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Abstract
Research on militias portrays them as subservient proxies of governments used to achieve tactical goals. The conventional wisdom, however, ignores the diversity of state–militia relations. This article outlines four distinct strategies that states can pursue toward militias, ranging from incorporation to suppression. It then argues that regime ideology shapes how governments perceive and deal with militias. A new theory of armed group political roles brings politics back into the study of militias. Comparative evidence from India and Pakistan shows that varying regime ideological projects contribute to different patterns of militia–state relations. These findings suggest that political ideas ought to be central to the study of political violence, militias should be studied in direct dialog with other armed groups, and a traditional focus on civil war should be replaced by the broader study of "armed politics."

> a state is that human community which (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of the legitimate physical violence within a given territory.
>
> (Weber 1994, 310-11)

> U Po Kyin halted in his stride. He was astonished. 'Good gracious, woman, what idea have you got hold of? You do not suppose *I* am rebelling against the Government? I – a Government servant of thirty years' standing! Good heavens, no! I said that I had

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> *started* the rebellion, not that I was going to take part in it. It is the fools of villagers who are going to risk their skins, not I.'
>
> (Orwell 1974, 139)

George Orwell's U Po Kyin—a (fictional) colonial bureaucrat during British rule in Burma—captures an important truth about states and violence. Rather than always pursuing Max Weber's monopoly of legitimate violence, governments have complex, often unexpected relationships with non-state armed groups. States govern coercion in a number of ways; while Weber describes some places at some times, Orwell captures many others. Yet simply pointing out this variation is insufficient: the key question is when and how these different political orders emerge.

This article blends the insights of Orwell and Weber to make two arguments about state–militia interaction. First, governments and militias engage in a much wider range of political orders than existing research can explain. The dominant conceptualization of this dynamic is one of supportive collaboration, with regimes straightforwardly outsourcing or delegating violence to militias (Mitchell 2004; Roessler 2005; Reno 2011; Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos 2013; Biberman 2013; Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe 2013; Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015; D. Cohen and Nordas 2015; Eck 2015). But this is only one possible state strategy. Militias may also be violently targeted by regimes, absorbed into the state apparatus, or contained as a low level but endemic challenge. They are not intrinsically subservient junior partners of governments.

Rich variation in state–militia politics can be found from Hitler's assault on the SA in "Night of Long Knives" in 1934 Germany to the collusion strategy the Myanmar military has adopted toward the United Wa State Army to the incorporation strategy that puts private armies in the Philippines on government payroll. These strategies may lead to a state monopoly of violence but can also sustain an enduringly fragmented distribution of coercion.

Second, I argue that regime ideology plays a crucial role in shaping state strategy toward militias. Existing theories adopt an apolitical vision of how states use militias, treating them as simple, easily controlled solutions to tactical problems of local information and weak state capacity. These operational concerns are certainly relevant, but they are incomplete for making sense of the sophisticated state–armed group relationships that we observe in the world. In their introduction, the editors of this issue identify militias as "potential allies to the state" (Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger 2015). Identifying who is—and is not—a potential ally is rarely an obvious calculation, and it varies across governments and over time within them. There is a deeper ideological politics at work that influences both which regimes are open to using militias and which kinds of groups are seen as potential partners. Differing conceptions of the political arenas that they seek to construct and defend help governments decide which armed organizations are threatening, allied, or unsavory but tolerable.

Governments have varying political preferences rooted in historically contingent ideological projects. I use this simple, but overlooked, fact to create a typology of militias' political roles drawn from their ideological fit with and operational utility to a government. Militias can occupy different roles within a political system, ranging from armed allies to mortal enemies of rulers. Different types of militia are targeted with strategies that reflect these roles. As regime and armed group ideologies change, and as militias become more or less useful, so do militias' relationships with state power.

This is not a full-fledged theory of armed order, but taking ideas seriously fills in a crucial analytical gap. Existing work ignores the political salience of militias, framing them as thugs manipulated by governments. Yet comparative evidence from militia–state relations in India and Pakistan shows that my argument helps to explain patterns that the conventional wisdom struggles with. The political space available to collude with religious and ethnolinguistic militias varies dramatically across these countries because of the ideological foundations upon which they are built.

This article concludes by identifying implications of these arguments for future research on state–armed group relations. First, the commonplace dichotomy between strong and weak states should be replaced by analysis of the bargains and deals that structure state–armed group interactions. In countries like India, Nigeria, and the Philippines, state power can be quite substantial, but only when there is political motivation to use it. The politics of coercive deployment and restraint may be more important than raw state capacity.

Second, we need to rethink conventional distinctions between types of armed groups. Like insurgent or criminal groups, militias can be suppressed, contained, incorporated, or colluded with. Over time, their political positions can also change: militias may become insurgents, and vice versa, or shift into crime or electoral politics. In turn, insurgents and armed political parties can become militias. Rather than static and intrinsic, the political roles of armed groups are potentially fluid and changeable.

