Armed Politics and the Study of Intrastate Conflict

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Abstract: States and armed groups can have diverse political relationships, from tight cooperation to intense warfare. As a result, violence is not identical to conflict, but conflict research often conflates the two. These conceptual insights have not been turned into a systematic empirical research agenda. This paper makes the case for studying state-group interactions across space and time as part of an “armed politics” approach to conflict. It conceptualizes and measures state-group armed orders of alliance, limited cooperation, and military hostilities, and the termination of these orders in collapse or incorporation. The paper applies this framework to several cases in South Asia. It measures armed orders across five groups and six decades in Nagaland, and then offers a briefer overview of state-group armed orders in Karachi, Mizoram, and northern Burma/Myanmar. These cases suggest that examining armed orders helps us better understand ceasefires and peace deals, rebel governance, and group emergence and collapse, among other substantively important topics. The armed politics approach valuably complements existing data on civil conflict, particularly in contexts where groups do not reliably align with or against the state, and/or in which datasets disagree about the existence of a conflict. The paper concludes by identifying new empirical and theoretical horizons for research on violence, order, and conflict.

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The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) is one of Asia’s most resilient armed groups. Founded in 1961, it was a determined foe of the Burmese military for decades. Yet from 1993 to 2010, it drops out of the most detailed dataset on armed conflict because it signed a ceasefire in 1992 and did not resume hostilities until 2011. During this period, the KIO continued to govern civilians, mobilize military forces, and bargain with the state, even though it was not actively fighting. This is an example of the broader phenomenon of “armed politics”: whether Kurdish pesh merga, Shiite militias, and Sunni armed groups in Iraq, private armies in the Philippines, or the armed wings of political parties in Pakistan, many armed actors oscillate between conflict and cooperation with governments. Some eventually merge into the state, others fight protracted wars, and yet others maintain steady spheres of influence with the government.

These cases suggest that conflict should not always be conflated with violence. Ceasefires, peace deals, rebel governance, and armed group emergence and collapse can occur in periods marked by little violence, while distinctions between insurgents, militias, and electoral violence are often variable, not fixed. Recent research has pointed out many of these nuances and puzzles, but conceptual and case-based insights have not been turned into a broader empirical research agenda. This article offers a way to build on previous work by systematically measuring armed orders in South Asian cases and using this research to identify the costs and benefits of studying state-group interactions across levels of violence.

Exploring armed politics has two advantages. First, it allows systematic comparisons between armed orders of alliance, limited cooperation, and military hostilities, as well as their termination in either collapse or group incorporation. Violence is undoubtedly important, but

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1 Smith 1999.
2 Gleditsch et al. 2002. The most updated version of these data is Themner and Wallensteen 2014.
these armed orders (and their termination) can all exist in its absence. Studying armed politics helps us understand shifts between orders across dyads and over time within them, and it can improve how we study other important outcomes like variation in rebel governance and the signing of peace agreements. Second, the armed politics approach integrates diverse types of armed groups under a shared framework. Militias, insurgents, and armed electoral groups can all be part of similar armed orders. This lets us compare across otherwise disparate types of groups.

Research on armed orders, however, is very resource-intensive and cannot be easily pursued across a large number of countries. Rather than replacing existing cross-national data, therefore, the armed politics approach can instead complement them. It will be most useful in complex political environment in which armed actors do not align consistently with or against the state and governments and groups continue to interact across different levels of violence. Armed politics lets scholars study these contexts at a fine-grained level while still using a shared approach that can travel across cases.

This paper first unifies existing intuitions under the analytical framework of armed orders and their termination. It then provides a detailed examination of a context, Nagaland in India, that existing datasets struggle to represent. I show how conventional approaches miss important variation that can inform theories of conflict dynamics and outcomes. Briefer discussion of other cases from South Asia illustrates the value-added of the armed politics approach. The paper concludes with a discussion of when and where studying armed orders will be most and least helpful, the empirical challenges and opportunities associated with this agenda, and new theoretical directions for studying the origins and evolution of armed orders.

