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The effect of rebel behaviour on legitimacy under the local population A case study of the FARC

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Abstract

A lot of research has been done on the strategic decisions that rebels make in conflict and governance. However, limited research has been done on how the characteristics of a rebel group impacts their legitimacy under the local population. In this research, a light will be shed on this relationship. First, the existing literature on rebel governance and legitimacy will be discussed. Four characteristics of rebel behaviour were extracted from the literature: coercion, narratives and practises, services, and institutions. The four characteristics will be used in a case study on the FARC. The main findings are that low levels of just coercion, the provision of services, and participatory institutions have a positive effect on the legitimacy of a rebel group. Narratives and practices need to be in line with those of the local population, otherwise legitimacy is hard to achieve, even by the other characteristics.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Recently there has been a strong interest in conflict studies for the phenomenon of rebel governance. Research has shown that some rebel groups are able to create effective and even legitimate governance structures. The creation of governance structures by rebels can make them an alternative to governance by the state. The scope and limits of these governance structures by rebels' groups varies depending on resources, goal, and structure of the group (Arjona et al., 2015). Some only engage in providing security, where others become a clearer alternative for the state, even going as far as providing education and healthcare. One of these groups is Hamas that has taken control over many institutions in Gaza, and now provides education and healthcare to the local population through these institutions (Berti, 2015).

Scientific relevance

The research on rebel governance has mainly focused on the behaviour of rebels. Questions like why they engage in the provision of services or how they shape and use institutions. These themes are important as is shown by the work of for instance Arjona (2016). She found that civil war is often not the chaos we believed it was. She found that armed groups try to impose some social order in areas under their control. She also found that if groups had long-term goals, they were less violent against civilians, in comparison with armed groups who only focussed on the short-term objectives. This showed that rebels make strategic choices in their behaviour. This strategic behaviour is further underlined by research on the dependence of rebel groups on the local support for their survival. Support from the local population, in shelter, resources, recruits (Arjona et al., 2015). Keister and Slantchev (2014) have looked at different strategies rebel groups used in governing. Comparing strategies with a heavy use of extortion with strategies that tried to please civilians. They found that ideological extreme groups are more brutal towards civilians, as they find compromising too costly. What all these researches have in common is that they focus mainly on the rational of rebel actions.

However, little research has been done on how the tactics of rebels effect the perception of civilians. Rebels need some legitimacy in the eyes of the local population to get support. But also, to achieve their long-term goal which often is replacing the current government. It raises the question how rebel's behaviour towards the local population, effects the perception of the local population, and effects their legitimacy amongst the local population. Currently there is a lack of information and scientific understanding on how this relationship works. In this research I will assess this lack in scientific knowledge, by giving new insights in how this relationship works. The relationship between rebels and population is a crucial part in the puzzle of civil conflicts and can give a better understanding on past and current conflicts.

Societal relevance

Understanding the perceptions of civilians towards rebels is not only important for the scientific community. It is also crucial from a societal viewpoint. We live in a time in which we see less and less war between states, but an increase in intrastate conflicts. In these conflicts' governments launch counterinsurgency operations to deal with rebels. These operations are often not very effective and lead to high collateral damage. These counterinsurgency operations often fail because of the support rebels have under the population, making effective operations difficult. Failed counterinsurgent operations can also estrange the population, increasing the legitimacy of rebels as an alternative for the state (Provost, 2017). An example of this is the counterinsurgency operation in Afghanistan by the US. The deployment of troops and drone attacks on insurgence did not help to stabilize the country (Eikenberry, 2013). The US is now planning on leaving the country, which will likely lead to the Taliban retaking control of Afghanistan (Wolff, 2021). With this research I target to give more insights on how the perception of civilians towards rebels are shaped by their interactions.

It's only a small part of the puzzle, but it can be a first step in creating better policies regarding counterinsurgency. If it is known how rebels achieve local support, then it might be possible to take these opportunities away. In a way that is more effective, than launching massive counterinsurgency offensive that often leads to more violence. Policy could be shifted towards tackling the problem at its roots, or even preventing breeding grounds for rebel groups to arise. It will not only help to make the conflict less violent but could also help to deescalate a conflict and prevent massive refugees flows to other countries.

Not only counterinsurgency policy could be improved, but it might also help to address grievances under the population that support rebels. If research shows that a rebel group has strong political support amongst the population, then the feelings of the population that lead to this should be taken serious by the state. As a rebel group represents an idea or feeling that lives under the population, the government should address these ideas and feelings. This could be by negotiating with a rebel group that has such support. Understanding why a part of the population support rebels is crucial in this regard, as it helps to identify the underlying problems that need to be addressed.

I will address an answer to the problem, I have discussed above with the following research question:

How does rebel behaviour influence the legitimacy of rebels amongst the local population?

Design

To find an answer to the research question, I will build on the existing scientific literature regarding rebel governance and rebel strategies. Besides literature on rebels, I will also make use of literature regarding legitimacy, as this will be the dependent variable. Based on this literature review I will extract independent variables, and indicators for the dependent variable. The independent variables being the actions rebels can undertake towards the local population. The dependent variable will be the legitimacy of rebels amongst the local population. I will conduct a case study on the FARC to observe how the relationship between rebels and civilians regarding legitimacy works.

Structure

As I mentioned earlier, I will first do a literature review on rebel behaviour and legitimacy, this will be covered in chapter two. From this literature review, I extract different independent variables and indicators for the dependent variable. These will be operationalized in the method section in chapter three. In chapter three I will also discuss the research method, case selection, and hypotheses. Before the analysis in chapter five, in which I will discuss my findings, I will first give a short overview in chapter four, of the historical context of the FARC and the conflict in Colombia. I will conclude this research with a conclusion in chapter six, in which I will present my findings and formulate an answer to the main question. This will be followed by a reflection on the research process in chapter seven.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

Most research regarding civil conflicts focuses on the start or the outcome of a conflict. But less research is done on how the conflict evolves and affects the civilians in their day-to-day life (Keister & Slantchev, 2014). Recently there has been a shift in which scholars have started looking into dynamics within the conflict, more looking at tactical choices by rebels and insurgents (Ibid.). This still leaves the perspective of civilians and the impact these different tactics and strategies remain unexplored. This paper will address the effectivity of the different rebel strategies regarding legitimacy and compliance from the perspective of the local population.

If we look at the dynamics of a civil conflict, we see that rebel groups often provide some form of governance or services, with the goal to create compliance and legitimacy. Rebels are dependent on civil cooperation (Ibid.). In exchange for this, rebels hope to get support in recruits, resources, or information. There is a lively discussion regarding why civilians would support rebels in the first place. A differentiation will be made between three main reasons why civilians would support rebels, although scholars disagree on the impact they have.

First, the rational choice argument. Some scholars argue that civilians can make logical decisions based on what benefits them the most. Joel Midal's work provides the following argument: the relationship between civilians and rebels is a simple exchange of goods and services. Civilians lend support to the rebels in exchange for tangible benefits (Malthaner, 2015). This reasoning holds that civilians are willing to help rebels if they get something in return. The social and economic situation in a country can create a breeding ground in which rebels can gather support easily, for example by economic or social deprivation and a weak state (Ibid.). Samuel Popkin agrees with this assumption. He doubts that civilians support rebels for their revolutionary ideology. He argues that civilians follow a rational logic of self-interest, which is centred on local issues and short-term benefits and especially on the fear of loss and injury (Ibid.).

Kesiter and Slantchev (2014) disagree with this notion. They argue that although service provision by rebels helps to create legitimacy, this effect will be very limited if their ideologies are not aligned. All actions the rebels will undertake will be met with suspicion. Because of the limited amount of trust between the civilians and rebels, the rebels are more likely to use force. On the other hand, civilians are more likely to oppose the rebel's rules and collaborate with the state. Arjano, Kasfir, and Mampilly (2015) stress the point that, even though the choices civilians have are limited, they do have choices. One of these choices is partial resistance against rebels. Full resistance is unlikely, since the cost are extremely high for civilians. The main argument here is that rebels will need to take into account ideological fit with the population. Otherwise, they might be met with high levels of suspicion, or even partial resistance. A lack of ideological fit would also lower the impact of service provision on legitimacy according to Kesiter and Slantchev (2014).

A third reason put forth by Kesiter & Slantchev (2014) for civilians to support rebels, is coercion. Coercion works both directly and indirectly. It works directly in the sense that it eliminates those who oppose the rebels, or by punishing civilians who do not comply with their rule. It works indirectly by warning civilians what will happen if they oppose the rebels. So, coercion does not automatically mean the use of violence. It's about the threat of violence being used. One could compare it with speeding tickets. The fact that you can get one is enough reason for most people to not exceed the speed limit. In this case coercion is more used to achieve compliance, then support of the population. Coercion can also gather support for rebels if it is used to address grievances (Loyle, 2021). This can be done by creating a justice system. This is a service rebels can provide. But this service also has a coercive side, rebels often use justice systems to deal with collaborators and people who disobey the rebels. Showing a more coercive side, disguised as a service.

A fourth reason is the shape of institutions used by rebels. Institutions that are more inclusive and leave more room for civilians to participate are expected to be seen as more legitimate by the local population. Mampilly and Stewart (2021) have created a typology based on four dimensions to address what kind of institutions rebels use. I will discuss these typologies later in more detail.

I have decided to name these variables that influence the legitimacy of rebels amongst the local population; the characteristics of rebel behaviour. I first named them instruments, but that lays too much focus on a rational choice argument. I wanted to stay clear of the rationales behind rebel's behaviour and focus on the impact they have instead. Naming them instruments would also not do justice to values like ideology and the shape of institutions. As these are characteristics of a group, and not instruments that can be used.

These four broad characteristics of rebel behaviour that can lead to support, compliance, and legitimacy under the civilian population gives us some insight how rebels can operate. I will later discuss these characteristics in more detail. First, I am going to discuss legitimacy as it is crucial for understanding how the relationship works and how it can be observed.

Legitimacy

Most literature on legitimacy in political science looks at states and their government (Weatherford, 1992). Rebel groups operate in a different context than state do, namely the context of civil war. This makes addressing legitimacy different when looking at states or at rebels. While the main literature on legitimacy focuses on western institutions and democracy, research by Arjano (2016) and many others show that rebels are also capable of governing and creating their own institutions.

Before I discuss legitimacy in the context of civil war, I should first discuss what rebels are and when to speak of rebel governance. The main criteria to speak of rebels are: territorial control, a resident population and violence or a threat of violence. Arjano, Kasfir and Mampilly (2015) make these three criteria more specific. Firstly, a rebel group must hold some territory in the state against which it is rebelling, the level of control may fluctuate over time. Secondly, there must be a civilian population residing in the controlled area. Thirdly, the group must use an initial act of violence against the sitting government, after this they must keep using violence to be a credible threat to the sitting government (Ibid.).

The presence of governance by rebels is harder to determine. For the state, the presence of governance is mostly taken for granted as sovereignty is the most important aspect and is achieved by being internationally accepted (Arjano, Kasfir & Mampilly, 2015). Research shows that rebellions happen mostly in states that are sovereign only by the acceptance of the international community, these states lack legitimacy amongst the population (Jackson, 1990). Speaking of sovereign rebels would be confusing as juridical they are not, but empirically they might be. Because of this Kasfir suggest to look at domination when discussing the level of governance by rebels (2015). He defines domination as the degree of civilian compliance in an area under the control of a rebel organization. This differs from territory which only says something over the control a rebel group in an area has in comparison with the enemy, and not about the control over the population. The control of territory is a necessary condition for domination of that area.