Finally, the approach developed here merges previously isolated work on insurgency, militias, electoral violence, and state building into an integrated research agenda. Political violence does not exist in a political vacuum as states and armed groups interact with one another in fascinating forms of *armed politics* (Staniland 2015). Systematically theorizing and measuring these patterns of competition, cooperation, and coexistence provides a valuable new way of grappling with fundamental questions about violence and political order.

State Strategies toward Militias

This section outlines four common strategies states can use toward militias, and armed groups more generally: suppression, incorporation, containment, and collusion. Existing research has put its focus almost exclusively on what I refer to here as "collusion"—cooperation between state and militia in pursuit of shared interests,

whether in attacking mutual enemies, winning elections, or acquiring revenue. Yet this is only one of the ways that governments can deal with armed groups. Militias can be targeted for destruction or absorbed into a state apparatus, just like insurgents. These strategies can shift over time and vary over space, allowing for a dynamic operationalization of state–armed group interactions.

This typology of strategy captures important variation that has been missed in existing work. Each strategy reflects two dimensions: whether the state is highly motivated to eliminate a group as an independent actor and which mix of conflict and cooperation it chooses to pursue that goal. Suppression and incorporation both seek the elimination of an armed group as an independent actor, but through different policies (violence and negotiation, respectively). Containment and collusion tolerate the existence of an armed actor, but use different blends of cooperation and repression: containment seeks to limit the group's activities below a politically acceptable threshold, while collusion seeks to coordinate group activities with government policies.[1] These strategies can be sequenced over time, but they are analytically and empirically distinguishable.

Strategies can be separated from outcomes by studying patterns of force deployment, targeting or its lack against armed actors, the presence of active support to armed groups, and the public and private statements of policy makers. This requires detailed knowledge of patterns of the use of force and of the rationales guiding coercion, cooperation, and restraint. These strategies may not achieve their aims: containment efforts can fail to contain, collusion strategies can explode out of state control, suppression strategies can trigger further escalation, and incorporation policies can drag on without success. Militias may manipulate or defy central policies, sometimes forcing government policy change or creating new wartime political orders (Staniland 2012). This article focuses on the state because its preferences and options toward militias have been understudied, but it is important to keep in mind the potential autonomy of armed groups and their ability to resist strategies over time: they can create forms of armed order that governments would have preferred to avoid (Reno 2011; Staniland 2014).[2]

Suppression

Suppression is a strategy that deploys sustained lethal targeting of a militia and its supporters in hopes of breaking its fighting power to the point that it will be either disintegrate or be forced into making major concessions. Coordinated campaigns of targeted and/or indiscriminate violence against suspected members and supporters, attempts at large-scale population control/dislocation, consistent willingness to use lethal force, and hard-line public statements from policy makers are indicators of a suppression strategy. The extent and nature of violence can vary within and across suppression strategies, but they are characterized by large-scale investments in destroying an armed group.

Ferdinand Marcos' attempt to break the power of the local armies led by his political rivals during his autocratic centralization is an example of suppression (Sidel 1999). He used loyalist security forces to demobilize and, where necessary, to physically attack militias linked to powerful political barons. In 1980s India, the state decided to suppress Sikh militants in the Punjab who had previously been colluded with by Congress party leaders for electoral purposes. The Pakistani Punjab's provincial government suppressed its former pro-government allies in the Sunni sectarian movement in 1997 after winning a landslide victory that left it unbeholden to the armed sectarians' support.

In the Pakistani Punjab and Indian Punjab, suppression escalated into internal conflict. These blurry boundaries between types of armed groups can be found more broadly: Reno finds that in some post–Cold War African cases, "the appearance of armed factions associated with past and present governments, conceived in part as instruments to bolster these governments, *came to be the principal threat to their security*" (2011, 244). Militias can become enemies of governments, just as insurgents can become allies.

Containment

Containment is distinct from suppression in that it uses less state violence and is only triggered by armed group activities that rise above the politically acceptable threshold of unrest established by the state. The intensity of violence and size of force deployments are lower than what would be necessary for full-scale suppression, but containment still involves repression toward armed groups. Governments often avoid leadership decapitation for fear of excessive escalation and its forces are tasked with maintaining stability, even if that leaves armed groups in place. Governments pursuing this strategy "price in" a certain amount of violence and instability as the cost of governance, and aim to keep it from becoming politically disruptive. Containment is frequently used in areas of endemic but low-level unrest: mundane daily thuggery, modulated electoral violence, and militia presence are acceptable, and state forces maintain a limited posture and light footprint as long as these processes do not spiral into broader conflict.

In areas of the Philippines and north India—especially Bihar in the 1980s and 1990s—security services have adopted a containment strategy where there is sustained but comparatively low-level militia violence. The political impetus for full-scale suppression or incorporation does not exist, and so security forces aim to prevent major outbreaks of violence. Containment is often more politically appealing than violence monopolization.

