

Fighting the People, Fighting for the People: Insurgent Governance and Conflict Outcomes

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Abstract

The fortunes of belligerents in internal conflicts vary over time, sometimes considerably. Existing research has advanced explanations focusing on either political or military factors for why one side achieves victory over the other at the conclusion of a conflict, but has little to say about outcomes that occur within conflicts prior to the final termination of a conflict. This paper argues that the persistence of an insurgency during a conflict is a joint function of insurgent's governance strategies and their ability to control territory. In areas under complete insurgent control, insurgencies persist because defection to the incumbent is not possible. In contested areas, however, the size of the social coalition established by insurgents is decisive. Insurgencies established on broad social coalitions will persist because civilians will not defect to the incumbent. By contrast, when insurgents establish narrow coalitions, civilians will defect to the incumbent, bringing about a collapse of the insurgency. This paper exploits variation in the fortunes of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during two phases of its insurgency to show the effects of broad and narrow coalitions on the persistence of the political institutions established by the CCP. This paper highlights the central role of politics to internal conflicts and shows that the outcome of an insurgency depends on the ability of belligerents to establish political institutions regarded as legitimate by civilians in the fundamentally competitive environment of a civil war.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a well-deserved reputation as one of the most effective insurgent fighting forces of the 20th century. Though the CCP was ultimately successful against the incumbent Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) government, CCP's road to victory was far from smooth. The CCP uprising against the KMT began in 1927 in Southern China. By 1931, the CCP had defeated three massive counterinsurgency campaigns against its base areas and in that year established a formal government in the form of the Chinese Soviet Republic. The CCP achieved victory over a fourth campaign in 1933 and expanded to cover an area the size of Ireland and governing a civilian population of more than three million. However, in 1934 the Red Army suffered a tactical defeat and the Chinese Soviet Republic collapsed as civilians defected to the KMT. The CCP's remaining forces embarked on the 9,000-kilometer Long March, eventually taking it to Northern China. The CCP's defeat in Southern China was neither partial nor temporary and collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic spelled the end of CCP influence in Southern China. It was only after 1949, after the defeat of the KMT in the Chinese Civil War, that the CCP re-gained control over these areas of Southern China.

Twelve years after the CCP's 1934 defeat, the CCP suffered yet another tactical defeat in the opening stage of the Chinese Civil War, losing vast tracts of land Northern China to the advancing KMT army. Though civilians had the opportunity to defect to the KMT, they did not, and the CCP insurgency went on and later prevailed over the KMT. The fortunes of the CCP and KMT over the course of the broader conflict between the two points to the puzzle that animates this article: why do the fate of belligerents in civil wars vary within the same conflict?

This paper argues that the persistence of an insurgency is a joint function of insurgent's governance strategies and their ability to control territory. In areas under complete insurgent control, insurgencies persist because defection to the incumbent is not possible and non-compliance can be consistently sanctioned. In contested areas, however, the size of the social coalition established by insurgents is decisive. Insurgencies established on broad social coalitions will persist because civilians will not defect to the incumbent and will continue to comply with the rules and regulations laid down by insurgents. By contrast, when insurgents establish narrow coalitions, insurgent rule is based on coercion and the majority of civilians excluded from the insurgent coalition will defect to the incumbent, bringing about a collapse of the insurgency.

This article theorizes the independent and joint effects of military and political strategies in civil wars demonstrates the validity of that theory using a structured comparison of two of the CCP's largest, most strategically important, and most administratively-sophisticated base areas. I draw on a large body of primary source material including internal CCP and KMT documents, memoirs, contemporaneous scholarship, and journalist accounts, as well as secondary literature on the conflict to show the CCP's military strategy, the composition of the CCP's coalition in both periods, patterns of civilian compliance and CCP coercion, and the reaction of civilians in both contested and uncontested areas.

This article proceeds as follows: the first section reviews the existing scholarship on irregular conflict outcomes. The second section presents a theoretical framework that explains the outcomes of irregular conflicts. The third section presents a case study of the CCP's insurgency in Southern China from 1931 to 1934 and its defeat by the KMT. The fourth section presents a

case study of the CCP's insurgency in Northern China during the Chinese Civil War from 1946 to 1949. The fifth section concludes by evaluating the framework in light of the evidence presented and discusses implications for scholarship and policy.

Explaining Civil War Outcomes

Scholarly literature on civil wars is unified in its conceptualization of conflict outcomes as occurring at the termination of a conflict, that is, at the point that there is a durable cessation of hostilities between incumbent and opposition as a result of a peace treaty, ceasefire, or a decisive military victory by one of the belligerents.¹ While it has long been accepted that irregular wars can be broken down into stages, the stages are treated as important insofar as they influence the final outcome of the conflict.² The same is true of scholarly works, as well.³

But this focus on conflict termination ignores the variation in the fortunes of belligerents over the course of a single conflict. The discussion of the CCP insurgency above shows that even the best insurgents do not win every battle, nor every phase of the war. Ignoring these within-conflict outcomes presents both theoretical and empirical problems. Theoretically, it truncates the number of possible observations, limiting the range of outcomes to be analyzed, and under-theorizes conflict processes. Empirically, this focus prevents existing frameworks from explaining the course of insurgencies in both the past and the present.

Scholarship examining civil wars tends to view conflict outcomes as a product of either military or political factors. The military face of an internal conflict is easily discernable and includes the battlefield strategies, tactics, and technologies deployed by an actor in pursuit of eliminating the armed forces of its opponent. The political face of civil wars can be found in the policies belligerents adopt toward civilians in wartime. Carl von Clausewitz famously stated that “war is the continuation of politics by other means.” Like the international conflicts of which von Clausewitz spoke, civil wars and insurgencies are military and political contests between an incumbent authority and an armed opposition.

The effect of military factors on conflict outcomes has been the subject of extensive study. Arreguin-Toft (2005), for example, argues that conflict outcomes are a function of the interaction of the military strategies employed by strong and weak actors during a conflict.⁴ Other scholarship suggests that strategic and tactical innovation is decisive in explaining the outcomes

¹ Nicholas Sambanis, “What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 (December 1, 2004): 830–31.

² Mao Tse-tung, *Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1989); Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (New York: L. Stuart, 1965).

³ Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill, *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2010); Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2013).

⁴ Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 34.

of irregular conflicts. Nagl (2002) argues that organizational learning explains variation in the success of counterinsurgency (COIN) operations.⁵

Examining insurgencies from 1800 to 2005, Lyall and Wilson (2009) argue that the secular increase in the mechanization of incumbent armed forces make them particularly vulnerable to rebels that cast away the trappings of modern force structures and adopt guerilla strategies and tactics. Mechanized forces, they argue “struggle to solve the “identification problem” – separating insurgents from noncombatants selectively – because their structural design inhibits information-gathering among conflict-zone populations.”⁶ They argue that “the combination of industrial lock-in and a belief that modern states fight along mechanized lines conspire to trap incumbents” into adopting conventional tactics against insurgents’ irregular tactics.

Although a focus on military tactics provides explanatory leverage on variation in the battlefield outcomes, this strand of scholarship overlooks the political side of conflict. There is a clear implication that the existence or destruction of a belligerent’s political institutions is predicted by military outcomes. However, much to the consternation of incumbent authorities engaged in irregular conflicts, military victories do not usually translate into political victories. When incumbent armed forces enter insurgent areas, they are generally unable to locate the insurgents and find the civilian population unresponsive to their demands for information. As soon as the incumbent’s armed forces return to the barracks, the insurgents reappear and reassert their political authority over the population.

