Introduction

> *"Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun… and in order to get rid of the gun, it is necessary to take up the gun."*
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> – Mao Tse-tung, *Problems of War and Strategy,* 1938

In 495 B.C. a group of common Roman infantry appealed to their government for debt relief. Newly returned from a recent war, the soldiers—known as plebeians—found their homesteads pillaged and their assets plundered. Left pauperized and penniless, the weary veterans had been unable to meet their tax obligations and were forced to sell themselves into indentured servitude until their debts were paid. "Though we fought for freedom abroad," they lamented, "at home we live in chains."

Despite widespread sympathy for the plebeian cause, the Roman government resisted and delayed potential reforms. On two occasions, state officials promised economic concessions before rescinding their commitments when the time for enactment approached. As the plebeians' trust and patience in the existing government decayed, they instead staked their fortunes to the judgment of a new leader: a man named Sicinius. Taking his advice, the dissatisfied civilians shed their bonds, gathered arms and supplies, and encamped on a hilltop three miles from Rome. Once deployed, they refused to stand down and demanded that the government dispatch an envoy who would attend their appeal. So began the first political strike in recorded history.

Sicinius' act of rebellion sparked debate within the Senate: should the government restore domestic harmony by appeasing the plebeians or by crushing them? In a few short days, the senators capitulated. They reasoned that even a successful military strike would involve casualties and costs, while a prolonged standoff would leave the city vulnerable to external threats until an agreement emerged. To appease the protestors and avoid revolt, the government established a new office, the Tribunate, reserved exclusively

for plebeians and empowered with an authority unique in the history of the Republic: an absolute veto over legislative affairs. With Sicinius installed as Tribune and protections for their rights thus institutionalized, the plebeians laid down their weapons and returned to Rome with confidence that their government would henceforth fulfill its promises.

Whether accurate or apocryphal, Livy's account of the plebeian secession showcases the fundamental dilemma we address in this volume. Put most simply, an inherent tradeoff exists between government authority and government accountability.[1] On the one hand, citizens rely on strong governments to help them avoid the brutalities of life under anarchy.[2] The Roman government's "monopoly on violence" enabled it to enforce laws, facilitate commerce, and provide domestic security,[3] and it was on these grounds that the plebeian soldiers supported and defended their state in its wars with foreign adversaries. Unfortunately, however, government officials are neither universally just nor perfectly benevolent. With the power to enforce the law comes temptation to live above it, and early Roman leaders were authorized to act with impunity and with little regard for those they ruled—behavior exemplified by the Senate's reluctance to release the plebeians from servitude. The ultimate goal of the plebeians, then, was to find a means by which they could hold their state accountable to its promises without sacrificing the benefits traditionally associated with strong and centralized government power.

To citizens of mature democracies, accustomed to the idea that political checks and balances inhibit government abuse, the plebeians' dilemma may seem an archaic and purely academic concern. In contrast, however, the tradeoff between government authority and accountability remains a more prominent issue in states where institutional safeguards have decayed or are yet to emerge. In countries throughout the Middle East and Africa, the scale of human suffering testifies to the horrors associated with regimes armed with either too little coercive power or too much. In parts of Libya, Syria, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the collapse or fragility of the central government has left citizens vulnerable to predation from violent opportunists. Elsewhere, in places like Palestine, Egypt, or Bahrain, governments monopolize violence so comprehensively that they may themselves prey upon citizens with impunity. The observation

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[1] Livy, *Histories,* Book 2, Chapters 23-33.

[2] Hobbes 1651.

[3] Weber 1919.

that citizens suffer at both ends of the authority and accountability spectrum should prompt two basic questions: First, how can ordinary citizens reap the benefits of government strength while at the same time deterring government abuse? Second, when can civilians induce powerful regimes to extend new political or economic concessions to the populace?

