The five works this week look at political violence from two different perspectives – the structure of organizations that use violence to achieve their goals and the ideas that drive individuals to pursue radical agendas. The organizational works provide a variety of explanations for effectiveness in insurgent conflicts, with cases set in the Middle East and North Africa. The individual-level works address the motivations behind radicalization in support of Islamic terrorist organizations. By looking at two different dependent variables and five different independent variables, these works provide a wide range of explanations for aspects of political violence while highlighting the methodological challenges associated with studying the topic.

Peter Krause's article, "The Structure of Success: How the Internal Distribution of Power Drives Armed Group Behavior and National Movement Effectiveness", conducts a longitudinal analysis of seventeen campaigns by sixteen groups in Palestine and Algeria, evaluating how the distribution of power within movements resulted in various campaign outcomes. While existing theories debate whether unified or fragmented movements offer the best results for insurgent movements Krause found results that disputed both ideas. Fragmented movements, ones with two or more groups competing for primacy within the movement with diverse goals, consistently failed in the campaigns he evaluated. Unified groups, ones with internal competition but unity on their desired outcome, fared little better, achieving only occasional (and limited) success. Hegemonic movements, ones with a dominant group that had no rivals for control or goals, had the greatest probability of campaign success. Fragmented and unified groups expended time and resources competing amongst themselves, and in doing so, limited the movement's ability to either act strategically, negotiate effectively, or both. Hegemony

within a movement did not guarantee the group would always act effectively, but its

unassailable position within the movement gave it the latitude to survive missteps and find its

way to its most effective outcomes. Krause effectively uses the Palestinian movement and the

insurgency in Algeria to illustrate his case. Using process tracing and a most different case

study approach, he effectively shows his independent variable – power distribution within the

movement – to be driving the dependent variable – campaign success. He was perhaps at his

most convincing when explaining his theory using an organizational approach, highlighting it is

the distribution of public, club, and private goods that drive organizations and their behavior. If

he had pulled this explanation into his cases, identifying what goods were being sought by each

group during each campaign, he would have strengthened his findings, but overall, this is a

minor detraction. Krause's argument is well put together, strongly argued, and is the most

successful work in the group.

Sarah Parkinson's article, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and

Social Networks in War", nests well with Krause's work. Like Krause, she is studying

organizational effectiveness, though through a slightly different dependent variable,

sustainment of a rebellion. Her independent variable, the strength of informal, existing social

networks, is well-situated within an existing body of literature on social networks, spearheaded

by the work of Roger Petersen, Paul Staniland, Elisabeth Wood, and Alec Worsnop. As with

these other authors, Parkinson argues that successful insurgent organizations rarely appear out

of thin air. Most often, they are constructed on the backs of existing social networks, enabling

the members of the organization to engage in high risk behavior as a result of the pre-existing

trust sewn into the social networks. On this point, her work breaks little new ground, but she

does make two unique contributions. First, she argues that these networks are essential for insurgent success not because they provide fighters (which they do), but rather because the pre-existing social networks provide a logistical structure by which resources can flow to front line fighters. As the experience of creating armies from scratch in Iraq and Afghanistan has shown, learning how to fight is relatively straightforward, but sustaining a fighting force is an incredibly complex task. Parkinson shows the same to be true for insurgent groups. Without an existing social network upon which a support system can run, they struggle to succeed. The second contribution is that often these networks are run and dominated by women. By identifying this characteristic, Parkinson opened previously unexplored networks, such as marriage, to analysis and investigation. Though these are useful contributions, the work seems to be adding evidence to the current body of work rather than breaking new ground or opening new lines of inquiry. The work is valuable nonetheless.