Collusion

Collusion is a strategy of active, sustained cooperation between a state and an organized armed actor, ranging from explicitly holding back police and military action

against armed actors to actively providing guns, logistics, and training to them. It varies importantly in its depth and extent, as I theorize subsequently, but the strategy broadly hinges on mutual policy adjustments between a state and armed group in force deployment and targeting. Militias remain armed and continue to operate as organized political entities, sometimes pursuing political goals in tension with the government's, but their violence is not consistently aimed against the state.

Collusion can be a short-term expedient against a mutual enemy that later breaks down into suppression, a trust-building way-station en route to incorporation, or a long-term outcome in which the state and a militia develop clear rules of interaction and a strong basis for cooperation. The danger for governments is that collusion can hollow out state power and provide a base for militias to become unmanageably powerful; the danger for militias is that collusion may co-opt and defang a movement by embedding it in a system of patronage and control. As a result, even when durable, this strategy is rife with ambivalence and renegotiation.

Linkages between the armed militias of political parties and various Pakistani governments in Karachi can be seen as mutually beneficial arrangements for negotiating militarized elections (Staniland 2015; Gayer 2014). This is how private armies persist in the Philippines and why *chao pho* strongmen of Thailand emerged in the 1980s (Anderson 1990). In Iraq, from 2007, the United States colluded with Sunni nationalist armed groups (Long 2008). The subsequent Maliki government's policies increased suppression against Sunni armed actors, but collusion with Kurdish armed groups has been a constant since 2003.

Incorporation

Incorporation aims to demobilize a militia by formally integrating it into "normal" politics. It is a form of state making that seeks to eliminate non-state violence through absorption rather than annihilation. This is a strategy of peace negotiation in the case of insurgents or of formal demobilization or transition in the case of pro-state militias. Incorporation can lead to full transitions out of violent activity on the part of the group or can involve the armed group continuing to carry guns but now as formally part of the state. There are two variants of incorporation, those aimed at anti-regime forces and those aimed at pro-regime and militia forces. Both ultimately aim for the same outcome: the integration of non-state actors into state power and/or the political system. Incorporation can also fail, in peace processes that go nowhere or demobilization projects that collapse.

Militia incorporation, most relevant to this article, occurs when a state decides to shift away from a collusion strategy in favor of integrating militias into the state or ruling party apparatus. Bands of thugs become student activist wings; pro-state paramilitaries get uniforms and a spot in the official police; local private armies are turned into military units. This is how nobles' militaries were made into components of European great powers' armies, a key part of converting diffused private violence into concentrated national apparatuses of coercion (Tilly 1992). This process is

widespread in the contemporary developing world (Ahram 2011; Driscoll 2012) and has important echoes in American political development (Obert 2014).

In the Philippines, private armies have often been incorporated into a variety of local government security forces that are part of the state apparatus. For instance, Human Rights Watch (2012) argues that many units of Civilian Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGUs), the Special CAFGU Active Auxiliary, Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs), and Police Auxiliary Units have their roots as non-state groups. These are often used as tools of politicians, who transition their local followers from a private army into being on the government payroll. In this way, the private becomes public, though often still yoked to private purposes. In Colombia, demobilization of pro-state militias has been a crucial part of the state's strategy in the last decade and has involved extensive programs for reintegration (Daly 2011). In Karachi since the 1980s and in 1960s Calcutta, mainstream national political parties, ruling at the state or center, absorbed local criminals as muscle for managing militarized elections (Kohli 1990; Staniland 2015).

Ideology and Government Threat Perception

A full explanation of how states and armed groups forge armed order is beyond the scope of this article; I explore these broader questions elsewhere (Staniland 2015). Instead, the focus here is on how governments make decisions about the political status of militias and how those assessments inform their strategies. Regimes facing a landscape of non-state armed actors need to evaluate which groups are potential partners in collusion, objects of incorporation, or targets of suppression and containment. These are fundamentally political questions.

Ideology and Threat Perception

Governments pursue *ideological projects* that influence which armed groups are targeted with which strategies.[3] Ideology in this specific context refers to the boundaries of the polity and its relationship to the state that the regime wants to construct and defend.[4] Governments attempt to create political arenas that reflect these preferences, whether a linguistically homogenized polity or a communist-party state, though these projects are often contested and may disastrously fail. The laws, boundaries of political discourse, norms about acceptable behavior, and institutions that regimes try to put into place reflect their political commitments.

The political meaning of an armed group is not self-evident, and variation in this meaning shapes the desirability of strategies. A militarily weak militia that deploys symbols and goals antithetical to the regime's core project will be targeted with suppression, while a stronger group that is allied to the government's vision of politics is more likely to be colluded with or incorporated despite its greater material power. Militias' ideological positions vary across governments: for some regimes, leftist workers' militias are unacceptable, while for others, religious militias are instead

intolerable. Strategy requires beliefs about the political value of or threat posed by a group. These positions can shift as regimes change; the replacement of a counterrevolutionary regime by its revolutionary enemies should fundamentally reshuffle which armed groups are viewed as enemies and allies.