Argument and Outline

This book details how citizens can secure government accountability without sacrificing government authority by establishing and exercising a unique form of political leverage. Put simply, we argue that citizens can best resolve the governance dilemma using credible threats of insurgent violence. Our argument challenges several popular conclusions regarding the desirability of state consolidation, the benefits of democratic rule, the effectiveness of peaceful protests, the causes of civil violence, and the role of foreign intervention in domestic conflicts. Despite these areas of contrast, our explanation emerges from a straightforward and parsimonious theoretical framework.

According to our theory, which we detail more thoroughly in Chapter 2, citizens, insurgents, and governments are mutual participants in a "governance market." As consumers of governance, citizens seek a package of rights, liberties, assets, and opportunities. Because these goods are costly for the state to provide, a monopolistic government will tend to under-supply them, resulting in restrictions on the political and economic freedoms that citizens desire, or what sociologists term "structural violence."[4] Citizens, who are weak and poorly organized, are ill-equipped to secure additional concessions using peaceful demonstrations or, at another extreme, the type of military attacks we term "kinetic violence."[5] Embedded among the citizens, however, are political activists and entrepreneurs of violence ("insurgents") who enjoy a special talent for social organizing and militancy—talents that enable the insurgents to accomplish greater levels of kinetic violence than citizens can attempt themselves. Despite these capabilities, the insurgents themselves rely on citizen support, either for direct assistance in conducting attacks or for the cover and concealment they require in order to escape preventive government action.

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[4] Galtung 1969.

[5] Policymakers sometimes use the term "kinetic" to refer to military actions that include the use of lethal or high-level physical violence.

Within this framework, citizens function as influential consumers who can shift their support between the incumbent government and potential insurgent groups depending on the relative package of benefits or rewards that each side can credibly offer. As a result, both the insurgents and the incumbent are motivated to curry favor with the citizens. Whether the insurgents genuinely care for the citizens' well-being or simply pander to citizens' interests in the service of ulterior motivates, they will pose as generous competitors the incumbent government in hopes of amassing the support they require to combat the government directly. At the same time, the threat of competition from the insurgent group applies pressure on the incumbent, which realizes that if citizens remain disappointed they may abandon the establishment in favor of the insurgency. To avoid the kinetic violence associated with this possibility, the government may attempt to head off the insurgents by developing and delivering more generous political and economic concessions than the insurgents can match. In sum, citizens can leverage the latent threat of insurgent violence to extract economic and political concessions from recalcitrant regimes—even when the insurgents are themselves predatory and self-interested.

Our framework contrasts with theories that portray government accountability as dependent on democratic rule, the existence of peaceful social movements, the altruistic or sociotropic preferences of influential actors, the economic self-interest of a stationary ruler, the development of social norms, or reliable external enforcement—alternatives whose strengths and shortcomings we discuss at length in Chapter 1. In particular, we challenge the widespread belief that democracy is either a necessary or sufficient condition for accountable governance. While democratic rulers sometimes appear benign or benevolent, we demonstrate throughout the volume that protections on citizens' liberties and rights are often more fragile than researchers acknowledge. Whereas researchers sometimes argue that democracy fosters the emergence of institutional and social constraints against tyranny—ranging from constitutional checks and balances to nonviolent protestors—we show that even mature democratic regimes are ultimately constrained from predation by the threat of organized, violent dissent.

The importance of political violence in inducing or coercing state reforms remains under-appreciated by scholars and policymakers who overlook a fundamental truth of coercion: violence is most productive when it remains *unobserved.* Implicit threats of kinetic violence can succeed in motivating state reforms without becoming apparent to researchers; indeed, such threats often exist in conjunction with nonviolent tactics

to which researchers mistakenly assign credit. Likewise, insurgents are motivated to militarize in visible ways only when their latent threats and peaceful efforts have failed to induce reforms, leading outsiders to observe kinetic attacks precisely in situations where governments are most resistant to compromise. As a result, those who assess "success" and "failure" based purely on observable outcomes tend to over-attribute government concessions to peace movements and to under-acknowledge the role of coercive threats in motivating reform.