In "Violence Against Civilians in the Second Intifada: The Moderating Effect of Armed Group Structure and Opportunistic Violence", Devorah Manekin shifts the lens from the insurgent group to the counter-insurgent, investigating causes for opportunistic violence – violence that is not planned or ordered by superiors – against civilians by the Israeli Defense Force from 2000-2005. She investigated a variety of environmental, such as deployment length, and organizational, unit morale, structure, and command structure, variables, looking for an explanation for this specific type of violence. Using data collected from a medium-n (n = 118) survey of IDF soldiers, she found that deployment length was correlated with instances of violence, but that it was mitigated by organizational factors such as command and control and discipline. As she states in her introduction, the studies of opportunistic violence are limited,

primarily due to a lack of data. Her findings, however, reinforce what are already well-

established and widely accepted theories in both the organizational and leadership fields. The

culture of the organization, specifically, the standards that are set, the behavior of its leaders,

the effectiveness of its chain of command, and the previously demonstrated willingness of

leaders to hold subordinates accountable (discipline), are understood in the organizational

literature as highly effective ways to reduce monitoring costs and insure compliance, much

more so than the threat of sanctions. Similarly, there is a long literature of historiographies and

memoires on military organizations, war, and leadership that provide similar accounts of

variation in organizational performance. For centuries, military leaders and thinkers have

sought to understand why some units are faced with terrible conditions and situations and

perform well, while others, exposed to the same variables, fail, or worse, commit crimes.

Repeatedly, the findings are the same as Manekin's – those that are better led and more

disciplined perform better, no matter how long they fight. To be clear, this does not discount

her work, and she has certainly added strength to the literature through her empirical analysis.

It is, however, a stone on an already large pile, albeit not a political science one.

   The individual-level studies, Richard Nielsen's "Deadly Clerics: Blocked Ambition and the

Paths to Jihad", and Thomas Hegghammer's "Should I Stay or Should I Go: Explaining Variation

in Western Jihadists' Choice Between Domestic and Foreign Fighting", take a different approach

to the topic of political violence. Both works attempt to assess individual decision-making

amongst jihadists, an essential but difficult task. Individual studies are problematic, as Nielsen

explains, as it is difficult to gather reliable data on why people chose to do something. Data on

internal thought processes often relies on self-reporting, for obvious reasons. The challenge,

though, is that such a method relies on an individual reporting honestly and truly knowing what influenced him or her. Often, neither one is reliable. To address this issue, Nielsen collected data based on what clerics actually said and wrote, then he statistically analyzed variations in their speech to identify radicalization. Additionally, he focused on a narrow subset of individuals – clerics who entered academia only to find themselves off their desired professional path who then became radical. Radical clerics are few in number, and even fewer radicalize after they enter academia. Nielsen readily admits that his theory only explains the path taken by about 30% of the radical clerics. But, based on his narrow scope conditions and the enormous amount of text data collected, Nielsen makes a compelling, statistically valid claim that clerics who turn to jihad are often ones who were previously mainstream, but when they found themselves off the standard path to academic success, took to jihad as a professional alternative. In doing so, he effectively tackles an empirically elusive topic.

Unfortunately, Hegghammer is not so successful. Though he takes on a similarly difficult question – why do some fighters choose domestic versus foreign fighting – his empirical evidence and explanation is weak at best. First, he attempts to count the number of Islamist fighters in the West, a measurement that has no reliable data. Though he makes a laudable attempt, he readily admits he bases his numbers on anecdotal data and educated guesses. Based on this estimate, he determines that there are more three times as many foreign fighters as domestic fighters and concludes that it is more likely for a jihadist to go to another country to fight than to stay at home. He then offers three explanations for this trend: it is easier to fight somewhere else, they need training, or they prefer it, i.e. they are following norms. Once again, using anecdotal evidence and the numbers he made up, he proceeds to reject the first

two explanations and spends considerable space explaining why norms matter in the decision-

making process. While this may be true, by failing to adequately reject alternative explanations

with more than anecdotes and conjecture, I find it difficult to believe his explanation over any

other explanation. He attempts to answer a difficult question, but there are too many holes in

his methodology for this work to hold up to scrutiny.

This week's readings demonstrated a wide range of explanations for political violence.

All of them take on difficult topics and provide interesting and unique perspectives on the topic.

Overall, the organizational explanations were most successful, offering coherent explanations

seated in strong evidence. The readings also highlighted the challenges of studying the

individual level, providing examples of such research done both well and less well.

17.568 Comparative Politics and International Relations of the Middle East
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