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Book Review

Weinstein, Jeremy. 2007. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xx + 402 pp. ISBN: 978-0-521-86077-2 (hb), 978-0-5216-7797-4 (pb). Price: £40.00 (hb), £15.99 (pb).

by Bjørn Møller (17 April 2008)

This is one of the best books on rebel and guerrilla movements, I have ever read (and over the years, I have read quite a few). Well-written and logically structured, it presents new findings of great significance. In several respects it follows Paul Collier and his collaborators, but it is much less vulnerable to the critique sometimes voiced against this school for using complex methods and unsuitable proxies. Weinstein's work does contain a lot of figures and statistics, but only two tables and one chart which require no more than rudimentary mathematical skills.

The book, based on the author's doctoral work — combines several methods and theories. Its main approach is rational choice theory, based on the inherently plausible assumption that even rebels must choose from among options on the basis of preferences, available alternatives, and context. Acknowledging that preferences may be noneconomic, Weinstein nonetheless and plausibly assumes that economic costs and benefits weigh heavily in the calculations both of rebel commanders on whether to launch an armed insurgency (and, if so, how to prevail) and of individual fighters who face a choice of whether to join a movement as well as whether to remain in or try to defect. He uses collective action and organizational behavior theory to explain the decisions. Rebellion is dangerous, and recruitment and retention of combatants therefore call for the use of proper incentives, lest potential or actual fighters refuse to let themselves be recruited in the first place or defect when the going gets tough. Such incentives may be either material, in which case they presuppose the availability of resources, or immaterial based on shared values and beliefs. Whereas the former requires an economic endowment, the latter is based on a social endowment.

This inherently plausible assumptions allows the generation of a typology, based on whether a rebel group has access to resources from external supporters or in the form of lootable natural resources. The availability of such assets tends to create opportunistic rebellions in which the fighters are "consumers" expecting to be rewarded immediately for their services, whereas the absence of such assets creates activist rebellions attracting "investors," i.e., fighters who are ideologically or otherwise committed to the cause, expecting rewards only after the war has been won. Both groups need resources to continue their struggle, which allows for predictions about their behavior. In resource-rich environments, rebels can act as Olsonian "roving bandits," without need for any modus vivendi with the civilian population. In resource-poor settings, rebels require continuous support of the civilian, and mostly rural, population whom it must therefore treat reasonably well. Rebels become "stationary bandits." Thus emerge different propensities for violence. Opportunistic rebellions have few inhibitions against indiscriminate violence because they can afford to dispense with local support; activist rebellions are critically dependent on civilian support which militates strongly against violence and, indeed, calls for some form of

power-sharing between rebels and local, civilian authorities.

This complex and sophisticated, but eminently logical set of hypotheses, is tested on a limited set of four case studies, comprising the National Resistance Army in Uganda, Renamo in Mozambique, the Sendero Luminoso in Peru, and a local branch of the latter, based in Huallaga. Whereas the NRA and Sendero were activist, Renamo and Sendero-Huallaga were opportunistic, corresponding to their endowments. Renamo initially benefited from Rhodesian and then South African support, followed by a period of indiscriminate looting, partly mirrored by Sendero-Huallaga, financed by cocaine production. Neither the NRA nor the national Sendero had access to such resources. As a consequence they relied on ideology to recruit and retain combatants and on the civilian population to support them. This forced the rebels to behave in a more disciplined manner.

Besides secondary literature, these findings are based on interviews conducted *in situ* as well as on the author's own data set of acts of violence. Having found his hypotheses confirmed by this comparative analysis, he further tests them on a small number of other rebellions, including the RUF in Sierra Leone, UNITA in Angola, FARC in Columbia, and rebels groups in the Congo. He finds his theory to be fairly applicable here as well. The book is not merely recommendable as a theory-testing work, but the narratives and analyses of the four (or three-and-a-half) rebel movements offer most of what most readers need to know about them, so the book may also serve as an authoritative account of these movements. It is thus slated to become a standard work in conflict theory and is warmly recommended.

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