Throughout the volume, we pair our findings with evidence from historical or contemporary cases that help convey our intuition. Across a wide range of cases, we demonstrate that in the absence of credible kinetic threats governments tend to repeal political rights, overturn institutional checks and balances, and offer citizens a raw deal. In contrast, when threats of force were potent and credible, regimes from the Roman Republic to South Africa have offered citizens social, political, and economic concessions in hopes of avoiding the costs they would incur if such violence was realized. In some cases, our results cast new light on conventional and well-established narratives. For example, our argument suggests that although black protestors who eschewed violence throughout the U.S. civil rights movement deserve high esteem and respect for their efforts, they may nevertheless owe a portion of their success to the existence of their more radical peers who, in the words of Malcolm X, were "not hand-cuffed by the disarming philosophy of nonviolence." Put another way, our theory and evidence generally support Mao Tse-tung's declaration in the epigram to this chapter that citizens who seek political power must "take up the gun" to secure their goals. Where we disagree, however, is on the issue of whether the "gun" need ever be fired. Instead, the results of our theory fit more closely with Livy's claim that "one needs only a *show* of arms to have peace."[6] Within a broad range of conditions the shadow of insurgency is itself sufficient to induce government reform and improve civilian welfare.

Although the threat of insurgent violence often succeeds in eliciting state concessions, in other cases these efforts may succumb to state prevention, provoke state repression, or escalate to full-blown civil war. In the second section of the book, we turn to the various obstacles and "market failures" that can disrupt the process of peaceful reform. Chapter 3 describes how reforms may be stymied and civil violence may arise through a series of familiar channels, including repressive or preventive action by the incumbent;

[6] "Ostendite modo bellum, pacem habebitis." *History,* VI. 18. 7, emphasis added.

attempts by either the insurgent group or state to signal strength and resolve; and undue optimism on behalf of the government, the insurgents, or even the civilians themselves. In other cases, violence emerges through mechanisms that are less well-known and that stem from the interactions of several non-unitary actors. Chapter 4 illustrates these possibilities and explains the implications of our theory in states that include heterogeneous civilian populations or multiple competing insurgent groups. Because all of these mechanisms emerge from a single parsimonious framework, we believe the theory offers an adaptable and powerful platform for additional research on the causes of civil violence. In both chapters, we once again pair the various theoretical mechanisms with examples from contemporary and historical conflicts that ground the theory and convey the intuition, ranging from preventive repression of journalists, political dissidents, and social media users in the People's Republic of China to the outbreak of violence during the American Revolutionary War and even the capture of Iraqi territory by members of the Islamic State.

Whereas the opening two sections of the book treat domestic governance and civil conflict as existing within an autarkic environment free from external influence, part three demonstrates how citizens, governments, and insurgents react to foreign intervention. We explain in Chapters 5 and 6 how foreign aid and intervention can quell civil conflict if properly calibrated but can encourage the recidivism of violence when applied incorrectly. At the most immediate level, foreign intervention in an ongoing conflict may benefit civilians if it hastens the conclusion of a war or reduces the intensity of violence to which residents are directly exposed. In a broader sense, however, the ultimate consequences of foreign intervention hinge on whether it facilitates or disrupts domestic competition in the overall governance market. Even forms of intervention that initially appear successful at suppressing violence may nevertheless prove harmful in the long run if they reduce overall competition or restrict citizens' capacity to influence the outcome of a kinetic conflict between an incumbent and insurgent challenger.

In particular, interventions that dismantle or eliminate viable insurgent challengers often facilitate predatory behavior. By suppressing competitors or raising the costs of market entry, these forms of intervention enable the victor to gain monopoly power over the provision of governance, leaving citizens without recourse. Iraqi civilians fell victim to such behavior after the removal of ISIS from Mosul, as did Congolese citizens in several instances when foreign powers assisted state regimes in consolidating

political control. Likewise, the deconsolidation of a contested region can prove counterproductive when it separates political competitors and installs each as a monopolist over a distinct territory—a problem made evident in Gaza and the West Bank, where citizens in each area are vulnerable to extractive treatment by Fatah and Hamas.