Theorizing political threat and alignment is necessary to explain how governments distribute their inevitably scarce capacity across militias. Militias can exist along a number of political dimensions and symbols, and the salience and meaning of these dimensions determines how a government assesses a militia's political value. Threat hinges on which cleavages regimes fear most, whether leftist revolution, ethnolinguistic fragmentation, religious radicalism, or majoritarian sectarianism, for instance.

A group can occupy an *ally*, *enemy*, or *gray zone* ideological position in the eyes of rulers. Ally militias are those that mobilize symbols, cleavages, and demands that can be easily accommodated within the political arena desired by a regime. For instance, paramilitaries that battle leftist insurgents are likely to be compatible with a regime dominated by oligarchic, anticommunist landlords. Enemy militias are those that mobilize goals in direct conflict with a ruling regime's ideological template. These need not be antistate insurgents: a workers' militia demanding redistribution may not be actively fighting the state, but nevertheless be viewed as an illegitimate, unacceptable threat to the government's favored political order. Finally, militias can occupy a "gray zone"[5] that mixes elements of political conflict and compromise. This is where many militias exist, with their own political agendas that straddle the space between political alignment and opposition.

Taking seriously regime preferences and fears creates dramatic variation across countries—and over time as regimes change and governments evolve—in the political roles of different kinds of militias. Alawite and Shiite militias are not seen as intrinsically threatening to the contemporary governments of Iraq and Syria, while Sunni militias are far more threatening, with Kurdish militias occupying a gray zone ideological position in between. By contrast, Shiite militias would be a fundamental threat to the government of Saudi Arabia because of the way it has defined the boundaries of the polity and politics. The "new professionalism" of the Brazilian security apparatus led to an increase over time in the political symbols and activities that Brazil's military began to see as threatening, especially leftist mobilization (Stepan 1974). It is impossible to make sense of threat perceptions without paying attention to the symbols and cleavages that regimes and their dominant security institutions view as salient, acceptable, and intolerable.

Ideological Projects: Origins, Reproduction, and Change

Ideological projects have roots in mass anticolonial and democratizing movements, revolutions, the organizational worldviews of militaries, and/or the goals of political parties.[6] Political preferences are historically constructed and contingent, creating rich variation in how regimes view internal security. The political organizations that

establish a regime—which range from praetorian armies to mass mobilizing political parties to revolutionary vanguards—have embedded within them a set of political goals, beliefs about cause and effect, and views of which political symbols and demands are acceptable (Brass 1974; Boudreau 2004; Straus 2015). The forces that establish a regime need to structure the political arena in environments of profound uncertainty and contestation. Ideas play a central role in establishing the desired boundaries of the political: "bursts of ideological activism occur in periods when competing ways of organizing action are developing or contending for dominance" (Swidler 1986, 279).[7]

In these contexts, ideology and political power are intertwined. Ideologies of the polity become embedded in the personnel of parties, the bureaucracy, and military, and are reproduced through both formal and informal processes of training and socialization. Ideologies interact with other variables, like economic class or electoral incentives, and sometimes these factors surely play a key role in policy. But it is a mistake to turn governments and state apparatuses into simple ciphers for dominant classes or electoral coalitions (Gorski 1993; Vu 2010). Many ideological projects can only be loosely, at best, mapped onto these ostensibly objective material interests. They are often acts of creation and imagination that represent challenges to existing structures of power and control, not simple rationalizations of cynical interests behind an ideational veil.

Regime ideologies are embedded in specific institutions and groups of and individuals within ruling parties and state apparatuses, rather than necessarily being internalized by the mass public (Wedeen 1999). Political leaders, bureaucrats, and military officers need not be sophisticated ideologues, but ideology can nevertheless shape their general preferences and predispositions, often through unreflective or habitual practices. Members of society may oppose the political vision that the state tries to establish. Thus, ideas can be essential to government policy, even in the absence of hegemony (cf. Gramsci 1971). The Burmese military was unable to impose a commonsensical understanding of politics on its citizens, yet within the military itself there was an understanding of politics (Callahan 2004; Nakanishi 2013). Mass populations, however, may also motivate or restrain elites' options, depending on the structure of preferences and representation: once regimes have publicly adopted and promulgated a certain vision of nationalism, for instance, it may be harder to radically change that vision.

Ideological projects are most stable and coherent when governments are unified around a common idea of what the state exists for and how the political arena should be structured. Divided state apparatuses (with civil–military, central–local, or intramilitary tensions) may be associated with competing ideological projects. Factionalized security forces or political elites that control those security forces can have heterogeneous notions of appropriate roles for armed groups, and state policy will therefore vary according to which arm of the state is acting. In these circumstances, the "government" will need to be disaggregated.

Table 1. Armed Group Political Roles and Government Strategies.