This brings us to the point of legitimacy. Even though legitimacy based on western states does not fit the context in which rebels operate it still has some important concept, which can be used to address the legitimacy of a rebel group. The Western experience brings forward three main mechanisms of legitimacy that are interesting when looking at non-state armed actors (Duyevesteyn, 2017).

The first mechanism is based on the theory of a social contract. By creating social order and predictable social relations legitimacy can emerge for this actor that is seen as responsible (Ibid.). In the context of civil war this means that if non-state armed actors are capable of creating order, then this starts the legitimation process. If this leads to civilians and others to take part in this order, then this will confirm the existence of some sort of legitimacy (Ibid.). This creation of order can be done with coercion for example.

The second mechanism focuses on governance. This mechanism looks at the output of an actor. By showing good and transparent governance people will get more trust in governance institutions. Which makes them willing to accept? to these government institutions, like police, courts and taxes (Ibid.) The idea behind this is that by delivering good governance, civilians will comply to these institutions and find them legitimate. This is often called output legitimacy. The problem for rebel groups is that they have limited capacity and funds to create these kinds of institutions, which might ask for many resources. The only advantage they have is that in a civil war the expectation of civilians might be lower. Creating some sense of safety could already create a level of support and trust, dependent on how strong the state institutions still are.

Third mechanism: in western state, building democracy has a vital role in enabling people to express themselves. It gives them the opportunity to influence policy and participate in government. This process of legitimacy is focused on carrying out the will of the people and is often called input legitimacy (Ibid.).

The first point described by Duyevstein can be called empirical legitimacy, it shows that the rule of a certain group is legitimate by people accepting it and being part of it (2017). The second point can be called performance legitimacy or output legitimacy. This is legitimacy based on the perceived performance by the population. Of course, the performance in civil wars will be lower than in times of peace. Performance legitimacy can add to the empirical legitimacy. If governance structures by rebels perform well, more civilians will use them. By using these the empirical legitimacy grows. Especially empirical legitimacy is interesting when researching non-state actors, by looking at the relationship between different parties it becomes possible to address their legitimacy. The third point can also be seen in rebel governance, it mainly has to do with how much access there is for civilians in participating in governance. I will discuss later in more detail how institutions and inclusiveness vary between rebel groups.

Podder (2017) makes an interesting difference between judicial legitimacy and empirical legitimacy. Judicial legitimacy means that because of international relations an actor is seen as legitimate. These are states and their government. In some cases, it can be enough to control the capital of a country to be seen as the legitimate government. Rebels do not have this kind of legitimacy until they have toppled the current regime. This makes the term un-useful in civil war, Podder suggests looking at empirical legitimacy instead (2017). Empirical legitimacy is legitimacy we can see based on interactions, which can show for example compliance, support, and trust. Podder looks at three levels of compliance which all lead to different levels and forms of legitimacy: voluntary, quasi-voluntary and coercive compliance.

Voluntary compliance is when commands are perceived to be of interest to the community as a whole (Ibid.). To achieve this, rebel groups must adapt their actions to historical values, norms and beliefs of the community. At the same time voluntary compliance is not free of control. Control in symbolic and coercive sanctions stays intact. This can for example be the use of police and courts. Rebel groups will try to maximize compliance of civilians and will try to minimize defection to other actors, being the government or other armed groups.

When coercion becomes stronger in this process, voluntary compliance turns into quasi-voluntary compliance. This involves stronger social control and more severe punishment. An example of this is IS (Islamic State). At first, they were seen by the Sunni population in Iraq as liberators from the occupying Shia army. After a while IS started to impose stronger rules based on religious values. These new rules were enforced by strong punishment. Soon IS became an oppressor in the eyes of the population (Ibid.). In this case the use of police force and courts is no longer seen to be in the interest of the whole community but in the interest of mainly the rebel group.

This ties in with the third type of compliance, coercive compliance. Coercive compliance is the standard method for most armed groups. The relationship between civilians and rebels is based on coercion. The opinion of civilians is completely disregarded and is no longer based on shared beliefs or perceptions about decision processes. Resource rich groups often use this method, where resource poor groups are more dependent on their relationship with the population, leading to a relationship-based on voluntary or quasi-voluntary compliance (Ibid.).

Podder (2017) concludes that voluntary compliance leads to higher levels of empirical, normative, domestic and international legitimacy in comparison to quasi-voluntary or coercive compliance. Quasi-voluntary or coercive compliance has a negative impact on legitimacy unless they are seen as justifiable by the population. An example of this is maintaining law and order, in which some coercion is used.

In this research empirical legitimacy will be mainly of interest when the relationship between rebels and the local population can show how legitimacy between them works. For example, by looking at interactions and reactions towards each other.

Local legitimacy

This research project will focus itself on local legitimacy or domestic legitimacy. This is a form of empirical legitimacy from the perspective of the civilian population under rebel control. As earlier described the dependence on local support varies greatly between rebel groups. Rebel groups relying on local support can have different reasons for this. The first and most common reason is their dependence on local support for intel, resources, and recruits. Local support makes it also harder for the government to defeat the rebels. Another reason can be ideology, some rebel groups are driven by ideological goals against for example a corrupt government. It can be part of their vision to include the local population. Not all rebel groups are dependent on the local population for resources but get these resources from the international community. In some cases, a condition for these resources is that rebel groups behave with respect towards civilians and try to get their support. This can give them more international legitimacy.

Rebels that have international backing are less dependent on local support, but are dependent on the donor country. Some states find it important that they have local legitimacy, for others this is less important. Rebels that are backed by states that are not interested in local legitimacy of the rebels are often much more coercive, and use more violence towards civilians (Kalyvas, 2006).

Characteristics of rebel behaviour

From the literature on rebel strategies regarding their relationship with the population four main characteristics of rebel behaviour can be observed. Coercion, narratives and practises, services, and institutions. I will discuss each characteristics bellow.

Coercion

Loyle (2021) describes that rebels often create a legal system, to provide an alternative for the state. In such a system rebels can use coercion to bring justice, which can create stability in a place. If there is stability in a region, through security and law enforcement by rebel's, economic activity will rise (Podder, 2017). Markets will open again, farmers will start working the land. This only

happens when civilians perceive some form of stability in which they are willing to invest time and effort. Some level of coercion can be important to bring stability to a region. Stability increases the economic situation, which gives the rebels performance legitimacy (Ibid.). It is important to make here the distinction in justifiable coercion and unjustifiable coercion. Coercion like policing, keep law and order is justifiable and can increase the stability in a region. Which could improve the legitimacy of a rebel group under the local population.

Unjustifiable coercion can also be instrument to achieve compliance on the short term. This can be done by creating quasi-voluntary or coercive compliance, although on the long-term unjustifiable coercion will lose compliance and support (Podder, 2017). Kalyvas (2006) adds to this that rebels often make use of very strategic and tactical violence. They will often only target small groups to create examples, if civilians do not comply. Rebels that use violence on a bigger scale are not trying to achieve compliance, this often leads to displacement as they fear the violence. Targeted violence against criminals or collaborators sends a message against the local population about who is in control, making clear to not defy their control. This does not automatically lead to resentment under the local population. Only when the punishment is seen as to brutal and unjust, as was the case in some place under IS control (Podder, 2017). In the case of IS severe violence against civilians was used for minor infringements, punishments like whipping or even beheadings.

Interestingly rebel groups that provide more extensive services are also often more violent. These rebel groups are not scarred of using extreme tactics, like suicide terrorism. they use more extreme violence because they enjoy high levels of public support and are internally strong (Heger & Jung, 2015). The use of extreme levels of violence might lead to a deterrence of public support as was the case under IS.

Narratives and practises

Another interesting characteristic is narratives and practises like nationalism, religion, or ideology. Some rebel groups have strong narratives or practices. for example, Marxist views on how a society should be shaped or more religious values around sharia law like IS. These beliefs can help a rebel group in gathering support, but can also work against a group. Ideology can help a rebel group if it fits with the ideas, beliefs, cultural, and religious norms the civilian population have. It can create legitimacy out of this. If a group has an ideology that does not fit with the population, it will lead to friction and undermine their support. A group that used ideology or maybe the lack of a strong ideology in their advantage are the Free Ache Movement (GAM). They did not have a strong ideological objective. Because of this they managed to build a relationship in rural areas with Islamic teachers for support, while in more urban areas they dependent on political activist for support (Mampilly and Stewart, 2021). Podder (2017) adds to this that rebel groups who are unlikely to achieve international support are likely to build on a narrative for more local support through, nationalistic, religious, or ideologic motives.

If a rebel group has a strong agenda on religion, ideology, or nationalism, it will try to convince the local population of this narrative (Arjona, 2017). If the rebels succeed in this it will lead to more support and a stronger internal cohesion. Rebels that are fighting for a greater good are often less violent against civilians, then rebels fighting for wealth (Ibid.). If there is no fit between the narratives and practices of a rebel group and the population, support will be harder to achieve. It's not only important that the narrative is in line, but also that they practices them. The actions of rebels need to show it.

Services

Most rebel groups provide services to the population under their control. These services range from delivering justice and security to more complicated service like education and healthcare

(Heger & Jung, 2015). The level of service provision is dependable on the strength of a rebel group, more and complex services need more resources. The reason rebels chose to deliver services is that they greatly benefit from them. The provision of services makes recruitment easier, reduces cooperation between counterinsurgents and civilians, and increase the legitimacy of a group (Ibid.) Interestingly there are some main points on which is consensus between scholars regarding service provision. First, groups that provide services have a larger base of civilian support, especially if governance by the state is weak. Second, service provision implies that rebels have a clear command structure, and are more cohesive. Which translates in less violence against civilians. To be able to provide services a rebel group must have a strong command structures, as providing services ask logistical planning and resources of a group. Weak rebel groups often lack both.

Loyle (2021) looks more in depth at justice delivered by rebel groups. She finds that rebel groups take on the task of creating a sort of judicial system, because they want to be an alternative for the government. With the creation of judicial system, a rebel group can address grievances in areas under their control. This helps to stabilize their territory. What is very interesting is that Loyle (Ibid.) finds another reason why rebel groups create such a system. It enables them to punish civilians that are cooperating with other groups or the government in a more legitimate fashion.

When providing justice it is important to create a sense under the population of being more just than the government. This gives a group more local support, as was the case in Iraq. Revkin (2020) found that civilians that perceived IS as being more just than the Shia government where more likely to stay when their territory was captured by IS. she also found that if civilians had been threatened bad and unjust by the government, they are also more likely to stay in rebel-controlled areas instead of fleeing. It must be noted that there are a lot of other factors that influences the decision of staying or leaving.

Institutions

Mampilly and Stewart (2021) have created a typology for different kinds of institutional arrangements created by rebels. This typology can be linked to voluntary, quasi-voluntary, and coercion compliance I have discussed earlier. They have done this based on four dimensions; power-sharing, integration, innovation, and inclusion. On basis of these dimension rebel institutions can be categorized. According to Mampilly and Stewart (Ibid.) Martial Law is the default approach of a rebel group. All rebels start use coercion in the beginning (Mampilly, 2007). As example Mampilly and Stewart (2021) use the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which never shifted away from unitary rule in Northern Rwanda in the period from 1990 until 1994. There are two reason why the RPF did not shift away from their autocratic way of governing. First, when the RPF captured the territory they drove out the Hutu part of the population. This smothered opposition voices, which took the necessity of power-sharing away according to Mampilly and Stewart (2021). The second reason was that the RPF had no revolutionary agenda and a strong military advantage, so there was no need to actively engage with the remaining local population (Ibid.)