The capacity of belligerents to muster the resources necessary to prevent or wage conflict has been another focus of study in explaining conflict outcomes. Fearon and Laitin (2003), for example, argue that “financially, organizationally, and politically weak central governments render insurgency more feasible and attractive due to weak local policing or inept and corrupt counterinsurgency practices. These often include a propensity for brutal and indiscriminate retaliation that helps drive noncombatant locals into rebel forces.”⁷ The authors do not provide a clear statement of how state capacity would impact conflict outcomes, but DeRouen and Sobek (2004) find that state capacity has implications for the duration of conflict, specifically that states with strong and effective bureaucracies decreases the ability of rebels to achieve victory over the government.⁸ But these macro-level findings do little to explain why the fate of belligerents would vary over the course of the same conflict.

In contrast to the “military-centric” approaches, there is also a “politics-centric” approach that focuses on how incumbents and oppositions interact with civilians through their formal political institutions, social networks, and social bases. Institutions have long been the focus of analysis in

⁵ John A Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁶ Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” *International Organization* 63, no. 01 (January 2009): 68.

⁷ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, no. 01 (February 2003): 75–76.

⁸ Karl R. de Rouen and David Sobek, “The Dynamics of Civil War Duration and Outcome,” *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (May 1, 2004): 303–20.

the study of political systems. Once reserved for the study of Western democracies, institutional analysis has been applied to non-democratic political systems and has of late been applied to the study of rebel groups.⁹ This burgeoning literature has highlighted the extensive variation that exists in the form and function of rebel institutions, including the structure and form of insurgent institutions (Arjona 2010, 2016; Arjona, Kasfir, Mampilly, 2015), those institutions' provision of public services (Mampilly 2011), and how they balance insurgent's own preferences, public service provision, and coercion to produce civilian compliance (Keister 2011).

Despite the important contribution of this literature to our understanding of how insurgents govern civilian populations, this scholarship has little to say about how rebel institutions affect the outcome of internal conflicts because of its focus on areas under insurgent control. For example, in Mamapilly's (2011) study of insurgent group service provision, the only rebel group to be defeated by an incumbent, the Tamil Tigers, was the only group that developed effective governing institutions. Likewise, Keister argues that ideologically radical groups that engage in extensive coercion of civilians may be "[unable] to extract sufficient personnel, intelligence, materiel, food, and shelter to survive."¹⁰ Nevertheless, the most extreme group in her analysis (the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines) does not wither away. More broadly, the empirical record is replete with ideologically-extreme groups that remained in existence even as they brutalized their subject populations.

Shifting focus to incumbent institutions, there is a consensus in the qualitatively-inclined state-centric literature that non-democratic political systems controlled by a dictator and a small clique of supporters are particularly vulnerable to revolutionary overthrow. This literature posits that conflict comes about when despots alienate nearly all groups in society, at which point support flows to an opposition movement which proceeds to overthrow the incumbent.¹¹ The result is the development of a cross-class coalition that, united by hatred of the dictator, throws its weight behind a revolutionary movement.

This literature further posits that policies adopted by the incumbent that infringe the interests of a given social group will automatically drive the latter to actively support an armed opposition; exclusionary regimes thus create overwhelming oppositions by dint of their exclusivity. However, cultivating mass support does not isolate political actors from the fundamentally competitive environment that characterizes civil wars and many movements that enjoyed popular support suffered political defeat at the hands of an incumbent authority including, as the introduction to this article showed, the Chinese Communist Party.

⁹ Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 11 (September 17, 2007): 1279–1301. Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions Under Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Jennifer Marie Keister, "States Within States How Rebels Rule" (University of California, San Diego, 2011), 390.

¹¹ Skocpol, Theda and Goodwin, Jeff, "Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary Third World," *Politics and Society* 17 (December 1989): 499.

In order to resolve the bifurcation between military- and politics-centric explanations of conflict outcomes and address the “termination bias” of existing work, in the next section I advance a unified theory of conflict outcomes.

A Unified Theory of Conflict Outcomes

The central focus of this article is the fate of the institutions established by opposition forces to govern civilians in the course of a civil war. Rather than looking at the final outcome or termination of the conflict, I am interested in a narrower kind of outcome: those of the battles and campaigns that occur during the conflict itself. This focus permits a disaggregation of conflicts and a fuller exploration and explanation of the fates of belligerents over the course of a conflict. I follow North (1991) and define institutions as the “humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interaction. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos customs, traditions, and codes of conduct), and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights).”¹²

Scholarship on civil wars in general and on insurgent governance in particular shows that insurgents, like incumbents, are tasked with the business of instituting both popular and unpopular policies. Insurgents often mobilize civilian support by reforming or destroying political, social, and/or systems that disadvantage their chosen constituency. However, insurgents need more than the attitudinal support of civilians. The kinds of support that insurgents need most is often that which civilians are least able and willing to provide, such as conscripts, manpower, foodstuffs, medicines, guns, ammunition, and money. Even if we grant that insurgents’ political platforms are attractive to civilians, it does not follow that civilians will engage in costly or deadly cooperation with them.

The experience of the Chinese Communists is illustrative. From its earliest days in the countryside the CCP attracted considerable peasant enthusiasm by redistributing land. However, after the granting of land titles the messy business of government commenced. Peasants were subject to taxes (never popular) and subject to legal sanction if they did not pay. The CCP enacted laws providing for the liberation and mobilization of women, policies that engendered a not inconsiderable amount of opposition from men. Finally, wartime pressures drove the CCP to raise an army which was in direct conflict with peasants’ desire to farm the land *to which they had just been giving formal title*.

For civilians under both insurgent and incumbent rule, compliance is conditional on enforcement rather than a natural product of implemented policies. For this reason, a focus on a nebulous form of popular support should give way to a focus on institutions. Olson (1993) differentiated between “roving” and “stationary” bandits, noting that the latter are those that “[settle] down and [take]...theft in the form of regular taxation and at the same time maintains a monopoly on theft in his domain.”¹³ The institutions of the stationary bandit extract surplus, establish a code of conduct for the population, deploy constabulary forces to keep the peace and enforce rules, and

¹² Douglass C. North, “Institutions,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 97.

¹³ Mancur Olson, “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development,” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 03 (September 1993): 568.

deploy bureaucrats to oversee the implementation of central policy. It is these kinds of institutions that form the focus of this article.

To explain the fate of insurgent institutions, I focus on two important aspects of internal conflict: the governance strategies adopted by insurgents and their ability to control territory. Military strategies refer to the strategies and tactics that insurgents deploy in order to capture and retain control of territory. Governance strategies refer to the coalition of social groups that insurgents assemble in pursuit of their goals.