Even when intervention does not restore a formal monopoly on authority, citizens may suffer because foreign actions render them politically impotent and unable to exert significant influence over competing factions. If civilians wield no influence over which group will emerge victorious from a conflict—as may occur when combatants benefit from significant foreign patronage—then competitors will lack an incentive to provide optimal governance or to curry favor with civilians. When the United States installed Nouri al-Maliki's regime in Iraq, they shielded him from domestic backlash and enabled him to dismiss the human rights appeals of Sunni opponents who increasingly turned toward extremism. Likewise, intervention can disrupt the natural maturation process through which political challengers traditionally arise, leaving in place a chaotic environment wherein citizens are unsure which faction to support. NATO's intervention in Libya produced just such an outcome, disrupting a state that stood poised to undergo reforms and producing instead a quagmire of violence and political anarchy. We discuss in Chapter 7 how foreign threats can help countries escape this anarchy trap by stimulating collusion among governments and insurgents who seek to reap economies of scale in the provision of defense.

Contributions

This book should help researchers better understand the political economy of domestic governance and the inherent challenges of foreign intervention in domestic conflicts. First, the book suggests that researchers should set aside traditional debates regarding the conceptual distinctions between "autocracy" and "democracy." Instead, we should study specific mechanisms through which citizens can best manage the tradeoff between government authority and accountability. In contrast to one popular perspective in the literature, we demonstrate that democratization is neither the only nor the most practical tool available to citizens. Rather, latent insurgencies in many cases represent a potent means by which citizens can secure accountable governance even in the absence of institutionalized constraints. Indeed, the existence of viable insurgents can benefit citizens even when the insurgents are neither supportive of nor sympathetic with the

broader civilian population. In a departure from polarized interpretations of insurgent movements as either violent and opportunistic "antagonists" at one extreme or the well-intended "allies" of civil society at the other, we argue that insurgent groups deserve neither such censure nor such praise. Just as consumers benefit from the existence of multiple suppliers even if all such suppliers are inherently self-interested, citizens can benefit from the existence of latent insurgent competitors even if such insurgents would themselves engage in violent predation if given an opportunity.

Although our analysis throughout the book is positive rather than normative, it nevertheless also yields a variety of important implications for the conduct of policy that we discuss at length in the concluding chapter. By highlighting the productive role of insurgent threats, our argument challenges a longstanding approach to statebuilding that depicts the cultivation of internal stability as a prerequisite for generous and accountable governance. Blind faith that a centralized regime will produce better governance and construct binding institutions once violent challengers are suppressed is theoretically naïve. Instead, reforms and concessions require motivation. Put simply, where Charles Tilly argued that the threat of international conflict "made the state" by encouraging governments to pursue efficiency enhancing reforms, we demonstrate that the latent threat of insurgency is what make states *accountable*. The risk of instability encourages rulers to offer generous concessions to citizens and also provides a mechanism that makes such promises credible.

This is not to say that citizens or policymakers should always tolerate insurgencies. In deciding whether to nurture or oppose an insurgent group, citizens must weigh the potential improvements in accountability against the risks of destabilization, many of which are illustrated within this volume. When an insurgent group's decision to enter or avoid the political arena hinges on citizen support, we should interpret their participation as representative of the will of the people. However, there also exist circumstances when insurgents enjoy sufficient funding and arms that their decision to challenge the government is decoupled from citizens' interests. Under these circumstances, insurgent entry should indeed be deterred, as their war with the government is destructive and their victory, if realized, promises no benefit to citizens. Likewise, when assisting citizen-supported insurgencies, international actors should take care not to provide assistance that enables insurgents to either operate independent of citizen support or, alternatively, wholly replace the former regime and install themselves as new monopolists.