The second category is Partial Subjugation. An example of this IS (Islamic State), in some towns under control of IS the rebel group chose to leave room for local forces and their relatives to run day-to-day business. IS did this because they didn't want to micromanage the area. By giving room to local players IS hoped to win popular support and persuade the local population into its ideology (Khalaf, 2015). It must be noted that most towns under IS rule were ruled in a more martial law way. Mampilly and Stewart (2021) also argue that the rule of partial subjugation was not the end goal of IS but short-term solution, as they were lacking the resources at the time to

take full control over all conquered towns. This way they could use their resources in fighting instead of controlling.

Third, the status quo. In this scenario when a rebel groups takes control over an area, they keep the same structures in place. This can be governance practice but also cultural traditions. Mampilly and Stewart illustrate this with two cases, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM). Which is interesting about this case is that under the ELF use of the status quo led to the creation of a form of governance that was less inclusive. Whereas the GAM creates a governance based on the status quo that was more inclusive.

Fourth, Transformative (less inclusive). This category holds rebel groups that want to change the current institutions, often ideological driven. As example Mampilly and Stewart (2021) take the Khmer Rouge (KR) in Cambodia. The KR was ideological driven, their goal was to create a society-based Moa's communist idea with a mix of Khmer nationalism. Though the created completely different institution based on large commune and agricultural society, they had no intention of facilitating participation of civilians in these institutions (Ibid.).

The fifth, and last category is transformative (more inclusive). These kind of rebel groups want to change the current institution. They are often ideological driven just as with the KR, but want to be more inclusive and participatory towards the whole population. An example is the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), which strived for the independence of Portuguese Guinea. They replaced the colonial institutions and reshaped society, but they did this by cooperating with various ethnic groups. The PAIGC believed that cooperation was a better way, then coercion. It later held democratic election in which all groups where included. The institution created by the PAIGC also allowed for greater civilian participation (Ibid.).

These five categories give a good insight in different institutions rebel groups try to create and why they chose certain forms. These typologies are interesting as civilians are more likely to support institutions in which they are included and can participate. Which are transformative (inclusive) institutions, or status-quo institutions if they already are inclusive.

Hypotheses

I have created four hypotheses based on the four characteristics of rebels that might affect their legitimacy under the local population. I will operationalize these characteristics in the next chapter. The dependent variable, empirical legitimacy, will be divide in four more practical categories. This will help to reject or accept the hypotheses. I will discuss these categories in more detail in the next chapter. The literature review has led me to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1:

The local population under control of a rebel group will perceive the rebels as more legitimate, if they use low levels of coercion on the local population

Hypothesis 2:

The local population that is under control of a rebel group will perceive the rebels as more legitimate, if the rebel group uses and practices a narrative that is in line with the views of the local population.

Hypothesis 3:

The local population under control of a rebel group will perceive the rebels as more legitimate, if they provide services to the local population.

Hypothesis 4:

The local population that is under control of a rebel group, will perceive the rebels as more legitimate if they create or make use of institutions that allow room for civilian participation and interest.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss the research method I will be using. Furthermore, I explain why I have chosen to use FARC as case. I then operationalize the independent variables and the dependent variable. Lastly, I discuss which data I will be using for this research, and why.

Case-study

When doing research, it must be determined how broad the scope of that research should be, and how in-depth one wants to study a single unit of observation. This is a consideration one has to make between large-N cross case analysis or small-N case study. A large-N cross case analysis would provide answers that are more generalizable, but would lack in-depth knowledge. This in-depth knowledge can be found when doing a small-N case study (Gerring, 2007). In such a study, there is more room to look in-depth, and to find answers to how certain mechanisms work. It can provide insight into the black box of causality.

From the wide variety of research methods, I have chosen for a case study approach. When looking at the current literature, a clear distinction can be made between four different 'characteristics' that have an effect on the legitimacy of a rebel group. These characteristics are mainly looked at from the perspective of the rebels, as rational actions, leaving a knowledge gap from the perspective of the civilians. A case study can provide the in-depth knowledge on how these characteristics affect civilian perception towards rebels. The characteristics lead to four different pathways to legitimacy. My goal is to establish the importance and strengths of the different pathways.

This research will build on the existing theories around legitimacy and rebel characteristics, but looks at them from a civilian perspective, instead of the rebel perspective. It can be seen as theory testing approach (Gerring, 2007). This research aims to identify how the characteristics of rebels affect the civilian perspective, taking the theoretical base of strategic actions of rebels, but focusing on civilian perspective instead. I will trace empirical events to see which characteristics are visible, and how these affect the attitudes of the local population under rebel control. The research has an x1/y centred approach, which means that the focus will lay on the relation of the independent variables with the dependent variables (Gerring, 2007).

Case Selection

The selected case is the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo (FARC), which I will further refer to as the FARC. The FARC is a socialist/Marxist rebel group that has its origins in the mid 60's. It has been the largest and one of the most powerful rebel groups in the Colombian civil war. In 2016, the FARC signed a peace agreement with the Colombian government, and from 2017 onwards, the FARC ceased to exist as an armed group. FARC is one of the oldest rebel groups and has had a strong influence on the lives of Colombians during its existence.

I have chosen for the FARC as I was searching for a case that would be as representative as possible, while also including all characteristics I have extracted from the theory. The FARC can be seen as a typical case. According to Gerring (2007), a typical case is one that has a typical set of values for the phenomenon that is of interest. The FARC has had control over areas and governed these, making it an excellent case to look at the relationship between civilians and rebels. I will mainly focus on the time period from 1980 until 2016. During this time period, the FARC rose in power, helped by their involvement in drugs trade. The FARC reached its peak by the end of the 1990s. From 2000 onwards, they started losing territory and members. It will be interesting to see how this rise and fall in power affected their behaviour and that of the local population. I will refer to some earlier moments in the 60s and 70s, as they can be important context, but I have chosen to exclude them from my time period because data availability of the

60's and 70's is low. I will also not address the peace talks between the government and the FARC that led to an agreement in 2016, as the peace agreement is not within the scope of my research.

On a side note: at first I wanted to also include the ELN, another Colombian rebel group, but because of a lack of data regarding actions towards civilians and civilian perception on this group, I have chosen to only focus on the FARC, on which more data is available.

Audience

While a lot of research has been done on the strategies used by rebels groups to achieve legitimacy or other goals, this paper focuses mainly on the perception of civilians. The goal is to find out how different characteristics of rebels affect the empirical legitimacy of such a group from the perception of the local population. In this research, the local population will be defined as all the people who are non-combatants living in an area under control or partly under control of a rebel group; in this case under control or partial control of the FARC.

Operationalization

In this paragraph, I will operationalize the different independent variables and the dependent variable. The independent variables are the four characteristics: services, coercion, narratives and practices, and institutions. These characteristics can affect the dependent variable, legitimacy. I have divided the dependent variable into four categories. In the conceptual model on the right (figure 1) the expected interaction is shown.

Independent variables

In this paper, I make a distinction between four characteristics of rebels which can influence their level of legitimacy under the local population. These four characteristics should be seen in combination with each other, and affect the views of the local population regarding the rebels. The goal is not to see which characteristic is the most influential in comparison to another characteristic, as this will be dependent on the rebel group and the context in which it operates. I have chosen not to use categories to show to which degree a characteristic is visible, but to describe the visibility of each characteristic and link this to the context. This way, I hope to explain how a characteristic works, while taking its context into account.

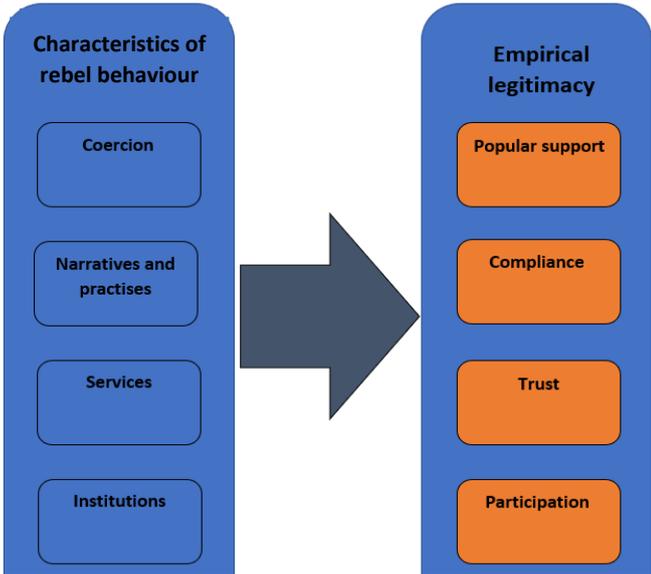


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Coercion

When using the term coercion, I look at the use or threat of force to achieve a certain goal. This goal can be in agreement with the local population, but it doesn't have to be. Use or threat of force can be seen in actions like taxation (extortion), order, punishment (just or unjust), and more. It is important to note that force does not have to be used, but the threat of force is enough to influence the behaviour and attitudes of civilians. Coercion may contribute to legitimacy of rebels amongst citizens if its seen as just, like punishments for criminal behaviour. Coercion might undercut rebel legitimacy if it's seen as unjust, like plundering or forced labour.

Narratives and practices

With this characteristic, I will look if a rebel group has an ideology, religion, or uses other narratives – such as nationalism – to create a sense of belonging and justification for their goals and actions. I will not only look at these narratives alone, but also if these ideas are put in to

practice. Furthermore, I will try to assess to what extent a narrative is in line with the views of the local population. Narratives and practices may contribute to legitimacy of rebels amongst civilians if they are in line with those of the civilians, narratives and practices might undercut rebel legitimacy if they are not in line with those of the civilians.

An example could be the Sharia police by the Islamic State (IS) in Syria. IS is a religious group that follows a very conservative notion of the Islam. In their view the Sharia law – an Islamic law that is based on ideas from the Quran – should be the general law. When IS took towns in Iraq and Syria, they implemented these laws and enforced them. Some civilians might be in favour of these laws; others might oppose them. By building on a certain view, being religion or ideology, a group can draw a certain legitimacy or justification for their actions out of the narrative. This is, however, strongly dependent on if the narrative is in line with the views of the local population.

Services

The provision of services can vary widely from one rebel group to the other. The services provided by rebels can range from dispute resolution to more complex service provision, like healthcare and education. To see if a rebel group is providing services, I will look at anecdotal evidence. The bare minimum to speak of service provision starts with dispute resolution, but service provision is often more extensive (Heger & Jung, 2017). Another condition to speak of service provision is that it must be visible for the population that it is delivered by the rebels, or indirectly by actions rebels undertook. Service provision may contribute to the legitimacy of rebels amongst civilians if the rebel group provides services that are useful for local population. This can involve minor things, like food distribution and dispute settlement. Services can also be more extensive, like healthcare and education. I will look for signals that the rebel group undertakes these actions, and how extensive they are.