		Operationally Valuable?	
		Yes	No
Ideological fit	Ally	*Armed ally* Strategy: collusion (deep)	*Superfluous supporter* Strategy: incorporation
	Gray zone	*Business partner* Strategy: collusion	*Undesirable* Strategy: containment
	Enemy	*Strange bedfellow* Strategy: collusion (thin)	*Mortal enemy* Strategy: suppression

Notes: Italics signify the political role of the armed group.

There can be change over time in political preferences and threat perceptions, as military coups, major shifts in electoral power, and new uprisings or revolutions alter the framework of rule that guides a regime. Political entrepreneurs sometimes change ideologies of the polity from within, though this will be a protracted and challenging process. It is possible that the ideological basis of a regime may completely crumble into purely personal power seeking. In these cases, tactical and instrumental logics will dominate. However, it is important not to underestimate the ideological core of even stereotypically thuggish and kleptocratic governments (Levitsky and Way 2012).

Militia Political Roles and State Strategies

Governments must categorize and discriminate among armed actors prior to implementing strategy, for, as Laitin (1986, 181) notes, "it is impossible to develop a theory of calculation unless one knows what it is that is worth fighting for." Table 1 outlines a new typology of armed group political roles and predicted government strategies toward them. The horizontal axis, operational usefulness, adopts the claims of the conventional wisdom about the uses of militias to achieve specific political tasks, such as winning elections, fighting insurgents, or deniably targeting dissidents.

The vertical dimension of Table 1 provides the key contribution of this article. The intersection of ideological fit and operational utility creates six armed group political roles. Political roles determine government strategy. This approach gives a role to operational concerns, but it goes further to explore how regime ideology shapes beliefs about political threat and thus affects the choices of state policy makers.[8] In order to engage in strategic behavior in a complex, fundamentally ambiguous world, governments need to decide what goals to prioritize, how to achieve them, and what poses the greatest threat to a desired political order. Ideological visions provide one important way of making these decisions.

When there is not a clear operational use for a militia, ideological fit dominates state strategy as governments pursue their political preferences. The regime's vision of the rules of the game drives its allocation of coercion and compromise. This can lead to radically varying policies across armed groups within a state's territory, and over time as governments change.

Superfluous supporters are groups whose existence and behavior are compatible with the government's ideology, but whose continued existence does not provide operational benefits to the regime. These armed groups are incorporated into a ruling party and/or state apparatus, as paramilitaries and militias are often folded into formal institutions once they have served their purpose. Incorporation of superfluous supporters has frequently acted as a mechanism for rulers to centralize their control over coercion.

Undesirables are generally contained. They are objects of repression and monitoring, but not the full hammer blows of state power. Governments have scarce coercive capacity, and they are unlikely to expend it all on groups that are seen as a mild political challenge, even if these groups are large, wealthy, or well armed. Instead, we see recurrent raids, vigilance, and a general attempt to keep a lid on the activities of undesirables. They are treated as endemic, but low-level, problems to be managed. This is the most indeterminate political role. States may launch temporary suppression campaigns to tamp down an undesirable group's power, or try to incorporate them to eliminate the problem altogether, but these are costlier strategies and so containment should be the default approach.

Mortal enemies are targeted with large-scale commitments of state intelligence and coercion. They pose a core threat to a government's foundational political project because their existence and activities undermine the regime's perceived basis of rule, even if the physical size or military potency of their threat is minimal. Suppression strategies may not succeed, either immediately or ever, but they are perceived as essential. There is little bargaining or accommodation; instead, the very existence of a mortal enemy group is unacceptable.

Militias that are operationally useful to a government, by contrast, will be colluded with. This is why the outsourcing/delegation approach is the conventional wisdom: researchers have been drawn to studying instances of cooperation, while ignoring repression or incorporation of militias. Given collusion, they have unsurprisingly found an instrumental rationale. However, ideological fit crucially shapes the *depth and durability* of collusion. It determines the likelihood of different political roles and the distribution of strategies across groups: strange bedfellow relationships will be much less common than business partner and armed ally relationships, for instance, and different kinds of militias will fill different roles across regimes. A communist-party state intent on dominating the political sphere is far less likely to perceive any militias as business partners or armed allies than a regime that accepts decentralized private violence in areas of historical indirect rule. It then determines the level of collusion that a regime will pursue toward a group given an operational use for the group.

Strange bedfellow roles should be rare and short-lived, since the underlying political tension between government and militia goals makes cooperation tenuous. We see a lowest-common-denominator form of collusion that does not involve extensive coordination or institutionalization (Christia 2012). The operational needs required to embrace a strange bedfellow militia are severe: insurgents marching on the capital and no-holds-barred militarized elections, for instance, can trigger collusion with ideologically incompatible groups to stave off existential threats. These are partnerships of desperation. Once shared interests are achieved, strange bedfellows are likely to rapidly shift into a mortal enemy political role and be targeted for suppression.