Finally, by presenting a theory in which insurgencies emerge endogenously within a parsimonious civil governance framework, this book also establishes a new path forward for both researchers and policymakers. Our theory suggests that insurgencies are not inherently destructive; instead, violence should occur only when governments fail to concede to the terms that insurgencies can credibly demand. As such, rather than pursue better methods of suppressing insurgents or, alternatively, of helping rebels depose and supplant predatory regimes, researchers who seek to understand the well-being of citizens should attempt to identify the various market frictions that cause violence to occur. Furthermore, we should recognize that in situations where these frictions cannot be entirely resolved, structural and kinetic violence are inversely related: reductions in repressive and authoritarian behaviors may be achievable only with the introduction or promotion of domestic insurgents whose presence fosters instability and creates a risk of war and repression. The fundamental tension between reducing structural violence at risk of kinetic violence (or vice-versa) is therefore an ethical challenge that researchers and practitioners have a responsibility to confront.

Our Approach and Assumptions

The topics we address in this book—the foundations of accountable government, the causes of civil violence, and the complexities of foreign aid and intervention—should interest a broad audience that includes not only political scientists and economists but also development practitioners, government advisors, graduate students, and motivated citizens. With this in mind, we have endeavored both to clarify the exposition of our logic and also to relate our theories to a series of historical or contemporary examples that illustrate the results. Prior knowledge of statistics, game theory, and other social scientific approaches to inquiry are not necessary to understand our arguments. What little math we reference in the text should be accessible to all readers familiar with basic algebra; more technical material is relegated to the appendixes and even there should be unnecessary for any but the most eager or mathematically-motivated researchers.

Although we privilege accessibility in our presentation, we nevertheless feel obligated to emphasize that our central arguments are based on a series of logical models and accompanying assumptions. Indeed, we may have never arrived at several of our conclusions in the absence of guidance from these models—a curious fact that raises

questions both about the general role of analytic theory in the study of political issues as well as the specific process we adopted in our research. We provide a brief description of this approach and our accompanying assumptions in the sections below.

Analytic Models

When we refer to "models," we mean nothing more than simplified representations of other things. Everyone who has used a map to find directions or consulted a diagram as a guide for assembling furniture has used a model. The goal of a model is to help us understand an object or process when developing this understanding might otherwise be difficult.[7] For example, although we may not depend on maps to guide us between locations we visit frequently—and we may likewise forgo diagrams when constructing simple furniture—models can prove quite useful when we depart to new destinations or confront more complicated projects with which we have little prior experience.

Models of political processes function in the same way as maps and diagrams. Social interactions form the basis of many of the outcomes we examine in this book, including state-sponsored oppression and organized political protest, and civil conflict, and foreign intervention. Unfortunately, human behaviors and relationships are complex and often defy immediate intuition. Although we admire scholars who can observe and identify causal patterns in social behaviors without resorting to models, we ourselves do not belong to that category. Instead, we use models in hopes that the process of building and studying them will teach us what our immediate intuition cannot.[8] Our goal is to depict complex social processes in ways that capture the central essence of the interaction in question. By reducing the interaction to its core components, we may better understand how each of those components—including the actors involved, the actions they take, the preferences they harbor, and the broader environment in which they operate—fit together to produce variation in behaviors and outcomes.

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[7] For more nuanced discussions of the use of models in social science research, we recommend Powell 1999, Lake and Powell 1999, Cartwright 2010, Slantchev 2010, Wagner 2010, Clarke and Primo 2012, Slantchev 2017, Rubinstein 2018, and Johnson 2019, from whom we borrow analogies and explanations throughout this section.

[8] We take some comfort from the fact that we are not alone in our reliance on models. Kenneth Arrow (1983, pp. 3–4), for example, initially considered it obvious that individual preferences would aggregate coherently, even telling a colleague that the result was already established. Only when he attempted to prove his intuition using a model did Arrow discover his instincts were flawed, producing a result so surprising it eventually earned him a Noble prize.