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Armed Politics

The core of armed politics is the existence of multiple armed political actors within the territory of a state. Recent research has begun to probe these complex dynamics of cooperation and conflict. Yet these critiques and conceptual arguments do not provide a simple way to measure and compare state-group interactions. Here I offer one way to build on these valuable insights and embed them in an empirical research agenda.

I identify three armed orders between a state and an armed group – hostilities, limited cooperation, and alliance – and two forms of termination – collapse and incorporation. These can be measured over time within state-groups dyads. For instance, Sunni groups in Iraq’s Anbar province shifted from hostilities to limited cooperation to alliance and, in some cases, back to military hostilities between 2003 and 2015. Armed orders can be compared across dyads: the limited cooperation between the Pakistani military and the Mullah Nazir group in South Waziristan is different than hostilities between the military and Maulana Fazlullah’s Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). This approach builds most clearly on Staniland’s “wartime political orders,” but simplifies that framework, applies it much more broadly to non-wartime contexts, and identifies pathways through which orders come to an end.

Scope

Armed politics begins when an armed group emerges as a coherent actor and begins to interact with and/or make claims on the government. We need clear evidence of cadres being training and equipped with lethal weaponry under the control of a leadership group within a
formal organization. I scope the armed politics approach to organizations that make public political demands of some sort and that exist with a formal command structure for at least one year. This means that “pure” criminal organizations and highly transient actors are not included, substantially limiting the range of relevant groups. After armed politics begins, state-group political relationships can be traced over time, identifying in each year (or a more fine-grained period of time) the armed order between the group and state, and whether or not the dyad terminates.

Armed Orders

Hostilities orders involve the deployment of military forces by both a group and a government that are intended to inflict harm on one another: military offensives, regular insurgent operations, and a belief on both sides that they are engaged in a contest of military power. Hostilities orders sometimes involve little violence, especially in low-intensity “containment” conflicts, but they can also involve huge amounts of violence accompanying total internal warfare. Evidence of hostilities is found in the operational activities of state and armed group armed forces, with mutual targeting, consistent force deployments, and clear strategies for imposing costs on the other actor.

A limited cooperation order is constituted by formal ceasefires or informal live-and-let-live bargains between a state and armed group. Some form of arrangement limits mutual violence without formal demobilization, a full peace settlement, or military victory. Both continue to exist as distinct actors engaged in bargaining. Unlike in hostilities, we do not see sustained military offensives by either side, and force deployments are limited geographically and/or functionally (leadership decapitation tends to be avoided, for instance). Unlike in alliance orders, there is not tight policy coordination toward shared purposes, but instead a delimitation of

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10 On logics of criminal conflict, see Lessing 2015.
territorial and functional authority and the maintenance of “rules” of interaction. This can involve formal agreements, such as ceasefires or peace deals, that minimize conflict without either side disarming. Limited cooperation can also involve informal understandings between governments and armed actors.

*Alliance* orders are characterized by tight, institutionalized cooperation between a state and armed group, generally with targeting of a shared enemy, observable coordination of policies, and sharing of organizational resources. These are not tacit arrangements or live-and-let-live deals, as in limited cooperation. Instead the security apparatus closely and consistently operates alongside and in dialogue with armed groups. Coding an alliance order requires evidence of government support for armed actors and regular coordination between them.

*How Armed Orders End*

These orders end in two ways: collapse or incorporation. Since groups often continue to operate even when not engaged in conflict with the state, lack of violence cannot be equated with the lack of an armed group. We need to assess whether it continues to interact with the state.

*Collapse* occurs when the group cannot consistently mobilize followers or engage in basic organizational activities. The group no longer exists, or cannot sustain activities related to revenue extraction, military mobilization, recruitment, or political claim making. This may be the result of military destruction or of internal dissension that undermine organizational organization. In rare cases, collapse can go in the other direction, with military victory by revolutionary or secessionist armed groups. *Incorporation*, by contrast, occurs when a group demobilizes its armed capacity as part of a formal or informal deal with the government that eliminates it an autonomous armed actors.