Governance Strategies and Territorial Control

The size of the coalition assembled by insurgents is crucial in determining both the nature of insurgent rule as well as the ability of insurgent's political institutions to persist in contested areas. When insurgents establish a coalition with one or more social groups, they pursue policies that are in the interest of that group (relative to other groups) and guarantees that group asymmetric access to the benefits of governance, such as government positions and patronage. I measure the breadth of an insurgent's coalition *relative to that of the incumbent*. Broad coalitions incorporate more social groups than that of the incumbent in areas in which insurgents operate. Conversely, narrow coalitions incorporate fewer social groups than the incumbent. Exclusion is just as important as inclusion and while broad coalitions exclude a minority of groups, narrow coalitions exclude a majority of social groups. Exclusion from a coalition means that at a minimum the interests of the excluded group(s) will not be forefront in the minds of the governing authority. In the context of a civil war (and especially for insurgents establishing new institutions), exclusion from a political actor's coalition marks a social group for economic and political sanction and potentially physical violence.

The primary importance of insurgent coalitions is their size relative to that of the incumbent along the cleavage on which insurgents mobilize and govern populations. I measure composition of an insurgent's coalition through analysis of its rhetorical commitments, the organizational composition of the insurgent movement and institutions, and how its policies operate on the ground. I measure the breadth of an incumbent's coalition by analyzing a country's social and political environment and examining status quo political arrangements, including control the administrative, financial, and military machinery of state.

A question that naturally emerges from this discussion is what determines the composition of insurgent coalitions. I argue that the ideology of insurgent elites drives the composition of the coalitions established by insurgents, as well as the structure of the institutions they establish. I follow Sanín and Wood (2014) and define ideology as

a more or less systematic set of ideas that includes the identification of a referent group (a class, ethnic, or other social group), an enunciation of the grievances or challenges that the group confronts, the identification of objectives on behalf of that group (political change – or defense against its threat), and a (perhaps vaguely defined) program of action. Ideologies also prescribe – to widely varying extent, from no particular blueprint

to very specific instructions – distinct institutions and strategies as the means to attain group goals.¹⁴

Insurgents are animated by their own subjective understanding of the world around them. They are not blind support maximizers. Rather, they choose the groups they wish to mobilize along a given social cleavage and the methods they use to construct political institutions. If insurgents wish, they can mobilize civilians along a previously-unsalient social cleavage. They can, furthermore, wipe the slate clean, destroying all existing political institutions and building new ones from the ground-up in the interests of the group they purport to represent. Again, whether the choice of certain coalition partners is optimal in achieving victory over the incumbent and whether or not ignoring and/or destroying existing institutions is a wise strategy in launching an armed rebellion are important questions, but are quite irrelevant for insurgent elites who are devoted to the establishment of a particular kind of political system.

In summary, insurgent ideology determines the composition of a coalition, but a coalition's actual breadth is determined by the objective social structure as well as the institutions of the incumbent regime.

The size of insurgent's coalitions determines the level of civilian compliance with the institutions they establish. Civilian populations have political and non-political preferences that cover everything from governance to ideology to religion to gender relations and beyond. The closer an insurgent's implemented policies to a given group's ideal point, the lower the cost of eliciting compliance and the higher the probability that the group will comply with the institutions established by insurgents. As with incumbent government, compliance with insurgent's institutions is a product of what Levi calls "quasi-voluntary compliance." This type of compliance "is *voluntary* because [citizens choose to acquiesce to government demands]. It is *quasi-voluntary* because the noncompliant are subject to coercion—if they are caught."¹⁵ For most of the population, even the groups with whom insurgents establish a coalition, individuals have an incentive to provide the absolute minimum degree of compliance that enables them to avoid sanction. In the context of an insurgency, this form of compliance can be measured by the extent of law-abiding behavior in uncontested areas.

The size of an insurgent's coalition dictates not just levels of compliance, but also the level of coercion necessary to implement insurgent's public policies. The difference between civilian compliance under insurgent's own implemented ideal point and that of civilians is either lost through non-compliance or realized only through the application of coercion. Rather than looking at violence writ large, I am looking at a particular type of coercion that Kalyvas calls "coercive violence," violence that is used by a governing authority as a resource to control rather than exterminate a population.¹⁶ This coercive violence produces enforced compliance, which I define as any civilian behavior elicited from civilians by a governing authority through the use of

¹⁴ Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Ideology in Civil War Instrumental Adoption and Beyond," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (March 1, 2014): 215.

¹⁵ Margaret Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 51. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

violence including (but not limited to) the fines, arrest, imprisonment, extortion, and torture. Rebels establish institutions that benefit certain groups and exclude others and the only way excluded groups will comply with rebel policy is through active enforcement and the application of coercion.

Enforced compliance and quasi-voluntary compliance are two sides of the same coin. The further civilian preferences from insurgent's implemented policies, the more coercion will be required to punish non-compliance and induce quasi-voluntary compliance. Insurgent institutions built on a narrow coalition implement policies that diverge significantly with the preferences of a majority of social groups and require a significant amount of active enforcement to elicit compliance. By contrast, inclusive institutions and the policies implemented by such institutions are relatively closer to most civilian preferences and require less active enforcement to elicit quasi-voluntary compliance.

I follow Kalyvas (2006) in defining territorial control as areas in which a belligerent possesses a monopoly on the use of force and can deny rival actors access to the area. Additionally, its forces and administrators can move and operate day or night safely and opposition clandestine organizations are either not in existence or have been completely destroyed. Areas where a belligerent exercises incomplete territorial control are characterized by military and political competition between the belligerents and in which forces of either cannot move freely at night, administrators do not sleep in their homes, and opposition forces regularly operate in the area.

[The Persistence or Collapse of Insurgent Institutions](#)

Institutional persistence refers to a state of affairs in which the institutions established by insurgents continue to regulate civilian behavior and facilitate the extraction of resources after a spell of armed conflict between the incumbent and insurgent. Institutional collapse refers to a state of affairs in which civilians completely cease to comply with the rules and regulations laid down by an insurgent group.

Compliance with or participation in a political actor's institutions is the primary means by which institutional persistence and collapse can be measured. A *sine qua non* of institutional persistence is spatial and temporal stability. In other words, rebels must govern the actions of a population and receive resources from it in a given area for a non-insignificant length of time. Where institutions persist, compliance need be neither exclusive nor complete. Even where belligerents enjoy complete territorial control, compliance with their institutions is not complete; citizens may evade taxes and military conscription. In the competitive environment of a civil war, incumbents and oppositions often operate parallel sets of institutions. Even if civilians comply imperfectly with two sets of institutions, the institutions in question can be said to persist.

When belligerents do not contest territory, either because they are physically unable to reach areas under a rival's control or because they do not make any attempt to govern civilians, defection from one to the other is not possible. In the context of an insurgency, if incumbents do not or cannot contest areas under insurgent control, insurgent's institutions will persist regardless of the level of compliance they receive and the amount of coercion they apply. But compliance and coercion still play important roles in explaining the nature of insurgent rule in uncontested

areas. Where insurgents establish broad coalitions, their rule will be based on extensive compliance and relatively limited amounts of coercion. By contrast, where insurgents establish narrow coalitions, their rule will be based on low levels of compliance and extensive amounts of coercion. The ability to coerce always ensures that civilians will not simply ignore insurgents, but the size of an insurgent’s coalition dictates the amount of resources that the insurgents need to devote policing civilians.