Collusion with *armed allies* is deep and multifaceted. State and non-state forces operate hand in glove, with militias often being de facto embedded within the security apparatus and receiving intelligence, training, and resources. This is a far richer and more encompassing form of cooperation than with strange bedfellow militias. There is not a political threat posed by armed allies since their behavior and existence are compatible with the preferences and symbols of the government. If the operational value of a militia ends, it shifts into a superfluous supporter role and is likely to be targeted for incorporation.

The most interesting collusive relationship is with *business partners*, militias with a gray zone ideological fit with a government that are also operationally useful. Powerful armed groups, even if they are not closely ideologically aligned with the regime, can be valuable local enforcers in exchange for autonomy and resources from the government. Remarkably durable political architectures of violence may emerge around business partner linkages. Yet these tend to be transactional relationships marked by some degree of distrust and maneuvering for advantage; they are more comparable to cooperation between states in the international system than the close intertwining of state and group we see in the armed allies context.

Strategic Change

The trajectories of armed order that emerge from these strategies and group responses are beyond this article's scope, but we can identify recurrent mechanisms that should drive change in armed group political roles and state strategy. First, governments themselves can alter their ideological projects, whether as a result of major regime changes or shifts over time within regimes. Second, armed groups can adjust their ideological position relative to the government, either radicalizing or moderating. These processes are likely to be constrained by politics within the militia and its social base, as well as competition with other armed groups (Pearlman 2011; Krause 2013/2014). Third, the operational uses that governments see for a given militia may emerge or disappear, leading to changing regime needs for a collusion strategy.

Militias and the State in India and Pakistan

I provide a plausibility probe (Eckstein 1975) of these claims with evidence from postcolonial South Asia. This probe compares broad patterns of state strategy toward militias across India and Pakistan, showing how the different ideological projects at the heart of Indian and Pakistani elite understandings of nationalism have shaped the kinds of militias that are colluded with and how they are treated. Given the standard view of militias as apolitical thugs used to achieve simple tactical goals, showing that regime ideologies of the polity condition who the state cooperates with, and how, should make us more confident about the importance of ideological projects for explaining state–armed group interaction.

This is obviously not a full-fledged test of the argument. But it leverages a common historical background in British colonial rule (Tudor 2013) and the shared challenges of weak local intelligence and infrastructural power in peripheral counterinsurgency campaigns. Given these similarities, we would expect parallel militia politics in India and Pakistan, since similar state structures and counterinsurgency challenges should trigger straightforward outsourcing/delegation logics.

However, varying foundational symbols and salient cleavages in India and Pakistan have created different political fears. Militias that would be beyond the pale in India are valued allies or business partners of Pakistani regimes, and vice versa. For India's new leaders in the ruling Indian National Congress, India was intended to be a multireligious, secular state free of the communalism that had poisoned the latter decades of the British presence. This was not a universal vision, and it had variants even within the Congress, but a basic commitment to a non-sectarian Indian nationalism is clear in both the private and public discourse of key leaders. In Pakistan, by contrast, Islam was to form the basis of the new state and nation. This led to a fundamental legitimating challenge for Pakistani regimes: the entire point of the state was to protect South Asia's Muslims, which meant that demands deploying Islam as a symbol (even if a contested and multivocal symbol) were far more acceptable than in India (Shaikh 2009).

While in India, a basic acceptance of multilingualism occurred by the mid-1950s and was solidified in the mid-1960s (Ayres 2009, 164-68), in Pakistan language and ethnicity were seen as alarming cleavages that would undermine religious solidarity from within. The ideological projects of the new rulers of India and Pakistan created different political arenas: despite important similarities in institutions and local power structures (Jalal 1995), the kinds of political symbols and demands that these states have tolerated in the public sphere are very different.

These dynamics have conditioned government policies toward militias. In India, Muslim and Sikh militias have only been colluded with once they have abandoned any ideological opposition to the government and become armed allies. After they lose operational utility, they have been rapidly incorporated. There is little political space for enduring collusion with these kinds of groups, and suppression has been favored over containment when a group is not useful. Far more political space exists

for business partner and undesirable relationships with tribal and ethnolinguistic militias in India's Northeast. They are less politically threatening, making a wider range of political roles and state strategies possible. By contrast, in Pakistan, militias deploying Islamist symbols and demands have been extensively colluded with, while ethnolinguistic groups have been more likely to be suppressed or contained. The overall pattern of government violence management is consistent with my argument: the ideological foundations of India and Pakistan shape state strategies toward militias.

Militia Politics in India

As Brass (1974) and Wilkinson (2008) clearly show, the Indian state is much less likely to accede to, or even acknowledge the legitimacy of, religion as the explicit basis for political demands in comparison to linguistic demands (see also Capoccia, Sáez, and Rooij 2012). Language and tribal mobilization are more acceptable and less threatening cleavages. The ideological project pursued by Indian governments can broadly accommodate these forms of demands (Guha 2007). A ''set of written and unwritten rules'' (Brass 1974, 19) were explicitly developed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, and other Congress leaders to manage different kinds of demands. Indeed, we can see the debates and decisions in the primary record as the new country's political elite decided what India would be for and how its politics would be structured (for instance, the correspondence between Nehru and Patel on Sikh agitation in 1949, in Das 1971, 116-55).