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11 This resembles what Staniland 2012 refers to as “passive cooperation.” See also Reno 2011 and Richards 2004.
12 Christia 2012.
Understanding Other Outcomes

Studying these orders helps us understand other conflict dynamics. First, studying armed orders can provide valuable new evidence on the creation, organization, and end of groups. Many groups emerge and organize themselves prior to any violence occurring, others collapse after years of low activity, and yet others are incorporated into the state after long periods of negotiating and bargaining. The Tamil Tigers, for instance, were born well before the standard start date of the civil war, while the People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam continued to exist even after it stopped fighting the state. The “organizational turn” in studies of armed groups seeks to explain the trajectories of groups. By more comprehensively measuring their origins, structures, and pathways of termination we can better test theories about these groups, while still examining their interactions with states.

Second, the signing and implementation of ceasefires and peace deals frequently occur in situations that do not meet necessary death thresholds to be included as a civil war. Kreutz shows that many conflict episodes end in an “other” form of termination, and armed politics provides one reason why: deals are culminated only after negotiations during in which both sides reduce violence. In complex political environments, existing data on ceasefires and peace deals can be valuably supplemented with armed orders research. This will help us understand when and how incorporation deals are signed/implemented, and when instead active fighting comes to an end through alliance, collapse, or limited cooperation. The dynamics of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo are an excellent example: there are multiple pathways through which

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14 Kreutz 2010.
violence has fallen, ranging from group collapse to enduring limited cooperation or alliance to incorporation.\textsuperscript{15}

Third, armed group governance, whether by rebels, militias, or other actors, occurs across armed orders. Governance is certainly useful during high-intensity civil wars, but is also extensively deployed to pursue political and economic influence in low violence contexts as well.\textsuperscript{16} The KIO in Burma did not stop governing when it stopped fighting the state, and Hezbollah has governed throughout periods of both active fighting and cold “peace.” Exploring these kinds of cases contributes comparative data to our understanding of armed group governance and how it may be related to different armed orders.

\textbf{Armed Politics in South Asia}

This section uses on new empirical research on South Asia to better identify the benefits and limits of armed politics as a research agenda. It focuses on state-group interactions that existing datasets either disagree with or do not include. First, I measure armed orders in one of the world’s most complex and protracted conflict environments, Nagaland in India. Existing datasets disagree with one another over the existence, timing, and relevant actors in this context. This makes it a valuable opportunity to show whether and how the armed orders framework can complement and move beyond conventional approaches. Second, I briefly code armed orders in state-group dyads in Mizoram, Karachi, and northern Burma/Myanmar to illustrate that armed politics can provide a unifying framework for measurement and comparison across cases. In all of these cases, I use qualitative research to build new, quantifiable, data.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Stearns et al. 2013.
\textsuperscript{16} Arjona et al, ed 2016 (2015?)
\textsuperscript{17} Though there are no missing data in this specific set of codings, missing data is another possible coding in a dyad/year.
Nagaland

Background and Existing Representations

Since 1955, state-group interactions in Naga areas of India have involved multiple armed groups, a major peace deal, and several rounds of negotiations and ceasefires, alongside continual Indian military operations.\footnote{Bhaumik 2009; Chasie 1999.} UCDP/PRIO codes an active conflict between the Indian government and the Naga National Council (NNC) from 1956-1968, when Kreutz identifies an “Other/Low Activity” episode termination.\footnote{Kreutz 2010.} It then recurs as an armed conflict from 1992-1997 and 2000 on the part of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isaac/Muivah (NSCN-IM).\footnote{Gleditsch et al. 2002. Cunningham et al. 2013 draws on this coding, though the most recent version of the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, in Themner and Wallensteen 2014, does not include any conflict between the NSCN-K and India (instead, the NSCN-K only appears in clashes with the Burma/Myanmar government between 2000 and 2007).} Toft codes Nagaland as a war that ended in 1997, while Fearon and Laitin and Sambanis both appear to include it as part of a single war in the Northeast beginning in 1952 and 1990, respectively.\footnote{Fearon and Laitin 2003, Sambanis 2004. Toft 2010 is unclear – the case notes suggest termination in 1975, but the apparent actual coding of termination is 1997. Compare p. 2 and p. 24 of Data Appendix for Toft 2010, at <http://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/blavatnik/files/documents/MTcodebook2010_0.pdf>.
} Neither Fortna nor Harbom et al. code ceasefires or peace deals related to the conflict, and Walter’s coding of state responses to Naga demands involves no accommodation.\footnote{Fortna 2008, Harbom et al. 2006, Hogbladh 2011, Walter 2006.}