Institutions

Institutions can be seen as the long-term objectives a rebel organization might have. Some rebels only focus on short-term goals, but other rebels group might have a view on what society should look like after the conflict. An example can be a rebel group that fights an authoritarian leader and envisions a more democratic country, where everyone is equal and all can vote. Rebels can start shaping this during the conflict by creating institutions. Institutions differ from services, as they are more based on beliefs of how society should look and are more long-term. Services can be used as strategic action, but this is more difficult with institutions. Institutions are more long-term, and grow more organically. To see what a rebel group does when it comes to institutions, I will follow the typology by Mampilly and Stewart (2020), which I have discussed more detail in the theoretical framework. I will look if the FARC uses institutions that enables the participation of civilians, and assess how inclusive they are. Institutions may contribute to the legitimacy of rebels amongst the civilians, if the institutions used or created by rebels are more inclusive than those of the state. Institutions might, however, undercut rebel legitimacy amongst civilians, if the institutions used or created are less inclusive for civilians.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is legitimacy. With this term, I refer to empirical legitimacy under the local population, that lives in an area controlled by a rebel group. In this case, under control of the FARC. Empirical legitimacy can be observed from interaction between the rebels and the population. By taking part or making use of rebels services, institutions, narratives and practices, the population acknowledges the legitimacy of the rebel group. Since empirical legitimacy is a very broad term, I will divide it into four variables which are part of empirical legitimacy. By splitting empirical legitimacy into four variables, it will become clearer how the different independent variables influence different parts of empirical legitimacy.

Popular support

For popular support, I will look at the support for rebels under the local population, who are under control or partial control of these rebels, to see if the local population is in favour of rebels. Popular support can be seen by looking at signs, action, and statements by the local population regarding a rebel group. These can be positive, for example the showing of symbols that are linked to a group, or choosing to make use of rebels services instead of state services. Demonstration against rebels can also be seen as a lack of support.

Compliance

Compliance is part of empirical legitimacy. It shows how cooperative civilians are towards the rebels and their rules. Compliance can be observed when civilians adhere to rebel rules. This can be the paying of taxes or respecting dispute settlements. There are also more daily visible signs; for example IS imposed sharia law in some towns under their control. Part of the sharia law was that women should be covered when in public. Most of the civilians complied to these rules.

Trust

Trust is an important factor in legitimacy. It shows whether civilians have faith in rebels and will undertake actions based on support for the group, instead of fear. Trust can be observed when civilians engage out of their own initiative with rebels. This can for example be using rebels dispute settlement, instead of the governments courts.

Participation

Participation takes it a step further than only supporting rebels. By participating, civilians actively seek a role in the rebel control over a territory. Participating can be helping to collect taxes, logistical help, political support, and taking part in rebel institutions. To observe participation, I will look at the stated examples above, but it will not be limited to those. I will consider all acts that require an active choice and active actions towards a rebel group with a supportive intention, as participating.

It's important to mention that empirical legitimacy is difficult to properly assess. Actions of civilians can be influenced by force or the threat of it. Compliance, for example, can be coerced, and this holds for all indicators. Because of this, it is important to look at the context, to see if there might be a threat or use of force that influences the behaviour of civilians. It's an important weakness to be aware of when judging the actions of civilians.

3.5 Data

This research will build on scientific literature, including case studies of the FARC and the Colombian civil war as a whole. Beside scientific literature, I will draw on reports by non-governmental organizations that were active in the conflict, as well as news reports. When it comes to NGO reports, I will mainly focus on those of Amnesty International and Human Right Watch. These organizations have extensive reports on events that happened between civilians and armed actors. This data will then be analysed

Chapter 4: History of the FARC and the Colombian conflict

In this chapter, I will provide some background information on the civil war in Colombia, from its start in 1930 until the 1990's. The focus will be the role of the FARC, and how and why this group emerged. Furthermore, I will address the role of drug production and paramilitary groups in Colombia. I elaborate on some crucial developments and historic moments that have shaped the conflict. This background information is important for placing the information in the chapter that follows – the analysis – in the historical context of the conflict.

A brief history of Colombia's civil war

Colombia has a long history of violence and civil unrest. From 1930 until 1946, the liberal administration initiated great land reforms, which involved taking land from rich landowners and redistributing that land to the peasant population. In 1946, there was an internal division in the liberal party, leading their government to fall. A new conservative government followed, which incited political violence: the conservatives reclaimed the land that the Colombian oligarchs had lost to the peasants. After the assassination of an important liberal politician in 1948, violence broke out in cities where liberals had a foothold. The conservative government responded by arming peasants under conservative control. The liberals on the other side also started arming their peasants, with help from the communist party. This period of violence is known as '*La violencia*' and took place from 1948 until 1958. The conflict came to an end because of an agreement between the conservative and the liberal elites, in which it was agreed that both parties would share public offices and alternate the presidency (Molano, 2000).

However, the agreement did not resolve the underlying conflict, and the fighting in the countryside between landowners and peasants continued (Phelan, 2019). Both conservatives and liberals had armed peasant groups to fight each other. One of these peasant groups was the "independent republics" of Marulanda and Arenas. In 1964, their encampment was attacked in air- and land strikes of the army with 16,000 soldiers. The encampment was, however, abandoned: forty-three guerrilla fighters had already fled to the mountains. The fighters didn't see a possibility to change the structure with legal means, and thereafter founded the FARC and declared an armed rebellion. In this time more guerrilla forces were founded, most notably the ELN and ELP.

In the 1970s, the National Front government introduced rural developments that paved the way for more concentrated land ownership, which sparked new support for the guerrilla groups that had been founded a decade before. The new government policy led to more land for the already powerful land owners and undermined the small-scale peasant producers. As a consequence, many peasant farmers invaded rural properties and divided the land among themselves. Property owners responded with public and private force, and succeeded in pushing the peasants away. This led many peasants to find their way to guerrillas' groups. Between 1970 and 1982, the FARC grew from 500 to 3000 fighters.

The FARC and the Colombian government entered peace talks for the first time in 1984, which led to a ceasefire that lasted until 1987. As part of the agreement, the FARC co-founded the Patriotic Union (UP) with the Colombian Communist Party (PCC). The UP achieved great electoral success for a left-wing party in Colombia. This success was, however, put to an end by the Colombian army and paramilitaries, who started targeting UP-politicians. It is estimated that, by 1988, up to 500 UP-politicians had been assassinated or had disappeared. Between 1988 and 1992, this number rose up to 6000 UP members, including UP presidential candidate Bernarda Jaramillo. After this,

most UP members fled the country and the FARC no longer believed in the changing the political structures from inside (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019). The FARC continued its armed struggle.

Values of the FARC

The FARC was a communist-Marxist rebel group, that has its base mainly in rural areas and has support under peasant population in these areas. The goal of the FARC was to overthrow the Colombian government and seize control. They wanted more equality in society, and considered themselves fighters for the poor (Phelan, 2019). Their views were strongly influenced by other leftist movements. One of the founders acknowledged in an interview that their views were strongly influenced by work of Lenin, Bolivar and Mao during their early years (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019). In the 1980s, the FARC shifted more to Bolivarianism as ideology (Phelan, 2019). Bolivarianism is a mixture of socialist, democratic, and nationalist values. This shift led the FARC to become less extreme and more nationalistic.

The influence of drugs

In the 1970s, guerrilla groups in Colombia struggled to sustain their operations. Modernization of the agricultural sector led to urbanization, which undermined the rural peasant base on which the guerrillas had built their support. In this time, the Colombian army was getting better at counterinsurgent operations. They declared defeat of the ELN in the mid-1970s, and the EPL and FARC saw their operational capabilities as severely limited. Additionally, the Colombian government had opened diplomatic relations with the Soviet-Union at the end of the 1960s, which led to a stop of financial support to left-wing guerrilla groups by the Soviet-Union (Offstein & Aristizábal, 2003). With diminished local and international support, the rebel groups had no choice but to find a new way to sustain themselves.

At that same time, the drug production in Colombia started to expand, as the demand from Europe and the US grew. The weakened guerrilla groups saw an opportunity there: in the beginning of the 1980s, guerrilla groups took an active role in the drug trade. The drug cartels and guerrilleros started working together. Isolated areas under control of guerrilla movements turned out to be excellent places to grow drugs. Especially the FARC became very active in the drug trade, by taxing marijuana and coca fields in exchange for protection.

The power of paramilitary groups

Conforming to the advice from the United States, the Colombian government implemented laws in the 1960s that allowed the arming and training of civilians by the army. The Colombian army encouraged the creation of so-called 'self-defence groups', in order to counter guerrillas. This legalizing and support for paramilitaries meant a sharp growth in private armies of large landowners. These groups, which were financed by large landowners, were responsible for the biggest part of the violence in the Colombian conflict. According to estimates, seventy to eighty-five percent of all killings throughout the conflict were committed by paramilitaries. Paramilitary groups had strong links with politicians, the army and cartels (Tate, 2016). The army and police often looked away when paramilitaries committed atrocities; usually they were told beforehand not to intervene.

In the late 1980s, the public pressure against paramilitaries was rising, which led to the outlawing of paramilitary groups by the government. This happened after the murder of two judges and ten government investigators. However, in 1995 they were legalized again, as private security companies. Just like the guerrilla groups, the paramilitaries were very active in drug trade. Some

paramilitary groups were linked to cartels, others had their own drug operations. Drug trade gave paramilitaries the resources to invest in modern weaponry and extensive training. The groups were even able to hire Israeli, US and British mercenaries to give special training on assassinations (Robinson, 1989).

Paramilitaries were not only used by the army and landowners to fight off guerrillas. They were also responsible for taking out politicians in the opposition, union leaders, and journalists. According to Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 1998) paramilitary groups are responsible for gruesome killings of random civilians. In one instance, paramilitaries killed twenty-two civilians, including women and babies, who were suspected of helping the FARC. The babies were nailed to doors, adults were decapitated and impaled on bamboo. Especially the excessive and horrendous violence perpetrated by paramilitaries is frightening. Many of these kinds of massacres have taken place, often with army bases a few kilometres away, but without intervention of the military. The Alto Naya massacre in 2001, for example, lasted three days and between 40 and 130 civilians were killed¹. The nearby third army brigade did not respond to the massacre, and only showed up when the massacre was over. However, when the FARC attempted to take over a neighbouring town, that same brigade responded within three hours. The military was also notified before that a massacre was going to take place, but did not respond to calls for help from the local population (Miller, 2001). This shows the link between the army and paramilitary, the army allowed the paramilitaries to commit atrocities.

¹ The number of casualties was difficult to identify, as most casualties were cut to pieces (Miller, 2001)

Chapter 5: Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyse the case of the FARC. The analysis will focus on the entire period of the FARC's existence as an armed group, but with a more in-depth look at the period from 1980 until 2016, as this is the period in which the FARC was most visible. Firstly, I will discuss each characteristics that rebel groups have, and elaborate on how these characteristics can be observed on the FARC. In this discussion I will argue how this links to the indicator that I have established earlier. Finally, I review the hypotheses that I put forth in chapter two.

Coercion

As I have discussed earlier, coercion can be seen as the use or the threat of force. If this threat or use of force is justifiable in the view of public, for example to enforce the law, then the local population is more likely to support these actions. This, in turn, improves the empirical legitimacy of a group. In the case of the FARC, the use or threat of force is overwhelmingly visible. I will discuss here in which forms the FARC uses it, and how the local population responds to it.

Provision of justice

The FARC mainly controls rural areas. Therefore, a distinction should be made between how the FARC operates in rural and urban areas, and how this influences the response of the population. In rural areas, the government often lacks influence, which creates opportunities for the FARC.

The state set up '*Juntas de Acción Comunal*' (JAC): local organizations, run by peasants from the community, to give local communities some autonomy and way to communicate with the Colombian state. These organizations are also often responsible for resolving communal disputes. Although they were created by the state, they kept an independent position and kept tight relations with the FARC in rural areas (Provost, 2017). The FARC often collaborated with the JAC for keeping law and order. The FARC created their own laws, which the JACs accepted. These laws regarded issues as free speech, labour standards, commercial trade (Ibid.). The FARC gave the communities space to settle their own disputes, but could intervene regarding more serious offenses such as fraud, rape or murder. In these cases, more severe sentences could be applied, like forced labour, banishment or even the death penalty. In a survey done by Arjona (2016), it is shown that 90% of the people knew the rebel rules and what to expect. An even more interesting outcome is that two thirds of the people stated they would turn to the FARC for justice, rather than to the government. This shows that the local population had trust and support for the FARC when it came to providing justice and keeping law and order.