Insurgent institutions will persist in areas uncontested by the incumbent because civilians cannot defect to the incumbent. The persistence of rebels’ institutions where they enjoy uncontested territorial control makes the size of their coalition appear unimportant. When rebels institute their preferred policies, they are confronted with the problem of ensuring compliance and can sanction as much and as often as their resources allow. Womack (1987), drawing on Hirschman (1970), emphasizes the competitive environment of a civil war offers civilians the option of “exit” (that is, varying levels of non-compliance) when they are subject to the alternating rule of incumbents and insurgents.¹⁷ When incumbents enter areas previously-held by rebels, the consequences of governance strategies become evident.

In contested areas, defection or denunciation by the population is an ever-present danger and the resilience of rebel institutions depends on the willingness of civilians to collaborate with rebels and comply with rebels’ laws in the absence of constant sanction. In these areas, groups excluded by the rebels’ coalition will *withdraw* their compliance from rebels and *shift* compliance to the incumbent, observing incumbent laws and providing incumbents with the information, manpower, and resources necessary to eliminate the insurgents. These groups will also refuse to provide protection for the rebels as they seek to evade the incumbent. On the other hand, groups with whom rebels have established a coalition will not defect and will continue to collaborate with insurgents even in the face of punishment by the incumbent authority. The extent of civilian defection to the incumbent in contested areas is determined by the breadth of the coalition assembled by the insurgents; broad coalitions will see very little defection while narrow coalitions will produce a large amount of defection to the incumbent.

The argument in this article can be represented as a typology of conflict outcomes:

		Size of Insurgent Coalition Relative to Incumbent	
		Broad	Narrow
Uncontested Insurgent Territorial Control?	Yes	Institutions Persist	Institutions Persist
	No	Institutions Persist	Institutions Collapse

Figure 1: A Typology of Conflict Outcomes in Civil Wars

¹⁷ Brantly Womack, “The Party and the People: Revolutionary and Postrevolutionary Politics in China and Vietnam,” *World Politics* 39, no. 04 (July 1987): 487–88.

When the institutions established by insurgent collapse “there is no longer a probability that certain kinds of meaningfully oriented social action will take place.”¹⁸ Institutional collapse therefore comes about when a population completely ceases complying with rules and regulations laid down by a political actor and civilians cease to provide it with resources. Non-compliance differs from imperfect (or incomplete) compliance in that in the former no significant aspect of citizens’ lives is governed by the dictates of insurgents. In the context of a civil war, this implies the complete displacement of one set of institutions in favor of another. The collapse of rebel institutions represents an incumbent victory. By contrast, the persistence of rebel institutions represents a continuation of the conflict.

The CCP Insurgency

The following two sections present a within-conflict comparison of two of the CCP’s base areas: the Chinese Soviet Republic in Southern China (see Map 1 below) between 1931 and 1937 and the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei (Jin-Cha-Ji) Border Region in Northern China between 1946 and 1949 (see Map 2 below). These two base areas represented the largest and most strategically-important of the CCP’s base areas in their respective periods of the CCP insurgency. The two areas, though geographically distant and distinct, were characterized by the same kind of unequal rural political economy found throughout much of China proper. Local politics was dominated by landed elites who used their political and economic power to exploit the peasantry. The comparison of the two base areas is facilitated by the fact that the KMT’s political and military strategies did not differ significantly between the two periods: conventional armed forces were deployed to seek out and destroy the CCP forces while local elite-led militias governed civilians in the villages.

The Chinese Soviet Republic, 1931-1937

In Southern China, CCP members established and controlled a number of small peasant armies that fled the cities in the face of the KMT crackdown. These forces took to the countryside and after a number of counterinsurgency campaigns waged by the KMT and its local elite allies, the Red Army descended into an area on borders of Jiangxi and Fujian provinces. The area secured by the Red Army, the CCP began the process of completely destroying existing political structures and building a new government from the ground-up. By 1931, the CCP made the decision to combine its local administrations and formally proclaim the establishment of the Chinese Soviet Republic.

Building a Narrow Coalition

The CCP’s approach to revolution in this period was based on Marxist-Leninist principles as interpreted and applied by a group of Moscow-trained Chinese communists.¹⁹ They believed first and foremost that societies were divided into classes based on their relationship to the means of

¹⁸ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 27.

¹⁹ Mao Zedong played an important role in the revolution on the ground, but these Moscow-trained communists, known as the 28 Bolsheviks, were in charge of the formulation of policy. See Hsiao Tso-liang, *Power Relations Within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930-34*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961)., John E Rue, *Mao Tse-Tung in Opposition, 1927-1935* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966)., Benjamin I Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951).

production. The CCP and Mao (who was a prominent figure, but not yet leader of the CCP) eventually settled on a class analysis based on the idea that rural society consisted of five classes: (1) landlords, (2) rich peasants, (3) middle peasants, (4) poor peasants, and (5) farm laborers.²⁰

The CCP was determined to remake the Chinese state from the ground-up. It completely destroyed existing forms of political and economic relationships and replaced them with its own. After fundamentally altering patterns of land tenure to the advantage of poor peasants, the CCP established new political institutions, the composition of which reflected the social coalition the CCP sought to build. Landlords and rich peasants were barred from membership of the government or civic organizations and while there was no explicit ban on middle peasant membership and no formal quota system, poor peasants formed the absolute majority of those in every organ, association, and organization in the Chinese Soviet Republic, outnumbering middle peasants by *at least* 10 to 1 and in some cases 100 to 1. Data on the state of the Party in August 1932 indicates that 81.7% of its members were poor peasants against 9.1% that were middle peasants; rich peasants and landlords are notable only for their complete absence.²¹

The CCP's class coalition was also evident in other areas of political and social life in the Soviet. Regulations specifically barred landlords, rich peasants, merchants, religious leaders, and KMT members and their families from participation in the Soviet political system.²² Policy in the Soviet was carried out by mass organizations (*qunzhong tuanti*), the most important of which was the Poor Peasants League (*pinnong tuan*), a mass organization whose membership consisted entirely of poor peasants. Landlords and rich peasants were strictly prohibited from joining the two largest civic organizations in the Chinese Soviet Republic, the "Anti-Imperialist League" (*fandi datongmeng*) and the "Soviet Protection League" (*yong-Su datongmeng*).²³

In the early days of the Soviet in 1931 to 1932, the CCP oversaw the implementation of a policy of equal redistribution of land (*pingfen tudi*). By 1932 the CCP had overseen the equalization of landholdings such that the vast majority of peasants achieved subsistence. Lands that landlords and rich peasants could not till themselves was redistributed to farm laborers and poor peasants, bringing about a general levelling of Soviet society.²⁴

The achievements in this period of the revolution were broadly satisfying to civilians, but not to the leadership of the CCP's leadership headed by Zhang Wentian and Bo Gu.²⁵ Persisting inequality and a perception that class enemies were preventing the revolution from moving forward led the CCP undertake the Land Investigation Movement (*chatian yundong*) in the summer of 1933 designed to uncover and destroy all remnants of perceived landlord and rich peasant influence. In its search for landlords and rich peasants, the CCP and Poor Peasants

²⁰ Mao Tse-tung, "How to Differentiate Classes in Rural Areas," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 1 (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966), 137–39.

²¹ *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji* 1932 (Vol. 1) (Beijing: Zhongyang dang'an guan, 1992), 441. Zhongyang dang'an guan and Jiangxi sheng dang'an guan, *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji*, vol. 1-2.