Research on armed orders provides a different picture. There have been five substantial armed groups: the NNC and NSCN-IM are joined by the NSCN-Khaplang (NSCN-K), Revolutionary Government of Nagaland (RGN) and the original NSCN. They have operated for approximately 79 group-years between 1956 and 2013, compared to the three groups and 24 group-years identified in previous work.\footnote{22 for the NNC; 5 for RGN; 8 for NSCN; 22 for NSCN-IM; 22 for NSCN-K. By contrast, Cunningham et al. 2013 code 13 years for NNC; 8 for NSCN-IM; 3 for NSCN-K. See <http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~ksg/eacd.html>.
} The NSCN-IM and NSCN-K have changed their relationships with the state over time, shifting from hostilities to limited cooperation, and then
more recently back to hostilities for the NSCN-K. The RGN was an ally of the Indian
government for five years before being incorporated into the state in 1973. The NSCN collapsed
into a pair of fratricidal splinters, the NSCN-K and NSCN-IM, in 1988. We see ceasefires from
1964-1972 (with the NNC), 1997-present (with the NSCN-IM), and 2001-2015 (NSCN-K), as
well as the Shillong Accord peace deal in 1975. In 2015, the NSCN-IM also signed a peace deal,
though it has not yet been implemented.

Armed Orders in Nagaland

Table 1. Measuring Armed Politics in Nagaland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NNC</th>
<th>NSCN</th>
<th>NSCN-IM</th>
<th>NSCN-K</th>
<th>RGN</th>
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The NNC was in military hostilities with the Indian state from 1955 until the ceasefire of
1964, brokered by the Naga Peace Mission.24 From 1964-1967, it was engaged in direct talks
with the Indian government. From 1968 until 1972 the ceasefire continued, but clashes occurred
as the two sides probed one another and the NNC tried to infiltrate weapons from China.25 1964-
1972 is therefore a period of limited cooperation, even as there were deaths in combat and
attacks during some years. In 1968, the RGN split from the NNC and allied with the Indian

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24 Guha 2007, 391.
government against the NNC, acting as a de facto pro-state paramilitary force.\textsuperscript{26} It was incorporated into the state government in 1973.\textsuperscript{27}

In 1972, the Indian government ended the ceasefire and banned the NNC, launching a major offensive against the group that badly degraded it.\textsuperscript{28} After three years of hostilities, NNC elements then signed the 1975 Shillong Accord peace deal, leading to the incorporation of the NNC.\textsuperscript{29} This deal led to the rise of a disgruntled splinter group, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), which formed in the 1978-80 period and went back to war with the Indian state.\textsuperscript{30} A new armed order was born, characterized by military hostilities. The actual levels of violence in the 1980s were relatively low, as the NSCN adopted a strategy of protracted guerrilla warfare, but India’s Ministry of Home Affairs continued to treat Nagaland as a disturbed area even in years with few fatalities.\textsuperscript{31} Participants unambiguously understood this as a context of conflict.