What is interesting about the FARC is that they do not only have laws for the population, they also have a code of conduct for their own fighters. This code of conduct provides members with a guideline on how to interact with the local population and what their right and duties are. If a member does not adhere to these guidelines, they can be punished. Punishment can range from labour or studying of the regulation to more severe punishments like the death penalty. A member could be sentenced to death for looting, sexual violence, killing a FARC member or a civilian (Provost, 2017). I will discuss the justice process in more detail when I discuss the institutions, as it shows some interesting values. The justice system for FARC members is more extensive than it is for civilians, and it seems that punishment is also more severe (Ibid.). Norman (2017) observes that the FARC is a very well structured and disciplined organization, that resembles that of a standing army.

Drug trade and coercion

From 1980s onwards, the FARC used coercion to control the drug trade and production in their territory. At first, they were against the production of drugs, since they believed that it wouldn't

benefit their cause and would deter the stability in their region. However, as the productions grew and more 'narcos' became active in their area, they start regulating it. They started taxing those narcos, and established fixed prices for farmers (Saab & Taylor, 2009). The conflict between the paramilitaries and the FARC intensified when a power vacuum was created by the government's takedown of the Medellín and Cali cartels in the 1990s, who controlled around 60% of all drug production and trafficking together (Ibid.). This power vacuum was mainly filled with by paramilitary groups and smaller cartels. In some areas, the FARC started taking a more active role in drugs productions and processing, but this was dependent on local fronts². In this period of more intense violence between the FARC and paramilitary, the FARC became more concerned of paramilitary infiltrations. As a consequence, they started punishing collaborators (or suspects of collaboration) harder and put firmer control on their territory. They didn't allow narcos in to buy drugs anymore, as they were afraid that they might be paramilitaries (Amnesty, 2000). This led to the use of more coercion against outsiders. It seems, however, that the levels of coercion stayed the same in areas that were under the control of the FARC.

Another form of coercion the FARC often used was the taking of hostages. The FARC used this strategy for two main goals: to create revenue and to influence political decision making. The targets were often rich landowners, who they used for ransom. Other politically motivated targets were mayors who were accused for corruption (Amnesty, 1994). They had to go to trial for their corruption or unjust social policies, and were often forced to resign and return misused funds. Some mayors have been executed by the FARC (Amnesty, 1996a). These tactics led to increased violence by paramilitary groups, which in turn forced at least 20,000 people to flee. The taking of hostages as punishment or political leverage shows a higher level of coercion by the FARC. However, the victims were mostly people with important political functions or rich landowners, and therefore did not belong to the local population on which the FARC builds.

Uribe's Counterinsurgency

A series of military defeats after 1998 and the stronger involvement in the drug trade meant that the FARC became more susceptible to potential corruption under low ranked fighters. This problem intensified when Uribe's administration launched a massive counterinsurgency offensive against the FARC in 2002 (Norman, 2017). In the period of 2001 until 2008, the groups lost approximately half its members, from 16.000 to somewhere between 6000 and 8000, according to the Colombian government. This number has been disputed by other sources, although there is consensus that the group has seen a strong decrease in fighters. The success of this counterinsurgency came from paid informants. The Colombian government paid FARC deserters, as well as civilians, for information about the FARC and their location (Amnesty, 2008). This enabled the Colombian government to make more precise attacks against FARC locations.

The Uribe's administration decision dragged civilians into the conflict even more, and was condemned for this by the UN (Ibid.) As a response on this new tactic, the FARC became more violent against civilians if they suspect them to cooperate with the government. The FARC started to use more terror attacks in urban areas, as a counter against the government. The FARC has always lacked support in urban centres, which made major military operations in cities impossible. This shows their dependence on local population for intel, resources, and other support to launch successful operation. Because of this lack of support in urban areas, the FARC made a shift towards more terrorist activity in cities. These terrorist activities consisted of

² The areas controlled by the FARC are divide over so-called fronts, these fronts are responsible for the day to day control.

kidnappings, assassinations and bombings. An example of this is an attack in September 2003, when the FARC strapped a bomb to a horse, and blew it up in the middle of a market place (Lee, 2011). The FARC also started targeting vital infrastructure like bridges and power plants.

In its attempt to slow down paramilitary forces and the Colombian army, the FARC started laying more and more landmines in contested zones, which have led to a high number of civilian casualties. In 2006 alone, this led to 1,167 people injured or dead (Amnesty, 2008). The high number of casualties caused by the FARC – by using landmines, terrorist attacks, and kidnappings – have helped opponents to portray the FARC as criminal organization. The negative picture in the media of the FARC, which I will discuss below, and the more violent course the FARC took, sparked massive protest against them. In February 2008, around two million people took to the streets in Bogotá, waving flags and wearing T-shirts with slogans that demanded the end of the FARC and its violence (Lee, 2011). This protest was followed with more protest in other places in Colombia and around the world. It can be concluded from these massive protest throughout Colombia, that the high levels of coercion the FARC used from 2000s onwards, has undermined their support.

Narratives and practices

In this paragraph I will discuss how the ideological narrative the FARC had as an armed group fitted with the local population. I will first look at the difference between rural and urban areas. After this, I will look at recruitment by the FARC. Lastly, I will discuss the influence of drug trade on the ideological narrative of the FARC.

Rural and urban areas

When the FARC was established in the 1960s, it operated mainly in rural areas and was very dependent on peasant support. Their Marxist ideology of equality and redistribution was attractive for the peasant population in the rural areas, who had little to no rights in Colombia. Their lands had been taken away during the period of '*La violencia*' by rich landowners with own military groups. This drove many farmers to these more rural areas (Molano, 2000). But even here, this group was threatened and often driven away by violence. The FARC started to control some of these rural areas, and redistributed the land under the farmers, and protected them against attacks from militias (Lee, 2011). The FARC was dependent on these peasants for supplies and intelligence. It was also dependent on peasants for recruits: research by Beltran (2015) shows that people who were born in an area that was under control or influenced by the FARC, were strongly inspired to join the FARC later on.

The Marxist ideas of the FARC fitted well in rural areas. In these areas, it was more likely to find someone affiliated with the Communist Party of Colombia, then in the more urban areas where the communist ideas didn't find any breeding ground (Cortés, 2017). In the beginning, the Communist Party and the FARC were closely linked to each other. The FARC also incorporated ideas of agrarian reform in their speeches and started educating peasant why reforms were so important.

Even though the FARC had their own strong ideas about what society should look like, and was often painted as being atheist or even anti-religion, they accepted other views and beliefs. One former FARC commander stated that they were open for all beliefs and religions, as long as people threated each other well. It is also known that a few catholic priests were active within the FARC as fighters (Ibid.) The statement of the former FARC commander didn't just concern religion, but was also about beliefs on what society should look like. According to one community leader, the FARC tried to control everything when they came, but when the villagers made clear that they had

their own way of keeping order and handling day to day business and didn't need the FARC for this, they respected that. They agreed to share information, but the community would not be ruled by the FARC (Provost, 2017). From early on, the FARC relied on local support, and the narrative of the FARC seems to fit well with that of the local population. The acceptance of local customs by the FARC makes for a better fit between civilians and the FARC. This is shown by relatively high levels of local support for the communist ideology in the rural area. The FARC was dependent on this support early on, when they didn't have drug revenue.

Urban areas and disinformation

Although the FARC held strong support in rural areas, this was not the case in urban areas. Most people living in urban areas have a more negative view of the FARC than those living in rural areas. There might be two reasons for this. Firstly, people living in urban areas have often never interacted with a FARC member, as they aren't present there. Secondly, the information and news that they receive about the FARC and other guerrilla groups is very one-sided. There are many examples of paramilitary groups and government troops taking part in massacres and blaming these on the FARC (Amnesty, 1996a). An example of this is the town of Toquilla in 1992, where an army patrol entered with a list of people they suspected of working for the FARC. They shot these people and painted slogans on the wall, claiming that the FARC was responsible for the killings. This was later disproved by eye-witnesses (Amnesty, 1996b). This is only one example, but it is a tactic often used by the army and paramilitary groups. The statements are taken over in the media, before they are disproved and so the FARC is blamed for many attacks it did not perpetrate. Colombia ranked 134th in the 2006 World Press Freedom Index, making it one of the most dangerous countries for journalist in Latin America. The main reason for this is the close relation between politicians, army, and paramilitary groups and their efforts to silence journalists (Reporters Without Borders, n.d.). It is estimated that the army and paramilitary forces together are responsible for 70-85% of all casualties (Tate, 2016), leaving 30-15% for the guerrilla groups, including the FARC.

The use of state propaganda and economic reforms and other political goals of the FARC that were clearly more focussed on rural areas, made that support for the FARC was low in urban areas. The FARC was probably viewed as a rural group that fought for peasant rights, and had little to do with people living in the cities.

Recruitment

FARC mainly recruited young, low-educated people from rural areas. In comparison to other non-state armed groups, they had significantly more female fighters. Around 20-30% of the fighters were female (Sanín, 2017). There are different reasons as to why people might join the FARC. Surveys under demobilized FARC members show that ideology can be a motive, but the main reason is food and shelter. This is the case because many peasants in rural areas live in extremely poor conditions and the FARC is an escape out of this (Rosenau et al., 2013). However, other research shows that people joining the FARC often held good paying jobs, earning above the national average. It is therefore likely that these people often worked on coca plantations, which pays well and leads them to get in contact with the FARC (Saab & Taylor, 2009).

The FARC mainly recruited from the local population and, as showed above, some people did join for ideological reason, but people mainly joined because it improved their living conditions. This shows that the FARC's ideology was not a very important reason for people to participate in the FARC.

Influence of drug trade

It is often believed that, because of the FARC's involvement in the drug trade, their ideological views faded more into the background. However, this wasn't always the case. When the production of coca started in the 1980s, the FARC tried to resist it, since they saw it as a capitalist influence that would undermine their support for a revolution. But quickly the FARC saw that they were not able to prevent the production of coca, so they started regulating it. The FARC implemented regulation, such as fixed prices that narco-traffickers had to pay, taxation and labour standards (Phelan, 2019). They also promoted the growth of other crops, to prevent food shortages, and created and trained self-defence groups. These groups were a response to the rising crime and violence in areas where coca was produced, and were made up of local community members (Norman, 2017). It was later claimed that the production of coca improved the socio-economic situation of people in the rural areas. Lowering the gap between rich landowners and small farmers. Extensive socio-economic reforms fitted very well into the Marxist ideology of the FARC.

The impact of drugs and the revenue it brought was positive in the beginning, but from 2002 onwards, when the army launched a major insurgency offensive, this positive influence went away. In the period between 2002-2008, the FARC lost a lot of fighters in combat with paramilitary groups and the military. This led to a loss of experience, and was a heavy blow to the moral. Under these casualties were also important commanding figures (Lee, 2011). It seems that the ideological values became less important in this period. Some demobilized FARC members named the deviation from the revolutionary principles as one of their main reasons to leave the FARC (Rosenau et al., 2013).