²² "Zhonghua suweiai gongheguo de xuanju xize," in *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* vol. 3, 178–85.

²³ "Fandi datongmeng zhangcheng," in *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* vol. 3, 734–35.

²⁴ *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji*, 1932 (Vol. 1):198, 205.

²⁵ Mao had not yet risen to the leader of the Party. See Rue, *Mao Tse-Tung in Opposition, 1927-1935*.

League found them in spades as the CCP and its poor peasant allies gradually expanded the definition of what constituted a class enemy to include peasants at or even below the subsistence level.²⁶

Patterns of Compliance and Coercion in the Chinese Soviet Republic

Compliance on the part of poor peasants with CCP policy was extensive. They were the most enthusiastic participants in land redistribution and were the most willing to join the CCP's civic institutions. But it was in their reaction to the state's extractive and military policies that the poor peasants made their support for the regime most clear. One example of this comes in the form of voluntary contributions to the Soviet government by purchasing government debt notes and then returning them without claiming the principal. While the purchase of government bonds was mandatory, the return of the bond notes without repayment of principal was not. Those who voluntarily surrendered their bonds were almost always poor peasants or farm laborers.²⁷ The quantity of funds and denomination of notes surrendered to the government suggests that approximately 8% of the population provided this kind of support to the regime.²⁸

Active support for the Soviet was concentrated among the poor peasantry. Non-compliance and CCP coercion, by contrast, was deployed against landlords and rich peasants. The formal legal apparatus of the Chinese Soviet Republic was almost exclusively concerned with uncovering and punishing "counterrevolutionary" crimes which in practice meant any attempts by those classified as landlords or rich peasants from protecting their interests using either peaceful or non-peaceful means. More often than not, the result of this kind of behavior was either execution or hard labor.²⁹ Thousands more fled into mountainous areas of the Soviet or to the KMT, seeking refuge from the CCP.³⁰

The Red Army Defeat and the Collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic

Up to the Fifth Encirclement and Suppression Campaign in 1933-1934, the CCP relied on luring KMT units into areas under its control (*youdi shenru*) and engaging it on its own terms. Prior to military action it would "strengthen the defenses and clear the fields" (*jianbi qingye*), evacuating

²⁶ Data compiled from *Red China (Hongse Zhonghua, hereafter HSZH)*, the official organ of the Provisional Central Government of the Chinese Soviet Republic, and from *Struggle (Douzheng)*, the official organ of the Central Bureau of the Soviet Aras reveal the true nature and extent of the Land Investigation Movement: those targeted during the movement were in possession of between 40 *dan* and 13 *dan* per household. The average middle peasant (one who rented out no land and owed no debt) family possessed roughly seven *dan* of land per member of household. Even the smallest households in Soviet areas had at least four members, meaning that for subsistence they would require at least 28 *dan* of land. Based on *HSZH* nos. 76, 95, 96, 104, 106, 107, 111, 113, 118, 123, 125, 127, 144, 181, and 185. [Lu] Dingyi, "Liangge Zhengquan, Liangge Shoucheng," *Douzheng*, September 23, 1934, 16.

²⁷ Individuals and the amounts of bonds they surrendered (or funds otherwise given to the government) were honored in a section of *HSZH* titled "The Red Board of Honor" (*hongbian*). See *HSZH* nos. 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, and 85.

²⁸ A total of 321,500 *yuan* was reported returned and bonds were issued in notes in the amount of 0.50 *yuan*, one *yuan*, and five *yuan*. Evidence from *HSZH* indicates that bonds returned (or monetary contributions other than bonds) were usually in the amount of one or two *yuan*. The Chinese Soviet Republic's population was nearly 3.5 million in 1932.

²⁹ Zhongyang dang'an guan and Jiangxi sheng dang'an guan, *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji*, 1932 (Vol. 1):126–27. *HSZH*, no. 119, 3, no. 235, 2.

³⁰ *HSZH*, nos. 94, 95, and 107.

most civilians from the area and leaving only the CCP's most ardent supporters who would provide no information on the CCP's activities or provide misinformation to the KMT, removing any food or livestock of which the KMT could make use, and destroying infrastructure critical to the KMT war effort such as roads and bridges.³¹ Because the CCP removed all foodstuffs and most people from the combat area, KMT soldiers were without food, supplies, and intelligence. Under these circumstances, the KMT had to rely on long supply lines vulnerable to CCP surprise attacks. KMT forces that were not defeated retreated back to areas of KMT control.

In late 1933, Mao Zedong, long the principal CCP advocate of guerilla warfare and luring the KMT into CCP-controlled areas, lost power and influence in the CCP and was replaced in his military command capacity by Zhang Wentian, Bo Gu, and a German military advisor in the Soviet named Otto Braun. The three of them concluded that the Chinese Soviet Republic had reached a point where it was both advisable and desirable to switch from guerrilla warfare to positional warfare.

The result of this change in strategy was catastrophic. Large units were concentrated and thrown into battle against KMT units for cities and towns. As a consequence, the KMT was able to bring full power of its conventional forces to bear against the Red Army. The KMT eliminated Red Army forces garrisoned in major cities along the outer edge of the Soviet and by the end of 1934 all major Red Army units had been defeated in battle or had departed on the Long March.

The CCP's military defeat was quickly followed by a massive political defeat as the political institutions of the Soviet collapsed as civilians defected to the KMT. As KMT armies made their way into the Soviet starting in mid-1933, civilians *withdrew* compliance from the CCP's institutions and *shifted* it to those of the KMT. There were widespread defections from the groups that had been excluded by the CCP's coalition. Instances of mass flight to KMT areas numbering hundreds to tens of thousands were regularly reported in both the CCP and KMT presses and affected practically all areas that remained under CCP control.³²

Civilians who escaped from the Soviet before 1934 either organized themselves or were organized by the KMT into paramilitary organizations led by local elites called "Refugees Corps" that advanced into the Soviet along with the KMT military.³³ Instances of organized mass flight to KMT areas and collaboration with KMT forces also increased.³⁴ In the Soviet, civilians acted as guides for the KMT military and provided intelligence on the whereabouts of CCP forces and personnel.³⁵ Civilians, for their part, welcomed the KMT soldiers and affiliated

³¹ Guofangbu shizhengju ed., *Jiaofei Zhan Shi* (Taipei: Zhonghua dadian bianyinhui, 1967). Vol. 1, pg. 119-120. Vol. 2, pg. 245-247.

³² *HSZH*, no. 96, 124, 168, 173, 233, 236. *Douzheng* 39, 6.

³³ *HSZH*, 205, 2. *HSZH*, 234, 1.

³⁴ A CCP commander who defected to the KMT in the spring of 1934 stated that finding manpower for the Red Army had become difficult because of the extent of defections and civilians flight to KMT areas. *TKP*, 3 October 1934, pg. 3.