The NSCN split into two factions, the –IM and –K, in 1988.\textsuperscript{32} They each operated in Manipur, Nagaland, Burma/Myanmar, and other states in the Northeast, with violence increasing in the 1990s. However, the NSCN-IM signed a ceasefire with the government in 1997 and the NSCN-K followed in 2001.\textsuperscript{33} Both ceasefires lasted until 2015, creating two long stretches of limited cooperation. The NSCN factions during this time were deeply involved in extorting money from businesses, influencing government bureaucrats, bargaining with government

\textsuperscript{26} Horam 1988, 146-151; Dev 1988, 82.
\textsuperscript{27} Bhuamik 2009, 97; Verghese 1996, 94; Das 2005, 206-7; Horam 1988, 143-151.
\textsuperscript{28} Nehru 1997, 520.
\textsuperscript{29} Dev 1988, 98-114.
\textsuperscript{30} Verghese 1996, 95.
\textsuperscript{31} For instance, MHA 1982-3, 2; MHA 1987-88, 8.
\textsuperscript{32} Bhuamik 2009, 99; Goswami 2007, 138.
\textsuperscript{33} Rajagopalan 2007, 16.
negotiators, clashing with one another, and trying to control social and political life, even though they not fighting state forces.\textsuperscript{34}

In 2015, the NSCN-K ended its limited cooperation and is now engaged again in military hostilities, while the NSCN-IM signed a peace deal, though it is still technically on ceasefire. Rather than hard distinctions between war and peace, armed politics in this context has taken a number of distinct trajectories, from the collapse of the NNC to the incorporation of the RGN to limited cooperation between the state and NSCN factions. These orders are essential to understanding the broader politics of India’s volatile Northeast because of Naga groups’ links to other insurgents and their impact on neighboring states.

\textit{Rethinking Data on Peace Deals and Group “Types”}

This empirical analysis reveals two important ways armed politics can complement existing approaches. First, extant data on concessions, peace deals, and ceasefires have not accurately measured Naga history. Walter codes this conflict as involving no accommodation or concessions, but in 1957 (Delhi Agreement), 1963 (creation of state of Nagaland), and 1963-4 (Naga Peace Mission) we see exactly this.\textsuperscript{35} This matters for theory testing: the case is in tension with Walter’s claim that states will aggressively crack down on early separatists to prevent demonstration effects. Indian governments have instead cut numerous deals with ethno-linguistic and tribal armed groups, though not religious separatists.\textsuperscript{36} The ceasefires from 1963-1972, 1997-present, and 2001-2015 endured for substantial periods without the international peacekeeping that Fortna argues is crucial to the duration of ceasefires.\textsuperscript{37} Finally, my study identifies the 1975 Shillong Accord, which is missed in the UCDP dataset on peace agreements

\textsuperscript{34} Interviews in Dimapur and Kohima in October 2013.
\textsuperscript{35} Walter 2006.
\textsuperscript{36} Staniland 2015b; Saez et al. 2012, Brass 1974.
\textsuperscript{37} Fortna 2008. Although it falls within the temporal range of her study, the 1997 NSCN-IM ceasefire is not included in Fortna’s data.
because it occurred in a year with relatively little violence.\textsuperscript{38} Actors may sign agreements after already reducing military operations during negotiation; only looking at periods of violence misses this set of cases.

Second, Nagaland shows the limits of trying to fit groups into clear insurgent vs. militia categories. The NSCN-IM, for instance, has both fought the state and engaged in limited cooperation with it. The same group, with the same structures and leadership, has acted in ways similar to a militia, an insurgent, and a criminal group. Similar shifts in political roles occurred in both the RGN and the NSCN-K. Hard distinctions between “types” can obscure more than they reveal when it comes to group organization, governance, and strategy.

Other Cases in South Asia

Nagaland is a particularly useful context because of its complexity and variation, but the armed orders approach can be applied more broadly. Here I identify armed orders in three other South Asian cases, showing that we can use the armed politics framework to compare across contexts.

Karachi is Pakistan’s dominant source of urban political violence. There is no consensus about its status in the civil war literature, specifically the interactions between the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Party (MQM) and the government. Kalyvas and Balcells argue that violence in the city was actually communal rioting and do not include it as a civil war, a non-coding Toft agrees with.\textsuperscript{39} Fearon and Laitin code it as a civil war from 1994-1999.\textsuperscript{40} Gleditsch et al. code four years of armed conflict (1990, 1994-96)\textsuperscript{41}, while the UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset

\begin{flushleft}
38 Harbom et al. 2006.
40 Fearon and Laitin 2003.
\end{flushleft}
codes it as involving non-state conflict between the MQM and MQM-Haqiqi in 1991-1995 and 1997-1998.\textsuperscript{42}