I think it's important to show that the ideological values of the FARC only weakened after the successful counterinsurgency operations in the 2000s, not because of the influence of drugs as is often assumed, but mainly by the loss of experienced commanders. It's unclear how this affected the relationship between the FARC and the local population. However, many former FARC members name this as a reason why they left. As I discussed earlier, the FARC mainly recruits out of the local population and ideological reasons don't seem to be the main reason for people to join. The fact that former members now mention that the ideologic drift of the FARC was a reason to leave, could imply that, as long as the narrative fits with the view of the local population, they will accept it. But when the ideological values are no longer in line with those of the local population, they will oppose them. Of course, this assumption is based on the statements of former members, but it indicates that a narrative that doesn't fit with the values of the local population, can lead to the locals opposing them.

Services

In this paragraph, I will discuss the provision of service by the FARC, how they helped the local population, and how they became a credible alternative for the Colombian state in some regards. Furthermore, I will discuss how the FARC was able to provide these services.

An alternative for the state

The FARC provides a wide variety of services to civilians in territories under their control. This provision of services differs, however, from place to place. Its depends on the needs of a community and how strong the control of the FARC is in the area (Cortés, 2017). For example, one community lived near a severely polluted river, making it unsafe for the local population to live there. When the FARC came, the villagers asked them to help them clean the river, and so they did

(Ibid.). Other services they provided included, for example, delivering medical assistance or food supplies.

The need for service was high in rural areas, where the Colombian government had little influence. The services they provided were limited and often very costly because of corruption. This created a perfect breeding ground for the FARC, who were able to replace the role of the state by providing such services. As I discussed earlier, in the paragraph about coercion, the FARC brought law and order to many of these places. They provided safety against paramilitary and narco-traffickers, by creating militia to protect villages and by warning villagers for incoming threats. A study found that 90% of the population knew what the rules were under FARC control, and two thirds of the local population turned to the FARC for problems regarding public order (Arjano, 2016). The courts organized by the FARC were also attractive for the local communities, as they allowed dispute that concerned illegal activities, such as disputes regarding drugs. It was impossible to solve these disputes in official courts as these practices were banned by the government, making the FARC courts excellent alternatives (Provost, 2017). According to the population of La Macarena, the state institutions and judges could not be trusted. They felt that, in contrast to those institutions, at least the FARC wasn't corrupt. The FARC also regulated issues such as free speech, sexual conduct, labour standards, and trade. An example of this is the creation of fixed prices for coca, to protect the local population from being exploited (Saab & Taylor, 2009) (Lee, 2011).

The lack of state penetration in rural areas has made it easier for the FARC to become a clear alternative for the state. There was a need for certain services and the FARC provided them. When I look at the response of the local population, it becomes clear that they trust the FARC more than the state, and chose to comply with them and their provision of service. An example is their choice to turn to the FARC for justice provision, rather than to the state.

In some cases, the FARC outsourced the provision of services to the local communities themselves, like paying them to build schools or infrastructures. This was often done through the JACs. The JACs played a crucial role in the provision of service and keeping order. It varied from community to community how much influence the JAC had, but if they were trusted by the FARC, then the FARC governed through them and only intervened when they didn't agree with the JACs decision (Phelan, 2019). Mampilly (2007) also states that the governance by the FARC could be seen as very effective.

The popularity of the FARC governance was helped by the government. The government was already unable to really penetrate these areas, making it hard for them to provide services to the population. This gave the FARC the possibility to become an alternative state in these areas. As the government could not feasibly govern the areas under control, they launched military operations against the FARC - but also against civilians. They tried to intimidate the local population, hoping that they would drop their support for the rebels and their rule. This backlashed, however: the population started seeking protection by the FARC, making them more reliant on them (Provost, 2017). The fact that civilians sought the FARC's protection, demonstrates again that the FARC formed a clear alternative for the state when it came to provision of services, and that civilians seem to have trusted the FARC more than the state.

The means

The FARC was able to pay for a lot of services, such as infrastructure, schools, and healthcare, by using four strategies. Firstly, they profited from the drug production and trade in the areas under their control. Selling drugs brought in a lot of money, which they partially used to provide services

(Saab & Taylor, 2009). Between 60 – 90% of their income came from drug-related activities. Secondly, they implemented a bourgeois-tax. This tax was for all people who weren't peasants: rich landowners, but also narco-traffickers, as the FARC considered them to be a part of the capitalist system (Phelan, 2019). The third strategy was kidnapping. Kidnappings could have different purposes. The two main purposes were money and leverage. By kidnapping rich landowners or their family members, the FARC could create extra revenue without estranging the local population. The kidnappings were also useful to deal with policies that weren't in favour of the FARC or the population: it gave them a tool to put pressure on local politicians, to implement policies in favour of the FARC (Amnesty, 1996a) (Norman, 2017). The last strategy is using the multinational organizations that were active in FARC territory. These companies were often there for natural resources, and FARC would allow them access and protection in the area if they provided services for the population, such as schools and healthcare. They also had to pay tax (Dunning & Wirpsa, 2004).

These actions allowed the FARC to provide for a wide variety of services, like healthcare, education, infrastructure, land redistribution, dispute settlements, and security. These services hardly cost the local population anything, as the strategies I discussed above led to a large flow in revenue. The fact that the provision of services by the FARC was inexpensive or free, made them an even better alternative for the state, whose services could only be provided through some form of taxation. In the following example, it is shown that the local population was happy with the provision of these services: a former ELN member explained in an interview that, because of the help the FARC and ELN provided to these communities, the civilian population would warn the FARC and the ELN for incoming attacks by paramilitary and army (Phelan, 2019). This shows the support the FARC and in this case also the ELN enjoyed under the local population. The civilians and these groups had a mutual beneficial relationship.

Institutions (and institutional reform promoted by the FARC)

The ideological goal of the FARC was to overthrow the Colombian government and cease power. This would enable them to create a society that was more in line with their political views. Important points in their views were more equality between people, especially regarding the owning of land and capital. In this paragraph, I will discuss how this can be seen in the institutions created and/or used by the FARC. I will also examine what the role of the local population was in FARC's institutions, and try to establish how they perceived those institutions. I will do this by taking a few examples of FARC institutions and later linking them to the typology of Mampilly and Stewart (2021), which has been discussed in chapter 2.

Courts

The FARC had an extensive system of courts. There can be made three clear distinctions in the types of courts they used. Firstly, there were civilian courts for minor crimes and dispute settlements. Secondly, there were civilian courts for more severe crimes, and lastly, there were court-martials: courts for all things that regarded the FARC's own members.

The civilian courts for minor crimes and dispute settlements were often led by the JAC or community elders, with support from the FARC. The FARC allowed the communities to settle disputes and minor offences themselves, without involvement of the FARC. Only in the cases where this didn't work, or when the parties did not adhere to the outcome, the FARC would intervene. The FARC did, however, respect the decisions of community elders, and supported them in maintaining order. A survey found that the laws of the FARC were known by 90% of the community, and resemble those of the Colombian state: they were for 95% the same (Arjano,

2016) (Provost, 2019). It respects most local customs, values and traditions of peasant life. The main difference between the Colombian laws and the FARC laws regarded illegal activities, like the production and selling of drugs. This shows that there was room for civilian participation through the JACs, which had an important role in settling disputes and interpreting the law.

When crimes were more severe, a dispute settlement cannot be reached, or when there was no community alternative, the FARC did provide justice themselves. The FARC would then come to villages on market days, where they would listen to all the complains and settle disputes directly. These kinds of disputes could, for example, concern property rights, support for ex-wives, or debt collection. Most of the time, both sides of the dispute were present. If this was not the case the other party would be fetched, so both parties could tell their side of the story. There was also room for witnesses and location visits if it involved damaged goods or land disputes. By the end, the FARC commander would make a decision, which would be written down and given to both parties as proof, should enforcement be necessary (Ibid.).

The FARC held popular trials for criminal matters. Such crimes range from rape, abuse, theft, murder to other serious crimes. According to people interviewed by Human Rights Watch (1998), the those trials work in the following way: after the trial is announced by the FARC, the community comes to the meeting. The FARC then listens to what all people have to say, and then make a decision and execute the punishment. They would often be aggressive in their punishment if the accusation was of collaboration, which often led to execution. In most cases, the FARC held higher standards of justice than the example given above by Human Rights Watch, and their justice would come closer to actual administering of justice (Provost, 2019). They did, however, give everybody in the community the opportunity to speak on the matter. By doing this, the people could influence the trial and take a more active role in it.

The FARC often played a calming and de-escalating role, and prevented lynching by angry mobs from happening. In most cases, the FARC would decide that compensation for the victim was necessary, which the perpetrator had to pay. Repeat offenders or more serious crimes could lead to banishment (Ibid.). This is a very hard penalty in a time of war, as many areas are unsafe and other communities will be hostile. In the case of murder, the FARC often felt pressured to sentence the death penalty, as this could otherwise been seen as sign of weakness. The fact that the FARC felt pressured to administer the death penalty, shows in some cases that they were aware of the perception the local communities had of them, and that those perceptions influenced their actions.

The last form are court-martials trials, which were held against their own members. This was a democratic process in which the members of the FARC could choose a president, secretariat, five jury members and a prosecutor (Ibid.). An assembly needed at least 25 members. The accused was allowed to choose a defender out of all available members at the assembly. The defender would then gain access to all relevant evidence, and given time to prepare and to discuss with the accused. The FARC-unit commander that initiated the meeting had to leave to another location for the duration of the trial. All members were allowed to share information during the assembly. After this, the jury would come with a verdict: guilty or not guilty. The assembly could subsequently approve it, or discharge it. Circumstances play an important role in the process. Interestingly, the punishments against own members are often more severe than for civilians. Looting of civilians, treason, desertion, and murder are crimes that often led to the death penalty.

Civilians living under FARC rule, saw the FARC courts as trustworthy and at least not as corrupt as government courts (Ibid). Two thirds of the population chose for FARC courts (Arjano, 2016).

It seems that the people did have faith in the FARC. There was room for participation; JACs and the FARC asked the local population for their opinion, which could influence the punishment. The only place where civilians could hardly participate were in trials regarding their own member, where they could only be called as witness.

Existing institutions

The example of courts show that the FARC uses existing institutions like community groups such as the JACs. The FARC often used the strategy of using existing intuitions to achieve their goals. They used the JACs for simple trials, but also for other day-to-day business. Interviews with civilians have shown, for example, that if a community needed a school, the FARC would give the JAC money to build one, putting a lot of trust in the community (Cortés, 2017). The JAC were created by the government to give local communities more autonomy and to make contact between communities and the government easier. It seems, however, that the FARC benefitted the most from this change. By using the JACs, the FARC allowed for civilian participation, as the JACs could state what they needed and were in charge of implementing the FARC's policies.

From the late 1970s until the 1990s, the Colombian government began with the decentralization political power and spending (Sánchez & Palau, 2006). The idea was to improve the legitimacy of the government, by giving local governments more power, that were more visible and accessible to the population. This way, they hoped that people would no longer feel that everything was ruled by the elites in the city. As local governments got more influence and more money, they also became more interesting targets for guerrilla and paramilitary groups. This led to the forming of alliances between local governments and different groups. Sometimes, these alliances were based on mutual beneficial relationship, but other times they were based on intimidation (Ibid.). The FARC would kidnap majors or other important people, to use as political pressure to influence political decision-making, or to hold them responsible for mismanagement (Amnesty, 1994). The decentralization also led to mayors and governors being democratically chosen, which led to groups favouring one candidate. This meant that local government was often corrupt and/or controlled by an armed group in rural areas. How this impacted the local population is dependent on the armed group. The FARC says that it fights for the poor, where paramilitary groups often cooperate with or where employed by the rich elite.