³⁵ *Ta Kung Pao* (hereafter *TKP*), 18 December 1934, 10. *TKP* was one of the most authoritative and influential newspapers of the Republican period.

paramilitaries.³⁶ High-ranking members of the CCP and Red Army also began to defect citing, in part, the victimization of CCP members and civilians under the Soviet regime.³⁷

The CCP attempted to stem the tide of defections by promulgating new legal procedures that greatly expanded the number of capital offenses and allowed the lowest levels of the government and military to summarily execute those deemed likely to defect to the KMT.³⁸ It was further ordered that those classified as landlords and rich peasants (which by this time included self-sufficient peasants) were to have their property confiscated and were evacuated from areas near the front lines and drafted into hard labor brigades in the interior of the Soviet.³⁹ The CCP orders resulted in the killing of tens of thousands of civilians and the creation of mass graves throughout the Soviet.⁴⁰

By the end of 1934, KMT forces occupied practically the entire Soviet and began the task of restoring the pre-conflict status quo, undoing CCP land reform and returning land to its original owners. Peasants had to pay back rent to returning landlords, sometimes with interest. As part of its counterinsurgency program, the KMT established village militias and built a considerable amount of infrastructure designed to facilitate the counterinsurgency effort including roads, blockhouses, and telephone lines, the funds and labor for which all came from the peasants. CCP guerrilla units were still operating in the area, but they found civilians unreceptive or downright hostile to their presence. In one village in the county of Ruijin, the former capital of the Soviet, when CCP guerrillas entered a village, locals arrested them and put them to death.⁴¹ Civilian reactions were not uniformly violent, but throughout the former Soviet, the vast majority of civilians refused to provide any support to the CCP guerrillas.⁴²

In a preview of what would characterize CCP-KMT conflict after the collapse of the Soviet, a small group of poor peasants did provide some support to the Red Army. They found ways to smuggle food to the guerrillas and tried to help disrupt KMT operations. But the extent and quantity of this support was extremely small and the CCP, once “stationary bandits,” were forced

³⁶ TKP, 2 November 1934, 3. TKP, 3 November 1934, 3. TKP, 15 November 1934, 3.

³⁷ TKP, 8 November 1934, 4. TKP, 25 January 1935, 4. TKP, 16 February 1935, 4. Gong Chu, *Wo yu hongjun* (Hong Kong: Nanfeng chubanshe, 1954), 449–50.

³⁸ *HSZH*, 176, 5-6.

³⁹ *HSZH*, 192, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ta Kung Pao* (hereafter *TKP*), 1 May 1934, pg. 3. *TKP*, 13 June 1934, pg. 3. *TKP*, 1 September 1934, pg. 3. *TKP*, 12 November 1934, pg. 3. *TKP* 13 November 1934, 3. *TKP* 18 December 1934, pg. 10. *TKP*, 22 December 1934, pg. 3. The CCP did not always have time to bury the dead. After the defeat of the CCP, one of the tasks of the Red Swastika Society, a religious charity, was the burial of thousands of dead bodies in the counties at the center of the Soviet. Shijie Hong wanzi hui jiuji Ganzai Shanghai zong banshichu, ed., “Gan zhen zong baogao,” in *Minguo wenxian leibian*, by Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo and Minguo shiqi wenxian baohu zhongxin, vol. 15 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2015). The mass killings were indirectly acknowledged by the CCP’s then-leader, Zhang Wentian in the fall of 1934 in the last days of the Soviet. *HSZH* 205, 1-2.

⁴¹ *TKP*, 3 February 1935, 4.

⁴² *Jun zheng xunkan* [Journal of Military and Administrative Affairs], no. 13-14, pg. 543-550. *Jun zheng xunkan* was the internal organ of the KMT’s Nanchang field headquarters out of which the KMT counterinsurgency campaigns were commanded. See also Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army’s Three-Year War in South China, 1934-1938* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 29.

to become “roving bandits.” The guerrillas kept up the fight for three years, but were isolated in uninhabited, mountainous areas of Southern China.⁴³

The Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Border Region, 1946-1949

Up to 1934, CCP activity in China was centered in the southern part of the country. That changed in late 1935 when the Red Army arrived in Northern China. Following the Japanese invasion of 1937, the Red Army established a new base in the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Border Region (hereafter abbreviated as “the Border Region”). The Border Region was the first of the CCP’s Northern China base areas to establish political institutions under a broader and more inclusive political coalition called the United Front. Not long after its establishment, the Border Region was hailed as a model by Mao Zedong in an internally-circulated book detailing how to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Japanese military.⁴⁴

Building a Broad Coalition

Mao’s rise to power marked the beginning of a series of ideological and policy shifts that together represented a vast expansion of the CCP’s social coalition. As discussed in the previous section, the radical policies of the Soviet period resulted in the collapse of the CCP’s political power in Southern China. Mao was very much cognizant of this fact and sought to ensure that the CCP did not commit the same mistake again.

The CCP governance program in the Border Region was focused on gradually shifting social, economic, and political power to the middle and poor peasantry and, unlike in the Soviet. Policies implemented under Mao’s leadership brought about a vast equalization of wealth in the Border Region such that by 1945, the vast majority of civilians in the Border Region were middle peasants.⁴⁵

When the war against Japan ended in 1945, the Border Region expanded significantly as the CCP filled the vacuum left by retreating Japanese forces, doubling the size of the Border Region by early 1946 and expanding its population to ten million. Starting in the fall of 1945, poor peasants and local CCP organizations undertook “anti-traitor” (*fanjian*), “settling accounts” (*qingsuan*), “revenge” (*fuchou*), “rent reduction” (*jianzu*), and “wage increase” (*zengzi*) movements and achieved substantial results. Many peasants gained from the movement and it represented an attack nearly unprecedented in scope and ferocity on “feudal” forces in the Border Region, until that point an integral part of the United Front.⁴⁶

In response to these pressures from below, as well as a desire to remove all remaining possible sources of KMT support in the Border Region, the CCP promulgated what became known as the May Fourth Directive on May 4, 1946. Previous CCP policy protected the interests of the

⁴³ Benton, *Mountain Fires*.

⁴⁴ Kathleen J Hartford, “Step by Step: Reform, Resistance, and Revolution in Chin-Ch’a-Chi Border Region, 1937-1945” (Stanford University, 1980), 61. Nie Rongzhen, *Mofan Kang-Ri genjudi Jin-Cha-Ji Qu* (s.l.: Balujun junzheng zazhi she, 1939), 1–2.

⁴⁵ “Jizhong qu yijiusi nian da jianzu zhong jige wenti de zongjie,” in *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi Jin-Cha-Ji bianqu caizheng jingji shiliao xuanbian (Nongye Bian)* (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1984), 146, 148.

⁴⁶ “Zhonggong Jin-Cha-Ji zhongyangju guanyu chuanda yu zhixing zhongyang ‘wusi zhishi’ de jue ding (jiexuan),” in *Jin-Cha-Ji jiefangqu lishi wenxian xuanbian, 1945-1949* (Beijing: Zhongguo dang’an chubanshe, 1998), 136–37.

landlord and rich peasant classes, allowing them to legally rent their land to peasants and protecting their private property rights. The May Fourth Directive and subsequent CCP policy began the process of achieving “land to the tiller” in which any remaining landlord and rich peasant land would be distributed to peasants.⁴⁷

Patterns of Compliance and Coercion in the Border Region During the Civil War

Not long after the war against Japan ended in 1945, the Chinese Civil War began. Throughout the Civil War period, the CCP’s more radical political program created predictable patterns of compliance and non-compliance: groups included in the CCP’s coalition complied with the BRG, sometimes enthusiastically, sometimes reluctantly, while excluded groups complied only with the application of coercion.