Those who design and use models face a tension between two desirable characteristics. First, our models must be sufficiently accurate: a map that mislabels key addresses and depicts important landmarks in the wrong locations may be of little value to a tourist who seeks precise directions from point to point. At the same time, however, our models must be simple enough that we can make sense of them. Imagine, for example, that your goal was to quickly identify an efficient route for a cross-country drive. Although a high-resolution satellite photograph might be the most accurate way of depicting the region you planned to traverse, the picture alone might not provide a useful map; all but the largest roads would be difficult to discern among the vegetation and terrain. Instead, maps designed for navigation simplify and abstract: they highlight key routes in stark colors, add labels to improve clarity, and remove inessential details to minimize distraction. When we appraise a model, the important question is not whether the model is perfectly *accurate,* but instead whether it is *useful* for the purpose at hand. Good models discard irrelevant details and retain only whichever features are necessary for the model to fulfill its intended purpose.

This process of simplification and abstract raises a new question: how do we know what features of a political interaction we should discard or retain? Our answer in this project was twofold. First, we were fortunate to build upon a broad set of models and techniques established by our predecessors—to stand on the shoulders of giants, so to speak. Nevertheless, despite the sturdy foundations already laid for us, the models contained in this book did not leap fully formed directly from our minds onto the page. Instead, we were forced to iterate, and the process of iteration formed the second step in our modeling process. Our theories developed gradually as we modeled the relationship between civilians, their government, insurgent groups, and external forces in a wide range of distinct ways, each with its own level of sophistication. As we added and removed features, we studied whether the model continued to generate consistent and interesting results. Throughout the process, our choice of which characteristics to omit or include was informed by our knowledge of history, our familiarity with contemporary political events, our intuition, and the generous advice of our friends and colleagues. The model we present in Chapter 2 is the version we settled on as the clearest and simplest depiction that nonetheless captures the core civilian-government relationship with sufficient accuracy. Successive chapters layer additional levels of sophistication back onto the theory, thereby illustrating additional relationships and results.

Where do we arrive at the end of this process of iterated abstraction and reassessment? Deliberately simplified as they are, our models are by no means perfect microcosms of reality. At the same time, they represent more than haphazard guesswork. Instead, the models in this volume are most appropriately interpreted as *fables*. Like the narrative of the plebeian secession from Livy's *History*—apocryphal though it may be—and the countless other myths and folk tales we recount to our children, models are designed to tell us useful and informative stories. The best models abstract away from unneeded complexity to showcase a central narrative and, if possible, a kernel of truth we might otherwise overlook. Our obligation as researchers is to engage these stories, to reflect on them, and to learn from them as best we can. Indeed, it was through precisely this process that we arrived at many of our central conclusions in this book. By developing and analyzing simple models, we were forced to pare down our assumptions and construct clear definitions for our concepts of interest. In doing so, we developed a new framework that not only yields a series of core results that other researchers have overlooked but also discards several commonly-held assumptions that may have distorted previous analyses of interactions between citizens, protestors, and governments. We leave it to our readers to judge whether our results and the assumptions that produced them are more or less realistic and constructive than those associated with other theories.

Strategic Choice

Throughout this volume, we assume that citizens, insurgents, and governments are strategic actors. By this we mean that they will pursue their respective goals to the best of their ability. In other words, actors understand that their actions can produce a variety of distinct outcomes. Civilians, for example, may know that when suffering under an extractive regime they face three options. At one extreme, they can do nothing, in which case their present level of suffering will likely continue. Alternatively, they might attempt to rebel against the state directly, in which case the government will retaliate by targeting and killing them. Third, they can support an insurgent organization that would itself challenge the incumbent regime—an action that could either success in eliciting concessions or instead provoke civil conflict. The state faces a similar choice of strategies. First, it could attempt costly repression in hopes of preventing the rise of insurgent groups. Alternatively, it could offer preemptive concessions so as to induce citizens to support the

regime as opposed to the insurgency. Finally, the government could avoid both of these options, instead taking its chances that an insurgency either will not emerge or would not succeed in conducting significant kinetic violence.