Empowerment

One of the ideological principles of the FARC was the equality of all the people, both rich and poor. This is also visible in their behaviour and in the institutions they created. An example of this is the taxing of rich landowners and narco-traffickers, setting fixed prices, and putting labour standards in place. They also created so-called self-defence groups. These groups were made up of civilians that wanted to protect their community. The FARC would train and support these groups in maintaining law and order (Norman, 2017). This was especially important in regions where a lot of coca production took place, as the influx of narco-traffickers and other people trying to take a piece of the pie, which brought a lot of unrest and violence. By creating self-defence groups, the FARC empowered the local population and gave them a way to participate in keeping law and order. By doing this, the FARC showed the importance of the local population to them. The local population on the other hand showed their support for this idea by taking part in them.

Not only the empowerment of the peasant population was important for the FARC: they also strived for gender equality. The FARC allowed female fighters in their ranks, and within the FARC, men and women were seen as equal. This was a big difference between the FARC and Colombian society. A former female FARC member said that, normally, men are the boss in relationships, and

women had to follow. In the FARC, however, the women don't have to listen to their men and can do as they please as equals (Forest, 2006). However, both had to listen the orders of FARC commanders. The FARC would always put the struggle before the individual, which sometimes led to forced separation of partners, mothers and babies, and abortions. Although this does not undermine their believe in gender equality, it does shed a gruesome light on the harsh conditions FARC members had to deal with.

Typology

The institutions the FARC uses are both existing institutions and institutions of their own creations. The FARC also seemed to give room for civilian participation in these institutions, by giving them high amounts of freedom regarding day to day business. The changes in institutions or the creation of new ones, seem to be in line with their ideological goal of more equality, land reforms and other economic reforms. Mampilly and Stewart (2021) discuss five different typologies regarding institutions and rebel governance, these can be found in chapter two. It seems to be that the FARC sits between two different typologies, holding on to the *state-quo* and *transformative, more inclusive*. The FARC often uses existing institutions, like the JACs or the existing laws. But they also create their own institutions regarding land distribution, bourgeois taxation, and self-defence groups. With regard to government institutions, it seems that the institutions are also more open for local participation and gender seems to be less of barrier. The local population seems to trust and participate in the institutions of the FARC. This is most strongly visible in the case of justice provision and self-defence groups. The perception of the local population towards institutions in which there was less room for civilian participation, is harder to determine.

Hypotheses

At the start of this research, I put forth four hypotheses about the effect of various characteristics of rebel behaviour from the perception of the local population on the legitimacy of the FARC. I now will discuss each hypothesis based on the analysis above.

Hypothesis 1:

The local population under control of a rebel group will perceive the rebels as more legitimate, if they use low levels of coercion on the local population

If we look at how the FARC used coercion as an instrument, then this hypothesis can be accepted in the period from 1980s until around 2000. In this period, the FARC used coercion mainly for law and order, which was often seen as justifiable. Civilians stated that it was clear for them what the laws were under the FARC, which is not strange, as the conflict went on for a long time and the FARC laws were for 95% the same as those of the Colombian state. Also, two thirds of civilians said that they would go to the FARC if they wanted justice, instead of government institutions. This shows that the local population complied with the rule of the FARC, and trusted them. The fact that the local population often chose to go to the FARC, also shows that the punishments the FARC administrated were viewed as just and not excessive. The perception of the local population that the FARC was more just and trustworthy than the state made them a real alternative for the state, and underlines the legitimacy they had under the local population.

The FARC often worked together with local communities through the JACs, which consisted of civilians. They cooperated, for example, on maintaining law and order by creating self-defence groups that consisted of civilians and weren't part of the FARC. This shows some level of

participation of the local communities with the FARC. This was also the case for the cooperation between the JACs and the FARC on dispute settlements and trials.

In the period after 2000, when the government started a more successful counterinsurgency, the relationship with the civilian population seemed to deteriorate. The use of civilians as informants by the state gave them a more active role in the conflict and led to the FARC distrusting them. When the FARC suspected people of cooperating with the state, they acted more violently and aggressively. After some considerable defeats, the FARC started using more violence against civilians, like bomb attacks in cities and kidnapping people who were of influence or who came from families that did not listen to the FARC. These high levels of coercion led to massive protest nationwide against the FARC in 2008.

From this, I conclude that low levels of coercion can improve the empirical legitimacy of a group. However, it also works the other way around: high levels of coercion seem to have a negative impact on the perception civilians have of a group, and lower the empirical legitimacy it has.

Hypothesis 2:

The local population that is under control of a rebel group will perceive the rebels as more legitimate, if the rebel group uses and practices a narrative that is in line with the views of the local population.

The second hypothesis focuses on how well narratives and practices used by a group fit with the population in the area where they operate, and how this influences the perspective of the population. The FARC originally has a strong Marxist ideology, focusing on equality and economic reforms. Later on, they became more nationalistic, while still focusing on economic reforms. These economic reforms also held major land reforms, which were particularly interesting for peasants living in the rural areas. These people were often extremely poor and didn't own any land, and if they did have land, they were often violently driven away from it by rich landowners.

The ideas of the FARC did well in these areas, and in the early days, the FARC was very dependent on the local population for food, shelter, and information. This shows that that the FARC enjoyed some popular support in the areas. Later on, more peasants started joining the FARC. This shows the willingness of the local population to participate in the FARC struggle. However, it has to be noted that major reasons for joining were not so much FARC's ideological ambitions, but rather the strive for better living conditions and a way out of the hard lives they lived. Internally the FARC was strongly driven by ideology. This was translated into the actions they undertook, like labour standards and fixed prices.

The impact of ideology on the legitimacy is not very strong. It does however have a little impact. Because of this I confirm the hypothesis. A narrative that fits with the local population leads to a little more legitimacy. What is more interesting is that in urban areas, where there was no fit between the FARC's ideology and the population the FARC could not achieve support. This indicates that a narrative that is in line with the local population is a necessary condition for support, but not a sufficient condition.

Hypothesis 3:

The local population under control of a rebel group will perceive the rebels as more legitimate, if they provide services to the local population.

The third hypothesis looks at the impact of service provision on the perception of civilians. This hypothesis can be confirmed. The local population finds rebel groups more legitimate if they provide services.

The FARC provided a wide variety of services, depending on the needs and their control in the region. The example of courts shows that most people knew the rules and went to the FARC for help with disputes. They considered the FARC courts and trials better than those of the state, as they perceived state trials as corrupt. This shows that the FARC was trusted by the local population and that they supported their services and complied with their rules. The lack of presence by the state in rural areas and the intimidating tactics used by the state against civilians, gave the FARC the space to become a real state alternative. An interview with a former rebel showed that the local population would warn them for incoming attacks of the army or paramilitaries, which shows that they support the FARC and favoured their presence over that of the army and paramilitary groups.

The JACs played an important role in the providing of services and worked close together with the FARC in this regard. Some JACs could therefore be seen as part of the FARC governance, in which community members actively participated as they carried out FARC's instruction on law and order, as well as infrastructure and education.

What also benefitted the FARC was that they could provide these services through the income they got out of drug and bourgeois taxation. These were the main income sources of the FARC and enabled them to provide services to the local population for free, which has probably helped to persuade the local population.

Hypothesis 4:

The local population that is under control of a rebel group, will perceive the rebels as more legitimate if they create or make use of institutions that allow room for civilian participation and interest.

I will accept this hypothesis, because of the influence civilians had through the JACs and self-defence groups. They actively participated in both institutions, and data showed that the justice deliverance by the FARC through the JACs was seen as good, as a majority said they would prefer it over that of the state. The fact that they made extensive use of them also underlines the positive effect it had on the FARC's legitimacy.

The FARC used a combination of existing institutions and institutions they created themselves, making them a rebel group that sits between a type of status-quo and transformative regarding institutions. It is clear that in both these institutions participation and inclusiveness were important. Within the FARC, women were clearly more equal to men than in the rest of Colombian society. The FARC also left room for civilian participation in its institutions through the JACs, and respected the importance of community elders. The JACs played a crucial role in the participation of the civilians, as this was an institute with an importance influence in dispute settlement, but also day to day business. Even though the JACs were created by the state, the FARC used them a lot. They were used as a way to address a community, and the FARC benefited from their creation to assert control. Even though JACs already had an important position without the FARC, the combination gave them real power. The FARC provided them with funds to invest in their community, and gave them a way to enforce law and order by the creation of self-defence groups.

It should be noted that there is a relationship between the different characteristics underlying, because of this they should all be seen in relation to each other. Making it impossible to make any conclusion on the effect on one of the characteristics alone. A good example of this is the provision of justice in which all characteristics can be observed. The shape of the institution is important, some form of coercion is necessary, it is service that is being provided, and ideological fit influences the perception of the population towards it. All the characteristics play a part in this. It was however not my intention to compare the characteristics with each other, I merely wanted to identify how the characteristics of rebels affect the perception of the local population.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I started this research with the goal of finding out how the actions of rebels impact the perception of legitimacy under the local population towards the rebels. I have done this by looking at the characteristics of rebel behaviour from the existing scientific literature on rebel governance. In order to study the perception of legitimacy from the local population towards the rebel groups, I have looked at empirical legitimacy, as actions often speak louder than words. I used the Colombian guerrilla group FARC as the case for this research. I started with the following research question:

How does rebel behaviour influence the legitimacy of rebels amongst the local population?

In the literature, I found multiple characteristics of rebel behaviour that could influence the legitimacy they enjoy under the local population. The first characteristic is coercion. Coercion is seen by Loyle (2021) and Podder (2017) as crucial in creating order and stability, which enables economic activities and leads to performance legitimacy. Podder (2017) notes that legitimacy through coercion is only possible if the used coercion is seen as justifiable by the population.

The second characteristic I found in the literature were narratives and how they are practiced. Kesiter and Slantchev (2014) argue that a narrative that fits with the local population is crucial, otherwise it will undermine the legitimacy. Arjona (2017) adds to this that if the narrative is in line with that of the population it will further strengthen the rebel group.

The third characteristic of rebel behaviour that could be influential is the provision of services. Heger and Jung (2015) stated that the provision of services increases the legitimacy under the local population, making it easier to recruit new members and undermine the state. Loyle (2021) found that rebels often want to be an alternative for the state. Because of this, they start with the provision of services to the population.

The last characteristics I identified were institutions. Mampilly and Stewart (2021) show that there are a lot of differences between rebel institutions. Some groups allow for the participation of civilians and are inclusive to all, others use a top-down approach. Khalaf (2015) shows that by letting civilians participate, rebels hope to improve their legitimacy among them. It can be expected that participation and inclusion will lead to a higher input/throughput legitimacy.

Findings

I came to the following conclusions to answer the research question. The use of low levels of coercion by the FARC against the local population give the FARC – as expected – more legitimacy. The local population trusts the FARC and sees the coercion the FARC uses as legitimate. However, when the violence became more severe against civilians in the period from 2000s onward, the legitimacy of the FARC dropped. This is in line with my expectations based on the literature. I expected that coercion could increase legitimacy, if it's low and seen as just. High levels of coercion and unjust use of coercion have a negative impact on the legitimacy of a rebel group (Loyle, 2021) (Podder, 2017). The use of coercion by the state also had an impact on the legitimacy of the FARC. The state used coercion against its own civilians, which undermined the legitimacy of the state. The local population turned to the FARC for safety, which shows an increase of legitimacy for the FARC.