As was the case during the Soviet period, poor peasants were far more likely to provide active support to the CCP regime during the Civil War. The upsurge in peasant activism associated with the May Fourth Directive was led almost entirely by poor peasants.⁴⁸ Poor peasant women were especially enthusiastic about participation in CCP programs. They were at the forefront of after-care for the dependents of men who were drafted or volunteered to fight in the PLA. They were said to be particularly vigorous in, concerned with, and opinionated about comparing household wealth and distributing property. They were also known to be enthusiastic in going into the hills searching for landlord/rich peasant enemies that fled villages to escape land reform. In some areas, women became judges in CCP courts and were said to be particularly fierce in their interrogation and trial of suspects.⁴⁹

The CCP’s desire to achieve an equalization of landholdings and its encouragement to destroy last vestiges of the old order resulted in the extensive application of coercion against the few remaining landlords and rich peasants throughout the Border Region. During the radical period of land reform, judicial procedures were revised to allow arrests, trials, and even executions by mass organizations.⁵⁰ During the land reform movement, middle peasants “in a show of class solidarity” voluntarily “granted” (*xiandi*) or “allocated” (*bodi*) land to poor peasants.⁵¹ As land reform radicalized and any accumulation of wealth became a clear and present danger to its owners, middle peasants proactively offered to give their land to local governments. When

⁴⁷ Liu Shaoqi, “Guanyu tudi wenti de zhishi,” in *Hebei tudi gaige dang’an shiliao xuanbian*, ed. Hebei dang’an guan (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990).

⁴⁸ Du Runsheng ed., *Zhongguo de tudi gaige* (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 164–65. Luo Pinghan, *Tudi gaige yundong shi* (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2005), 3–4.

⁴⁹ “Ji-Re-Cha qu fulian guanyu chungeng zhi xiachu funü shengchang zongjie,” in *Ji-Re-Cha jiefangqu* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1995).

⁵⁰ “Zhonggong Jin-Cha-Ji zhongyangju guanyu gongan baowei gongzuo de zhishi,” in *Jin-Cha-Ji jiefangqu lishi wenxian xuanbian, 1945-1949* (Beijing: Zhongguo dang’an chubanshe, 1998), 200. “Jin-Cha-Ji bianqu xingzheng weiyuanhui guanyu renmin fating gongzuo de zhishi,” in *Jin-Cha-Ji jiefangqu lishi wenxian xuanbian, 1945-1949* (Beijing: Zhongguo dang’an chubanshe, 1998), 389–91.

⁵¹ Liu Lantao, “Guanyu Jin-Cha-Ji bianqu tudi gaige chubu jiancha huibao de zongjie,” in *Jin-Cha-Ji jiefangqu lishi wenxian xuanbian, 1945-1949*, ed. Zhongyang dang’an guan, Hebei sheng shehui kexueyuan, and Zhonggong Hebei shengwei dangshi yanjiushi (Beijing: Zhongguo dang’an chubanshe, 1998), 236. The quotes around “grant” and “allocate” are both in original, which indicates that the CCP was well aware of the pressures faced by middle peasants during land reform.

governments declined, middle peasants actively sought out poor peasants and gave them land as well as a share of their possessions.⁵² When that failed, middle peasants and poor peasants fled into the hills, though the number of these cases appears to be relatively small.⁵³

Military Defeat, Political Victory

The KMT's assault on the Border Region in 1946 was as ferocious and focused as the operations carried out by the Japanese during the Second World War. The KMT advance into the Border Region resulted in the withdrawal of many of the CCP's units. However, unlike 1934, civilians in the Border Region did not defect to the KMT and the CCP's political institutions remained in place. When KMT forces and militias entered an area, civilians complied with the KMT only to the absolute minimum to avoid coercion, but crucially did not reveal the identity of cadres or members of the CCP's mass organizations, nor provide any information on the whereabouts of the Red Army or CCP militias.⁵⁴ The CCP's political and economic reforms had so thoroughly reshaped rural society that re-imposing the pre-Resistance War order effectively infringed on the interests of farm laborers, poor peasants, middle peasants, rich peasants, and even some landlords (especially those who moved into capitalist ventures). As such, even as land reform intensified, civilians refused to collaborate with the KMT.⁵⁵

In the Border Region the only group that defected to the KMT in any appreciable quantity were large landlords, though even among that group the extent of defection was small. Where they did defect, they took back confiscated land and helped the KMT locate and kill CCP cadres and poor peasant activists.⁵⁶

The brutality of KMT counterinsurgency drove nearly all civilians in the Border Region to assist the CCP. Even during the radical phase of land reform, it was reported that in many areas even rural society's upper strata (*shangceng*) supported the CCP over the KMT. The militias that went into the countryside with the KMT unleashed a campaign of counterrevolutionary terror, targeting anyone who they suspected of collaborating with or benefiting from the CCP's political, social, or economics programs which by this time included practically all of rural society, including landlords and rich peasants.⁵⁷ "At least [under the CCP] we're able to live," one landlord said in reaction to the violence of local elite-led militias.⁵⁸

⁵² "Liu Jie tongzhi guanyu Chahaer sheng tudi gaige de huibao (jielu)," in *Hebei tudi gaige dang'an shiliao xuanbian* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990), 141.

⁵³ "Ji-Re-Cha qu dangwei guanyu tugai yundong de jiben zongjie," in *Jin-Cha-Ji jiefangqu lishi wenxian xuanbian, 1945-1949* (Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, 1998), 507.

⁵⁴ "Liu Jie tongzhi guanyu Chahaer sheng tudi gaige de huibao (jielu)," 146–47.

⁵⁵ "Zhonggong Ji-Jin qu dangwei dui yiyuelai gedi tudi gaige jinxing qingkuang de chubu Jjiancha ji jinyibu jizhong liliang xunsu guanche yudi gaige de zhishi," in *Hebei tudi gaige dang'an shiliao xuanbian* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990), 119.

⁵⁶ "Zhonggong Ji-Re-Cha qu dangwei guanyu tudi gaige wenti de jielun: Liu Daosheng tongzhi zai kuoganhui shang de baogao," in *Hebei tudi gaige dang'an shiliao xuanbian* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990), 464.

⁵⁷ Duan Suquan, "Jianchi diqu, fazhan liliang, peihe douzheng: jiefang zhanzheng chuqi de Ji-Re-Cha junqu," in *Ji-Re-Cha jiefangqu*, ed. Zhonggong Hebei shengwei dangshi yanjiushi and Hebei sheng dang'an guan (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1995), 471–72.

⁵⁸ "Zhonggong Jidong qu dangwei guogongbu guanyu bannianlai guojun gongzuo zongjie ji jinhou renwu de queding (Jielu)," in *Jidong wuzhuang douzheng* (Beijing: Zhongguo dangshi chubanshe, 1994), 516.