Studying armed orders helps make Karachi’s politics more “legible” to researchers. I find that the MQM was part of limited cooperation orders in 1985-1989, 1997-8, 1999-2002, and 2008-present; it was part of an alliance order during 1990-1991 with Nawaz Sharif and 2002-2008 with Pervez Musharraf. It was targeted in hostilities from 1992-1996 and more briefly during 2011 and 2015. Rather than having to choose which years count as armed conflict, non-state conflict, or peace, we can study all of them through the same framework.

Karachi also presents an opportunity to compare violence levels with armed orders.\textsuperscript{43} In 1992, when the Army launched a major operation against the MQM, there were comparatively few deaths in Karachi: the MQM strategically withdrew rather than standing and fighting.\textsuperscript{44} In 1996, another year of military crackdowns, violence was actually lower than in 1997, when the Sharif government welcomed the MQM back into the fold. Yet in 1995, an explosion of violence accompanied an offensive against the MQM.\textsuperscript{45} The same number of deaths can have radically different political meanings. In turn, similar armed orders may involve very different death counts: the alliance order in 1991 was much bloodier than the alliance order in 2003. This does not mean that violence data is unimportant, but instead that it is not always a good guide to state-group interactions.

Studying armed orders in Karachi also shows that, as in Nagaland, the exact same group can move between diverse political roles. The MQM has acted at various points like an insurgent, pro-state militia, and armed electoral group, yet it has had the same leader and

\textsuperscript{42} Sundberg et al. 2012. 
\textsuperscript{43} Violence data from 1994-2012 are drawn from Gayer 2014, 10; earlier and later dates rely on press accounts. 
\textsuperscript{44} Bakhtiar 1992, 38. 
\textsuperscript{45} Herald 1996.
structure throughout. It has governed, coerced, and contested elections throughout its lifecycle. The armed politics approach helps us better understand such groups that “fuse militancy and governance, disruption and political convention.”\footnote{Gayer 2014, 120.}

In Mizo areas of Northeast India, we see a conflict between 1966 and 1986, culminating in the 1986 Mizo Accord, the most successful peace deal in Indian history. Existing datasets generally have little to say about Mizoram, folding it into the larger “Northeast” conflict. The exception is PRIO/UCDP’s Armed Conflict dataset, which codes a conflict between 1966-1968. Examining armed politics identifies more complex variation. There were hostilities during 1966-1976, 1977-1979, and 1981-1983 (at different levels of intensity). In 1976, 1980, and 1984 there were periods of limited cooperation during ceasefires and negotiations.\footnote{Bhaumik 2009, 103-105; Verghese 1996, 147-149.} This dyad ended in the incorporation of the Mizo National Front (MNF) via the Mizo Accord in 1986. Systematically explaining the origins and success/failure of peace agreements requires examining both violent and non-violent interactions between states and armed groups.

Finally, the United Wa State Army in Burma/Myanmar’s Shan State is not a traditional insurgent group. It emerged from the wreckage of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in 1989,\footnote{Lintner 1990.} and Kreutz shows it involved in only one year of armed conflict, in 1997. Yet it is also not a standard pro-state militia, due to its often-tense relations with the military.\footnote{Kramer 2007, 3. Kreutz 2010.} This force has 20,000 men under arms and controls large swathes of territory along the Chinese border, so it is neither transient nor tiny, but there is no obvious place for it in existing literature. Studying it through the armed orders lens allows us to compare it to other groups: the UWSA has been part of a sustained limited cooperation order almost continuously since 1989, with a brief slide into...
hostilities in 1997, divvying up power and authority with the government while running its own independent governance and illicit economic networks.\textsuperscript{50}

**Armed Politics and the Study of Conflict**

There are advantages and disadvantages to using armed orders as an empirical unit of analysis. Carefully tracking state-group relationships is data-intensive, requiring substantial investments in fieldwork and specialized literature. There is a possibility of opening a “Pandora’s box” in which the relevant number of actors and events expands beyond tractability. The scope conditions I offered above do reduce this challenge, but tracking individual groups across levels of violence remains an undoubtedly major empirical task. Interdependence between dyads and the complexities of multi-actor conflicts pose other important problems.\textsuperscript{51} These costs mean that straightforward civil wars will often not require research on armed politics. Existing datasets do an excellent job in identifying clear cases of large-scale hostilities between states and insurgents. If there is little evidence of more complex dynamics in a context, then researchers can rely on traditional approaches to understand it.