A mentionable finding regarding coercion was the use of framing by the military, paramilitary, and the media. They often blamed attacks of the military or paramilitary groups on guerrilla groups, in an attempt to frame them for their actions. After some months, it often became clear who the real perpetrators were, as eyewitnesses started speaking with NGOs such as Amnesty International. This framing might have had a strong negative impact on the perception of the

population in urban areas towards guerrilla groups. People living in urban areas would not directly interact with guerrilla members, and were dependent on media coverage. Further research on how strong the impact of framing is on legitimacy of groups, and particularly in the case of the FARC, is necessary. The use of framing shows that legitimacy of a group is also dependent on its context and actions by other actors. Legitimacy could be seen as a kind of competition. Multiple actors want to be seen as legitimate, but often the legitimacy of one group is at the cost of the others.

The second characteristic I looked at was how narratives and practices, like ideology and religion, play a role in the perception of the local populations towards rebels. The expectation based on the literature was that they would improve the legitimacy of the rebel group if they were in line with the values and beliefs of the local population (Kesiter & Slantchev, 2014). The case of the FARC shows that ideology is of importance, and it can improve the legitimacy of a group. However, this effect seems to be small. More interesting was the finding that if the ideology did not fit with that of the population, it made achieving support difficult. This was visible in the urban areas where the FARC could not get a foothold. This shows that narrative and practices are more of a necessary condition in achieving legitimacy, which is in accordance with the expectations of Arjona (2017) on rebel legitimacy.

The third finding is that the provision of service enabled the FARC to become a clear alternative for the Colombian state. The local population gave the FARC a lot of support in return for the provision of services, and often chose the FARC services above those of the state. What stood out in this regard was the lack of state penetration in rural areas. The Colombian state had little presence in these regions, and the experiences the local population had with the Colombian state was often negative. This lack of output legitimacy of the state has helped the FARC in persuading the local population. The positive effect of service provision on the output legitimacy was what I expected based on the research by Heger and Jung (2015), who claimed that service provision would improve the legitimacy of a rebel group.

The last characteristic I looked at were institutions and institutional reforms. It was expected that the legitimacy of the rebels would improve if they used institutions that allowed participation and were inclusive (Mampilly & Stewart, 2021). This would help to improve the input/throughput legitimacy. The FARC used both existing institutions and institutions established by themselves. The most important institution they used were the JACs. These community groups were a way for the FARC to govern areas under their control. Because the JACs were made up of community members, the local population could actively participate and had some influence. By giving the JACs such an important role, the FARC improved their input/throughput legitimacy.

What was interesting in the case of the FARC was the role of the JACs. They were originally created by the Colombian state to give local communities more influence and improve the state's contact with these communities. However, the FARC benefited the most from this policy, as they used the JACs towards their advantage. Because of the JAC as existing institution, communities had a lot of influence in day to day business under FARC control.

These combined findings show that the characteristics of a rebel group have an effect on the perception the local population has of them. In the case of the FARC, coercion, service provision, and use of institutions seems to have improved the legitimacy of the group. The use of ideology by the FARC has had some benefits in the 1960s for achieving legitimacy, but mainly seems to be important as a necessary condition. When there was no fit between the ideology and the population, it was almost impossible to achieve support, as seen in urban areas. Important in the case of the FARC are the JACs who played an important role in the governance by the FARC. The characteristics of rebel behaviour have to be seen in combination with each other. An example

of this the provision of justice, which is accompanied by some form of coercion and is impacted by the shape of the used institutions and ideology or beliefs a group holds. The different characteristics are intertwined in each other. A change in one characteristic will likely also impact the others. By impacting the other characteristics, it will have a more noticeable impact on the legitimacy of the group.

Scientific relevance

At the beginning of this research, I noted that most research focused on rebel strategies and governance, but showed little interest in the local population. I have shown that rebel behaviour impacts the perceptions of civilians. My research shows that input/throughput and output legitimacy play an important role in the overall legitimacy rebels groups enjoy. It further shows that a combination of behavioural characteristics shape the legitimacy of a group, and that these characteristics should be seen in relationship to each other.

Another important finding is that the actions of all actors in a conflict affect each other's legitimacy. there seems to be a competition for legitimacy in conflict, different groups want it and their actions affect each other. In the case of Colombia, the FARC and the state competed for legitimacy with each other. The lack of state penetration in rural areas helped the FARC to achieve output or performance legitimacy by providing services. The state reacted to this by launching a counterinsurgency, which failed and drove the population in these areas towards the FARC for protection. A good example of state actions influencing the legitimacy of the FARC. The change in legitimacy between the different actors also show that legitimacy is an ongoing process; it is not static. One moment in time or place an actor can be legitimate, while in a different moment or place, this might no longer be the case.

As this research is only based on one case it has to be noted that the empirical results are not generalizable to other groups or countries. However, analytical results are generalizable. The findings on rebel behaviour like the role of narratives, and the use of coercion can be generalized. The four characteristics of rebel behaviour that I used could also be used in other case, as the underlying mechanism will work the same. Of course, the importance of certain characteristics might differ from one rebel group and conflict to the other, as they are influenced by context dependent factors. The role of the state for example: in the rural areas where the FARC operated, the influence of the state was weak or negative. These are favourable circumstances for a rebel group to blossom in.

The empirical data might not be generalizable, but it has given more insight into the legitimacy of the FARC. Taking away the notion that the FARC is a criminal organization because of their activities in drug trade. My research shows that the FARC did benefit from the drug trade, but also strongly governed it: they set labour standards and created fixed prices for coca farmers. These are actions of group that still had ideological beliefs and tried to gather legitimacy under the local population for their cause. It wasn't a group that was solemnly out for personal gain.

Societal relevance

This research has shown how and why characteristics of the FARC were effective in the eyes of the local population. Distrust in the Colombian government and a lack of good service provision by the state helped the FARC to achieve legitimacy. The levels of coercion used by the state in counterinsurgency operations had a negative impact on the legitimacy of the state and drove the local population towards the FARC for safety.

New counterinsurgency policy should focus more on undermining the legitimacy of the FARC by being a credible alternative and by using less violence against civilians. I can't make any claims on whether or not these actions would also be effective against other groups, but the underlying

mechanisms are likely the same. Context will, however, play an important role and should always be taken into consideration regarding policies in a conflict area.

The legitimacy of the FARC also showed that a part of the population was not represented by the state. In a state, all people have to feel represented and heard: if this is not the case, a good option might be to start negotiating with a rebel group to incorporate those feelings. This was also the case in Colombia. Both parties signed a peace agreement, making the FARC now a political party.

Further research

With this research I hope to have given some insight into the relationship between the local population and rebel groups. To make more substantial claims about this, however, more research is necessary. More cases would have to be studied to be able to understand the importance that context has on the relationship. In the case of Colombia, the lack of state presence in rural areas was an important factor, which helped the FARC's legitimacy. Closely linked to this is the competition of different groups for legitimacy. Actions of groups seem to affect each other's legitimacy; how this precisely works needs to be further investigated. A quantitative approach could also be very insightful to finding more data on which characteristics of rebel behaviour are most important under the local population, as data on the perception of civilians is rather limited.

I have found two interesting subjects which could be further explored regarding the FARC. Firstly, the impact of framing and fake news by the media, army, and paramilitary groups, which I mentioned when discussing coercion. This seemed to have a strong impact on the perception of the urban population towards guerrilla groups. The effect of this could be further investigated, which would also be interesting in comparison with similar civil conflicts. Secondly, how the FARC's legitimacy in rural areas has changed since they have become a political movement. Do they still hold a form of legitimacy under the local population, or has this stopped since their change? I have excluded the peace negotiation from my research, but it would be valuable to address how legitimacy evolves after a group lays down their arms.

Chapter 7: Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss obstacles I found while doing this research. These problems have affected choices that I made in my research. In my opinion it is relevant to reflect on them as they underline some of the limits and shortcomings of the research. They also might prevent them from happening in future research in this area. The following main themes will be discussed; case selection, data availability, and quality of data.

Case selection

When I was looking for cases to study the relationship between rebels and the local population I wanted to initially do a comparative case study. A few conflicts crossed my mind; Sudan, Colombia, Syria, and Congo. But eventually decided to focus on one case, because of the limited amount of time. I have eventually chosen for the case of Colombia because of the length of the conflict and the research that already had been done. This would help mine research as I relied heavily on available data. Two parties in this conflict were of particular interest, first the FARC and second the ELN. Both groups had similar views and were active at the same time. I thought it would be interesting with two groups so similar, to look if the effect of the characteristic regarding legitimacy amongst the local population would be the same.

When I started gathering data I found out that data availability regarding actions of the local population or their perception was rather low. For the FARC I could find a lot of data regarding their own actions and why they undertook them, data on the local population was more difficult. For the ELN both were difficult to find, data on concrete actions and data on the local population was lacking. Because of this lack in data I decided to drop the ELN, as it would be impossible to make any well-founded claims. The FARC was however the most important of the two, as they were the largest guerrilla group in Colombia and had the largest impact on the conflict.

Data availability

Even though more research had been done on the FARC, data on the local population is still very scarce. In my research I build a lot on a few instances that show the reaction of the local population towards the FARC. These are the examples like, the justice system, interactions with JACs, former members, and protest. I could often link these reactions and interactions back to events named in other research and reports by NGOs. The numbers of these reactions and interactions are rather limited, this undermines the reliability of this research. To find more reliable answers regarding this problem a field research would be necessary. I have chosen to not embark on a field research myself for a few reasons. First, there is a language barrier as I don't speak Spanish, this could be resolved by bringing an interpreter. However, the most important reason was the corona virus which would have made travelling to and in Colombia very difficult within the limited time I had available. These reasons were clear for me at the beginning of this research, I however believed that data availability would not be a problem. Even though data was more difficult to find than I first assumed I believe that my results are still valid. A field research could lead to more examples of the interactions between rebels and the local population, which could paint a broader picture. In such a research there should be a focus on finding interviewing the local population or doing surveys under the local population. As the FARC no longer exists as an armed group observation on interactions are no longer possible, it is however possible to still interview and survey civilians that have lived under FARC control.

Quality of data

I found while doing this research that the data on the conflict in Colombia was very coloured. Some papers speak of terrorists others of guerrillas. Paper that named the FARC a terrorist organization tended to focus more on gruesome acts and used a more negative tone towards the FARC. An example is that some papers say that the FARC taxes multinational organizations, where others

uses the term extortion. Often the truth lies somewhere in between and it's of course based on your perspective. If you see the FARC as an alternative for the state then taxation is logical, if you see them as criminals then extortion is logical. We as academic community see ourselves often as outsiders when investigating a certain phenomenon, believing that we start our research with a neutral view. However, we must consider that we are also part of the practices that we study, like in the case of legitimacy. This unconsciously effect how we perceive things, we must always stay aware that our own baggage influences or perception how neutral we think we are. This also counts for myself, for this reason I hope you as reader will be aware of this.

In the case of media sources this was often even stronger. Colombian news is closely linked with the Colombian elite and is used for the spreading of fake news on guerrilla groups. Blaming them for attacks on civilians that where perpetrated by the army or paramilitary groups. When reading a news piece or scientific literature it was important to note from which perception it was written and if there was agreement between different sources on what was said. I think I found a good balance between the different perspective, by separating the facts from opinions and comparing multiple sources. I found it worth mentioning as it will likely be a problem regarding data on many conflicts. I am probably also responsible for a certain perspective, as I make choices on which data I find important and how I phrase this.

In short, all the problems I had regarded data, the lack and the quality of it. Something to be aware of when reading this research as it makes that some claims rely heavily on limited number of events or interactions. This research should in that regard also been seen as a first step in exploring the perception of the local population towards rebels and the FARC especially and further research is necessary to make stronger claims on this.

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