These basic ideational rules have persisted over time within the Congress and the large bureaucracy tasked with managing violence. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Army have been the key organizations that deal with internal security, and the basic precepts of Indian nationalism are powerfully socialized and reproduced within these organizations. Even historically opposition parties, like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), accept at least part of this ideology: the BJP is no more likely to respond positively to Muslim political demands, though it is more likely to favor Hindu symbols and demands. Kashmir rapidly became central to Indian nationalism (Ganguly 1997; Bose 2003), further solidifying communal cleavages as a threat to the idea of India.

What does this mean for militia strategy? I compare Indian counterinsurgency operations in the Northeast with those in the Punjab and Kashmir on India's northwest, which then provide the basis for a broader comparison with Pakistan. In these cases, Indian security forces have faced formidable insurgent challenges built upon powerful social networks and sponsored by external states. Yet despite similar operational challenges, militia strategy has differed across these two sets of conflicts. There is a correlation between the political demands pursued by militias and state strategy pursued toward them. In India's Northeast, the primary cleavages mobilized have been linguistic and tribal, while in Punjab and Kashmir armed groups pursued goals linked to sensitive minority religious–political cleavages.

We see an extraordinary range of state strategies toward armed groups in the North East (Rajagopalan 2008, 41). The Indian state has been willing to collude with and try to incorporate a number of armed groups, some of which originated as clearly antistate insurgents but have taken on attributes much closer to militias, and others that arose as militias. Data from Ministry of Home Affairs reports and quality secondary sources show over three dozen ceasefire and peace deals in the region since 1975 (Staniland 2015). Deal making has been remarkably common, with business partners, superfluous supporters, and armed allies dotting the landscape.

There has been protracted collusion with business partner armed groups in Nagaland, Manipur, and several parts of Assam and Meghalaya in the form of ceasefires (usually known as "Suspension of Operations" agreements; MHA [Ministry of Home Affairs] 2012). For instance, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)-Isak-Muivah (IM) and -Khaplang (K) factions in Nagaland have long histories as insurgent groups, but since the late 1990s, their willingness to accept Indian sovereignty and their enduring power has made them business partners (per Table 1) who can keep Nagaland and Naga areas of Manipur stable. They continue to recruit and extort, but they are not seen as a deep ideological threat to the Indian state, and have become useful local stabilizers in a peripheral region where state building is difficult (Bhaumik 2009). This collusion, however, is still between suspicious, distinct organizations rather than a tight political embrace.

There has been much deeper collusion with allied militias in Assam in the 1990s (the so-called Surrendered United Liberation Front of Asom [ULFA], Baruah 2005, 171-75) and Nagaland in the late 1960s to early 1970s (Revolutionary Government of Nagaland [RGN]) that accepted Indian political authority. These cases are closer to the conventional delegation/outsourcing conceptualization of militia–state linkages than the business partner dynamics in Nagaland. Several groups, most strikingly the Mizo National Front and RGN, have been incorporated once they agreed to the basic guidelines of the Indian state and decided to abandon an independent political role. Incorporation has even become an incentive for small armed groups to emerge and then demand political and financial concessions in exchange for demobilization.

This is not to say that there are only business partners, armed allies, and superfluous supporters in the Northeast. There are also a number of undesirable groups that are contained, especially in Manipur and Meghalaya. Security forces operate in these areas to contain armed groups but without massive force deployments or highly motivated state-building initiatives. There have also been a few mortal enemies, primarily groups, like ULFA's Paresh Barua faction, that refuse to even talk to the Indian state (Bhaumik 2009, 122). Nevertheless, the Northeast remains a political space apart, allowing diverse state–armed group interactions (Baruah 2005, 75-76).

In the Punjab and Kashmir, the Indian state has also cooperated with militias. Collusion has been dramatically more restrained than in the Northeast, however. It has been a purely military tactic that is quickly dispensed with in favor of

suppression or incorporation once groups have served their desired purpose. There is far less political space to bargain with Muslim Kashmiri and Punjabi Sikh armed groups, mobilized along religious cleavages, than with Naga, Manipuri, or Mizo groups. Religious demands of this sort are more salient and dangerous than the linguistic and tribal cleavages that the Indian government has found ways of accommodating and managing. The state thus has had far greater political motivation to establish a monopoly of violence in these conflicts than in the Northeast.