We assume that when actors confront such decisions they harbor preferences over the various outcomes that could result from their actions. Taking these outcomes into account, actors will pursue the actions or strategies that they believe will yield the best overall results, given the information at their disposal, the behavioral constraints they face at the time of their decision, and their expectations about how other actors will behave. In other words, we can imagine citizens ranking the potential outcomes from the most to least preferred.[9] They might, for example, prefer the outcome in which they obtain economic concessions over the outcome in which they continue to suffer high levels of systemic violence. Nevertheless, they might also both of the former outcomes over the alternative of civil war, and even civil war over the outcome in which the government targets citizens with even higher levels of repression. As a result of these preferences, when the citizens select an overall strategy, they may naturally prefer "doing nothing" over attempting direct rebellion,. The citizens' willingness to support an insurgent group, however, depends on their belief that the insurgents could succeed in challenging the government. If the citizens initially believe the probability of success is very low, they might avoid supporting the insurgency for fear that such support would result in civil war. On the other hand, if the citizens acquire new information that suggests the probability of success is reasonably high, they may then decide that supporting an insurgency is worthwhile.

The last possibility in our example above—that citizens might acquire information during the course of their interaction with the government—merits some additional explanation. The models we present do not assume that strategic actors will always have full access to information. As we see throughout this book, actors are often forced to make decisions while they remain uncertain about various factors—their likelihood of victory in combat, their opponent's willingness to grant concessions, the government or insurgent's commitment to reform, etc.—that significantly shape their behavior and can even prevent the actors from achieving their preferred outcomes. For example, the citizens might support an insurgency that ultimately fails because they incorrectly believed

[9] An actor's preferences should not cycle. In other words, if an actor prefers A over B and also prefers B over C, it cannot be the case that she prefers C over A.

that the insurgents were likely to succeed. Although this may appear as a "mistake" after defeat occurs, the decision remains consistent with our strategic framework as long as citizens harnessed all available information at the time they were forced to act. Governments likewise may inadvertently provoke insurgency and war because they underestimate the capabilities or resolve of their adversaries. We return to the discussion of how uncertainty can provoke civil violence in Chapter 3.

Why is it reasonable to assume that actors behave strategically in the manner we describe above? To begin, most of us adopt this outlook in our daily lives—indeed, without the assumption, many human behaviors and social interactions become unintelligible. Even when participating in an activity as benign as walking the streets of a busy city, we immediately make assumptions and predictions about those around us. We anticipate that the other pedestrians will avoid running into us, just as we will generally avoid running into them. Likewise, we typically do not assume that people are walking randomly or selecting their routes irrationally. Rather, we suspect that they have chosen paths that they believe will maximize their goals, however those goals are defined. Whether travelers have prioritized the most efficient, the most scenic, the least busy route, or the one that will broach the least resistance from their traveling companions—indeed, even when they are jugging a complex combination of all these interests and more—they nevertheless engage, at some level, in a process of strategic selection through which they pursue their interests to the best of their ability. Our assumption of strategic choice does not even require that individuals must *succeed* in maximizing their goals: sometimes people hope to avoid delays or busy streets but nevertheless find themselves stopped by an unexpected crowd; at other times travelers opt for 'the scenic route' only to be caught in the rain. As long as individuals attempt to pursue their goals to the best of their ability, and use the knowledge available to them at the time a decision is made, their behavior remains consistent with our strategic framework.

Even when we observe seemingly erratic or non-self-interested behavior, our first instinct is often to "rationalize" those actions by seeking strategic explanations. Consider how we might react to a traveler on a bus or subway car who declines to give up their seat for a senior citizen or a person in need. Notice first that what we generally regard as the "correct" social behavior appears on its face to be altruistic rather than self-interested. How is sacrificing one's seat consistent with a framework in which individuals prioritize their own goals? Perhaps the most likely possibility is that people

may prioritize conformity to social expectations regarding polite behavior over physical comfort—either because they fear social sanction if they fail to conform or because they maintain an affinity for self-sacrifice. When we observe an individual who declines to comply with these social expectations, we might rationalize their behavior by assuming they harbor opposing preferences: the person is unusually self-interested and/or indifferent to social pressure. Alternatively, we might conclude that the person occupying the seat simply could not see or did not notice the senior citizen in need. In this case, we assume the person holding the seat shares the socially prescribed preference ordering but lacks the information necessary to adopt "correct" behavior. Finally, we might conclude the person occupying the seat is themself injured or encumbered; in other words, they have some other justification for retaining the seat that might override the standard preference ordering that favors sacrificing one's own comfort for that of a senior. In each case, our instinct is to interpret the seat-holder's behavior by filtering it through a strategic lens.