The armed orders framework is instead most valuable in contexts 1) about which datasets disagree, 2) in which there are ambiguous groups and years of armed conflict, and 3) actors that do not fall straightforwardly into the insurgent/militia dichotomy. The best cross-national data collection efforts have carefully identified unclear and borderline cases that create a preexisting set of candidates for deeper study.\textsuperscript{52} Kreutz specifically identifies this potential complementary: “By including unclear case observations, researchers would have more observations in the form of longer time series and more countries/organizations, with potentially improved analytical

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 37-45.
\textsuperscript{51} Poast 2010.
\textsuperscript{52} Kreutz 2015; Salehyan 2015.
leverage.” Armed orders establish a shared framework for comparing across and within these contexts, instead of one-off case studies that do not cumulate.

Given extensive within-country variation in armed orders over space and time, country- and region-level studies can generate substantial numbers of observations that facilitate broader generalizations. In a distinct research project, Otto et al. (2015) shows that it is possible to measure armed group interactions with the state across a substantial number of cases between 1989 and 2007, suggesting that the perspective advanced in this article is plausible. By linking groups and orders to UCDP Actor and Dyadic identifiers and UCDP/PRIO Conflict identifier and location information when possible, such contextual studies can still be embedded within broader data. The benefits of going deep into conflicts can balance the limitations of only studying a subset of cases. This approach is not a substitute for cross-national data on civil war, but armed politics brings new and useful insights and data to our understanding of conflict.

The armed politics framework can be adapted in a variety of ways. Careful sub-national research may identify local armed orders that are distinct from national orders. Studying armed politics may help to bridge “macro” and “meso” levels of conflict analysis by allowing scholars to study armed groups and state-group interactions simultaneously, rather than separating the two into distinct research programs. It can potentially be applied to shorter periods of time than a dyad/year, tracking much more fluid shifts in alignment over the course of weeks or months.

The armed politics approach has implications for theory. First, it suggests that in some cases the distinction between war and peace, or between conflict and its absence, is neither obvious or natural. Low numbers of dead bodies do not equate to political harmony, centralized control over violence, or a lack of conflict, while high levels of violence may not reflect intense or foundational political conflict between a state and armed group. This analytical move should

53 Kreutz 2015, 123.
encourage theories of bargaining, armed group behavior, state strategy, and conflict outcomes that take violence as a one potential outcome of interest, rather than a starting point or scope condition, and that explicitly seek to explore movement between violence and non-violence.\(^{54}\)

Second, the core question raised by the armed politics approach is why governments and armed actors pursue, or are willing to accept, particular armed orders. Regime ideologies, desires for reputation building, group fragmentation, electoral incentives and the group-state balance of power may all shape the orders that emerge.\(^{55}\) On the side of armed groups, internal rivalries and factionalism, dependence on or autonomy from different material resources, and the political preferences of civilians may all shape the orders that groups pursue.\(^{56}\) These provide starting hypotheses for explaining the sources of armed orders.

Exploring new theory and evidence about armed politics can help us make sense of a contemporary world in which the formal trappings of de jure sovereignty co-exist, sometimes uneasily, with the persistence of non-state armed groups and their diverse interactions with state power.\(^{57}\) This research agenda builds on the strengths of existing work while allowing rigorous comparative study of the full diversity of armed orders.

References


\(^{54}\) Fearon 1995; Chenoweth and Lawrence 2010; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011.


\(^{56}\) Shapiro 2013, Krause 2013/14, Pearlman 2011.


