited, edited, ordered and incorporated with care in order to speak to different dimensions of the overall project. Drawing on a wide geographical range of case studies (Latin America, West Africa, India, Central Africa and Europe) and a number of disciplinary approaches, the chapters flesh-out various conceptual elements of an overall 'whole': how to conceptualise rebel governance (Kasfir, Arjona), factors leading to its development and/or decline (Timothy Wickham-Crowley), the symbolic and diplomatic dimensions of rebel governance (Mampilly, Bridget Coggins), the influence of ideational principles on the phenomenon (Stathis Kalyvas, Bert Suykens, Kasper Hoffmann), the influence of civilians (Arjona, Till Förster) and the impact of rebel violence on governance (Francisco Gutiérrez-Sanín, William Reno). The collective contribution of these chapters to advancing the field of rebel governance studies – as well as their links to one another – is outlined clearly and persuasively in a comprehensive and highly readable introduction and conclusion (both authored by Arjona, Kasfir and Mampilly), which demonstrate clearly the extent to which the book is far more than just the sum of its parts.

This is not to say, however, that the editors have attempted to straitjacket their contributors into a single conceptual framework or line of analysis. Kasfir and Arjona, for example, delineate two slightly different analytical models for analysing and understanding rebel governance, both of which offer different attractions to researchers and neither of which are artificially forced upon the contributors (though their influence, particularly in the case of Kasfir's, is evident). Kasfir's chapter, which begins the collection, broadly scopes out the field and seeks to delineate its boundaries and provide a working definition – focusing on a rebel group's degree of territorial control, the presence of a resident civilian population in said territory and the existence of violence or the threat of violence. Arjona's approach (Chapter 9) is to conceptualise forms of rebel governance and, drawing on her previous work (Arjona 2014, see also Arjona 2016), suggests a binary: rebelocracy ('in which the armed group ... regulates conduct beyond security and taxation') and alioocracy ('where the armed group does not intervene beyond the realms of security and taxation, thus leaving other matters in the hands of others', p. 182, 183). It remains to be seen whether scholars adopt or contest these definitional scaffolds and whether they are sufficiently broad to capture some of the complex dynamics at play on the ground in many cases – reducing the latter to one of two scenarios has the potential to obscure and simplify as much as it does to explain and enlighten. That being said, few sub-disciplines within the social sciences achieve analytical purchase without offering terms, binaries and categories at a level of abstraction allowing for contestation and comparison and the contributions of Kasfir and Arjona undoubtedly begin this important set of intellectual exchanges in this work.

At its heart, the collection speaks to the complex and sometimes unpredictable interactions between structural and agency-focused factors in determining the shape and fate of rebel governance. Adopting state structures or accommodating established socio-political actors and cultural norms loom large in determining many of the governance models and approaches adopted by rebels in the book, from Congo to Aceh, though many of the chapters provide absorbing insights into how rebels have sought to reimagine or repackage these phenomena and relationships as part of a hybridised rebel legitimisation and governance approach. Kasper Hoffmann (Chapter 8), for example, explains how eastern Congo's Mai Mai rebels built a range of existing societal myths, beliefs and practices into their calibration of relationships with civilians – both consciously and unconsciously – in a manner which enhanced their legitimacy but also changed the nature of their identity and insurgent narrative. Employing Joel Migdal's 'state in society' model (Migdal 2001), Shane Joshua Barter (Chapter 11) demonstrates the practical approach adopted by Indonesia's Free Aceh Movement to rebel governance in forming alliances with non-state actors who enjoyed local support but did not share the same values as the rebel group – with unanticipated results.

William Reno (Chapter 13)'s fascinating analysis of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) upends reductionist 'new wars' and 'greed and grievance' interpretations of the movement's use of violence and resources by demonstrating how influential links to the pre-insurgency Liberian patronage network were for the group's subsequent regime maintenance strategy. The chapter, like many others in the collection, also sheds light on the inherent logic of governance

approaches which have too often been dismissed as intrinsically chaotic or vindictive; 'the depiction of [Taylor's] behaviour as purely criminal', explains Reno, 'does not take into account that it was part of [his] strategy to assert his authority as arbiter of disputes and source of favours ... the main incentive for individuals to seek out rebels for protection [in Liberia] came from the general insecurity that they created' (p. 281, 282). The contributions of Arjona and Kalyvas (Chapter 6) also speak to the centrality of structural and historical factors – the legitimacy and effectiveness of pre-insurgency governance institutions and the extent of rebel territorial control, respectively – in determining the nature and success of rebel governance.

The significance of rebel ideologies and beliefs on governance enjoy a prominent but ambiguous presence in the study, reflective of the challenges many insurgent movements face in translating their ideas into structures and practices which mobilise support, and which are meaningful to civilian populations. Kalyvas reveals the impact of ideology – in this case, communism – on the forms of governance adopted by insurgents during the Greek Civil War, while Suykens (Chapter 7) links the ideational premises of two rebel movements in Nagaland, North-east India, to their administrative practices, willingness to engage with state officials and, ultimately, their effectiveness. The agency of civilians in influencing forms of governance and, indeed, the success of rebel governance and the rebel enterprise is also recognised and explored in the collection – a significant contribution in its own right. Arjona examines the factors which generate civilian resistance to rebel governance, while Gutiérrez-Sanín demonstrates the deleterious relationship between loss of ideological coherence and discipline and popular support for leftist militias during Colombia's civil war (Chapter 12).

Where the book is perhaps less satisfying is in its examination – or non-examination – of the 'state'. A number of the authors draw fairly stark distinctions between 'state' and 'non-state' and place considerable emphasis on territorial control and the threat of violence – necessarily so, perhaps, to carve-out the conceptual space required to explore rebel (as opposed to state) governance. In many of the contexts described, however, the gap between 'state' and 'non-state' and between 'combatant' and 'civilian' (see Förster's helpful examination of this issue in Chapter 10) is difficult to identify. Indeed, for a range of civilians, rebel governance has often been the only direct encounter with state-like governance structures in living memory. Moreover, rebel governance for many communities has been based around consent in a way that the distant, predatory governance of the internationally recognised 'state' has never attempted to foster. For a range of rebel movements, the entity recognised internationally as the state (p. 25) has never enjoyed domestic legitimacy or authority and insurgency is not, at least singularly, about the overthrow and replacement of the 'state' but about fundamentally contesting what the post-colonial state *should* be (see, e.g., Justin Pearce's work on rebel governance during the Angolan Civil War, Pearce 2015). The excellent chapters by Mampilly (on rebels' adoption and imitation of state-like symbols) and Coggins (on rebel diplomacy) shed light on this blurring of state and non-state identities in the performance of rebel governance and represent exciting future research agendas.

The book does not claim, however, to offer the final word on rebel governance and, indeed, the editors suggest exploration of the question 'do non-state governors

share essential characteristics that distinguish them from state governance?’ (p. 298) among several areas for future research outlined in the conclusion. One of the many appealing features of the volume, indeed, is that it sets out an ambitious and intellectually compelling research agenda as part of a dialogue with researchers in the sub-field, rather than as a definitive summary of the state of the art. To some extent, the profile of the contributors and combined conceptual and empirical strength of the contributions represents the latter without it needing to be said. This is an important and persuasive piece of scholarship – and the beginning of an even more important conversation for researchers of insurgency and insurgent governance.

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