Civilians were sometimes enthusiastic for the CCP's return. Their excitement was sometimes so great as to be a liability for military operations. One CCP commander recalled that people were so excited about the CCP's operations that civilians would run about telling everyone that the CCP's return was imminent. Under such conditions it was difficult to preserve the secrecy of the CCP's operations. In this particular case, though, the advance notice of the CCP's return led the KMT forces to flee in advance of the CCP's attack.⁵⁹

The KMT's counterinsurgency program was focused on the elimination of the CCP's main force units and a restoration of the pre-CCP rural political economy. In appealing to only the largest landlords and other traditional powerholders in rural society, the KMT had an extremely narrow appeal. Even with its radical policies, the CCP's appeal was still broad enough that practically all groups in rural society continued to comply with the CCP in contested areas. Because so many of the social groups in the Border Region remained loyal to the CCP, its institutions persisted even as the KMT took control of large parts of the Border Region.

Conclusion

The theory and evidence presented in this article explicate the relationship between the persistence of insurgent's institutions in wartime, their governance strategies, and their ability to control territory. When the political systems established by insurgents are insulated from competition in uncontested areas, insurgents are free to implement whatever policy they like (within the limits of their resources available to coerce civilians). But insurgent political institutions are only as durable as their appeal to civilians in contested areas. If insurgents' social coalitions are narrow relative to the incumbent, a majority of civilians in insurgent-controlled areas will defect, bringing about a collapse of insurgent's political institutions. That is why the Chinese Soviet Republic collapsed in 1934 in the face of KMT attack while the Border Region did not.

It is by now a tired refrain in comparative politics that history should be taken seriously. A good place to begin is by analyzing conflicts that have been overlooked either because they occurred prior to 1945 or because they occurred in areas not traditionally included in comparative studies of civil war. The CCP insurgency, for example, has never before been integrated into a comparative study of civil wars or insurgencies. The conflict is rich in data, including accounts by belligerents, journalists, and scholars. It also rich in variation: regional, ideological, institutional, temporal, and tactical variation all feature in the conflict. It is unlikely that the CCP conflict is alone in this regard and future work should seek out similarly influential and similarly diverse conflicts for analysis.

This article also answers the call of Sanin and Wood (2014) to advance a strong program of integrating ideology into the study of civil wars. Though the behavior of the CCP was determined by more than ideology alone, this article shows the decisive role of ideology in

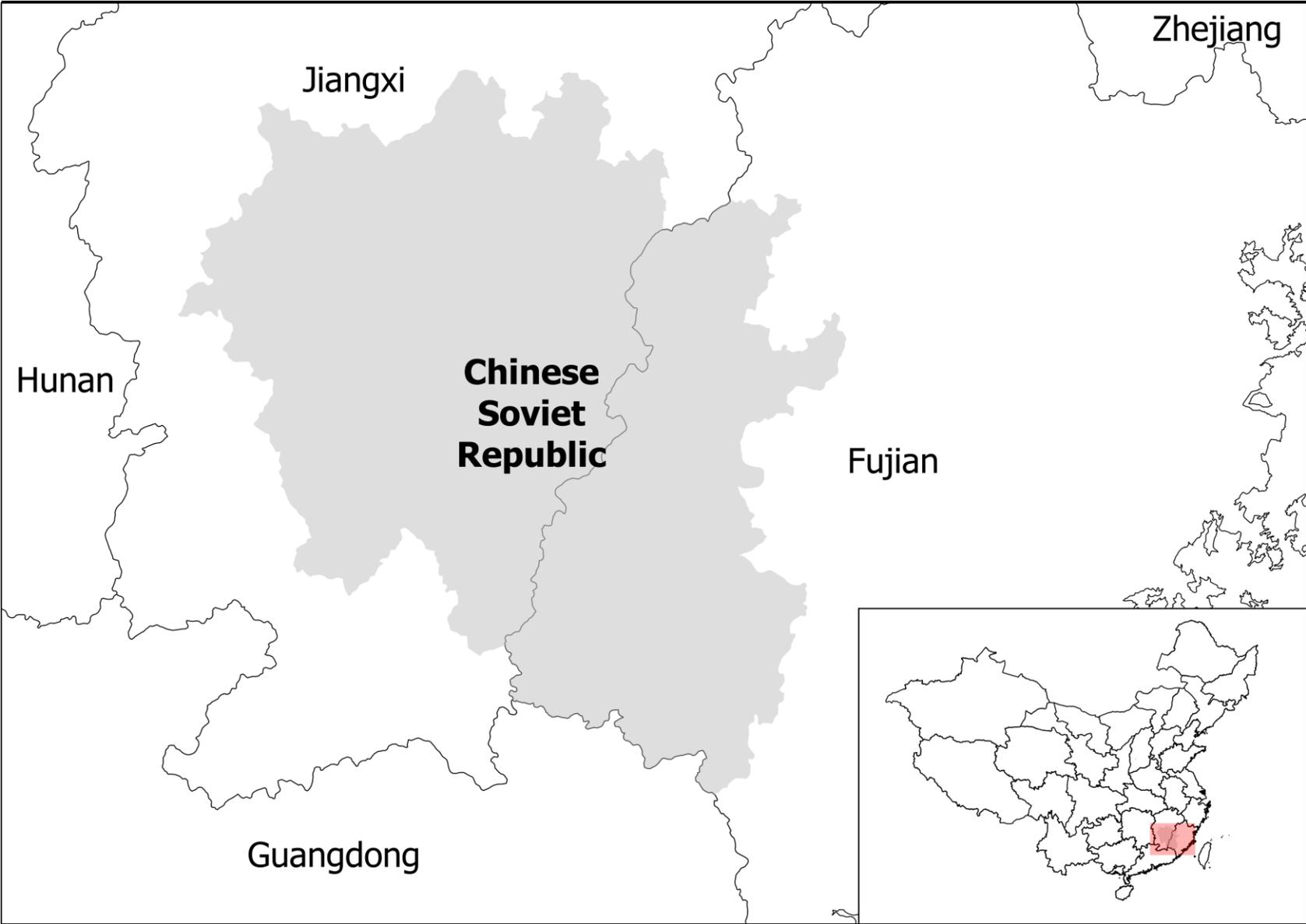
⁵⁹ Zhan Da'nian, "Huigu Ji-Re-Cha junqu 1948 nian de junshi douzheng," in *Ji-Re-Cha jiefangqu*, ed. Zhonggong Hebei shengwei dangshi yanjiushi and Hebei sheng dang'an guan (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1995), 508.

determining the social groups selected by the CCP as its primary constituency and the importance of insurgent leaders.

The single most important policy-relevant lesson from this article is that insurgencies are, first and foremost, political conflicts. As a result, the solutions to these conflicts are fundamentally political, not military. That insurgencies are political conflicts does not seem like a particularly novel insight. Indeed, a great deal of literature produced by practitioners of counterinsurgency (particularly during the Malayan Emergency and Vietnam War) stressed the importance of politics in achieving victory. But to these counterinsurgents, “political solutions” often involve establishing the authority of the government in areas affected by the insurgency. But politics means more than just having government administrators in an area where insurgents operate. Rather, it refers to the nature of the incumbent regime itself.

In irregular wars, insurgents choose the grievance upon which they mobilize civilian followers and the incumbent is put on the defensive with respect to that particular grievance. Whether the incumbent accepts the existence or legitimacy of those grievances is immaterial; if insurgents successfully mobilize individuals based on a certain grievance the onus is on the incumbent to de-mobilize them based on redressing that grievance.

Map 1: The Chinese Soviet Republic (ca. 1933)



Map 2: The Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Border Region (ca. 1945)