Given our general comfort in assuming that other citizens behave strategically, research that adopts a similar assumption regarding policymakers should not cause us great concern. By the time they obtain positions of influence, government officials, advisors, and insurgent leaders have often spent years training to make strategic decisions and learning to calculate the likely consequences of their actions. Furthermore, because the choices the actors make could result in significant political reforms or concessions at one extreme but could expose them to civil violence at the other, it is reasonable to assume that the individuals involved in these decisions devote significant effort toward selecting optimal strategies.

Despite our strong incentives and natural tendencies to behave strategically, actors nevertheless make genuine mistakes—both in calculating the net consequences of their actions and when implementing the policies they select. Such mistakes, however, are unlikely to be systematically distributed in ways that could impair or distort our analysis. Throughout this volume we seek to understand the strategic behavior of aggregated actors (i.e., entire governments, insurgent organizations, and influential political constituencies). To the extent that individuals within these groups may exhibit irrational tendencies, those specific proclivities may not become apparent or influential once behavior is aggregated to the group level.[10] Furthermore, if entire organizations are prone

[10] This may, of course, result in alternative problems inherent to preference aggregation, as in Arrow

to particular deviations from optimal behavior, it stands to reason that they should attempt to correct these tendencies over time in hopes of improving their decision-making performance and securing more favorable outcomes.

Finally, even if we remain skeptical that actors behave in accordance with these assumptions, as social scientists we believe they remain a necessary crutch when interpreting human behavior. Rejecting the strategic framework leaves us with little alternative: if actions are neither purposive nor goal-oriented, to what other explanations might we turn? Perhaps we could attribute behavior as occurring erratically, by spontaneous impulse, or through random choice, but none of these options facilitate generalizable explanation or prediction. Moreover, if actions are unrelated to preferences and inexplicable through a strategic lens, it is surprising that countless policymakers, prosecutors, marketers, and salespersons devote significant time and energy toward not only understanding the preferences of their subjects but also providing incentives and threats that could influence subsequent behavior.

Analytic Case Studies

Throughout the book, we provide support for our theory using analytic narratives. Our goal in doing so is not to provide a causal test for our specific theoretical mechanisms or core results. Given the strategic complexities of the behaviors we analyze, "testing" theories using quantitative analysis or historical cases ranges from exceedingly difficult to functionally impossible. The forms of data that are readily available or even theoretically obtainable rarely measure the concepts most central to current thinking about political violence, including the expectations, preferences, and demands of each belligerent actor. Although we can turn to historical accounts in hopes of obtaining or inferring such evidence on a case-by-case basis, our knowledge of history is piecemeal and nonrandom, and the data we obtain may not facilitate comparisons across cases that are necessary for counterfactual analysis and causal inference.

Rather than leverage analytic narratives with an eye toward causal analysis, we instead hope that they will illustrate how our assumptions and theoretical framework are similar to situations that have existed in the past or that continue to exist in the present. Such similarities increase our confidence that our theories are both realistic and appro-

(1983). In Chapter 4 we characterize behavior in situations where the civilians or insurgents are comprised of heterogeneous groups with their own preferences.

priate for use in further research. By introducing a comprehensive theoretical framework that highlights the range of causal mechanisms at play in civil governance interactions, this book may draw attention to specific aspects of historical cases that have thus far gone under-analyzed. Moreover, by illustrating each causal mechanism, our framework may help researchers identify seemingly distinct events that nonetheless exhibit similar attributes—a process that could facilitate more precise forms of causal testing in the future as researchers understand where direct comparisons are appropriate.