In Kashmir, the militia groups that the Indian government was willing to cooperate with had to disavow any independent political agenda. They were ideologically neutered armed allies and, once they had served their purpose, were incorporated into the police after becoming superfluous supporters (Joshi 1999; Swami 1998). It is very difficult to imagine long-run spheres of influence or collusion with armed groups in this highly sensitive region. There is less detailed data available on Punjab, but flipped local militants seem to have been either eventually turned into police, as in Kashmir, or, allegedly, suppressed after they were no longer useful to the security forces (Fair 2009).

These tendencies are not universal. Politicians and security forces have sometimes sponsored or tolerated religious (primarily Hindu) thugs (Varshney 2002; Brass 1997; Wilkinson 2004), and there was a disastrously ill-fated collusion campaign with Sikh militants in early 1980s Punjab (Tully and Jacob 1985). Nevertheless, the militias that have mobilized on language and tribal cleavages are treated with a much broader range of strategies than those that have mobilized along politically incendiary minority religious dimensions.

Militia Politics in Pakistan

In Pakistan, we see a very different pattern. The military has come to dominate the political system (S. P. Cohen 2004), and its threat perceptions are crucial for understanding patterns of state strategy toward armed groups (Fair 2014; Shah 2014). Some of these perceptions have been shared by civilian politicians as well, especially those on the right. The ideological project at the heart of Pakistan is to carve out and defend a Muslim homeland in the subcontinent. Religious cleavages therefore have a very different significance than in India: they are the rationale for the state of Pakistan. For many Indian leaders, partition was a disaster; for Pakistani leaders, partition needs to be defended. In contrast to India, ethnolinguistic cleavages have generally been seen by state elites as threatening because they undermine the Muslim nation and state: there was a "presumption on the part of the Muslim League leadership that Urdu would naturally serve as the national language for this new country. Those who objected, or sought an alternative, were stigmatized as 'anti-Pakistan' fifth columns" (Ayres 2009, 28).

Thus, as Shah (2014, 56) argues, "In this exclusionary view of nationhood, recognizing intra-Muslim differences would mean the symbolic undoing of the Pakistan project." The political meaning of militias has varied accordingly. Pakistani

governments have primarily colluded with explicitly Islamist armed groups, which include militias in East Pakistan and jihadist groups that are active in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistani security managers view these types of actors as potential business partners and armed allies who can provide two specific kinds of operational value while not posing an ideological threat (Shaikh 2009, 149-50; though the latter assumption has increasingly proven problematic).

First, some are oriented toward fighting in Indian-administered Kashmir and Afghanistan, helping Pakistan exert leverage beyond its borders. Those, like Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Haqqani network, that profess obedience to the Pakistani state are treated as armed allies and tightly cooperated with. Some others, like factions of the Jaish-e-Mohammed, have either become mortal enemies that have turned against the state and become targets for suppression, or become ambivalent business partners that are willing to cooperate in targeting the Indians but are skeptical of the state's legitimacy (Hussain 2007).

Second, militias have been used as allies in counterinsurgency and internal security campaigns, most notably in 1971 East Pakistan and on the northwest frontier since 2002. In 1971, the Pakistan Army closely colluded with Islamist militants linked to the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami against Bengalis in East Pakistan. They were ideologically compatible armed allies of the military (Raghavan 2013). Since 2002, a number of local factions in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa have cut deals with the Pakistani state, such Hafiz Gul Bahadur's group in North Waziristan (Mahsud, Gopal, and Fishman 2013). These groups have been willing to act as local stabilizers in areas of unrest, in exchange for being largely left alone. They have deployed Islamist symbols that are compatible with the idea of Pakistan. Strikingly, these "wartime political orders" (Staniland 2012) resemble the state–militia relationships in India's Northeast. Militias that would be mortal enemies in India are business partners or armed allies in Pakistan, and vice versa.

By contrast, there has been little sustained collusion with other categories of armed groups. The Pakistani military and civilian establishment does not trust Baluch or Sindhi (or previously, Bengali) armed actors to defend their particular idea of Pakistan. These groups are treated as mortal enemies or undesirables. The only Baluch, Sindhi, or (non-Islamist) Bengali militia that seems to have been regularly patronized are apolitical "Baluch guns for hire" (International Crisis Group [ICG] 2014, 22) in Baluchistan, similar to the Indian use of militias in Kashmir.

The exception is Karachi, where ethnic Mojahir armed political parties have sometimes been colluded with by the military and civilian leaders. This is primarily because of the unique electoral power and organizational resilience of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). The MQM was targeted for suppression in 1992 to 1996 by the military and then Benazir Bhutto, which also led to army collusion with its splinter group, the MQM-Haqiqi (MQM-H). This MQM-H became a puppet of the military, acting as an armed ally until the military decided it was no longer useful in 2003.

But the MQM was able to resist attempts at suppression and to maintain its role as a key player in Karachi's volatile politics (Staniland 2015). Both military and civilian leaders have decided they must live with the MQM, which has usually signaled its willingness to operate within the confines of the establishment's idea of Pakistan (Gayer 2014). It has become a business partner loosely compatible with the ideological project of the ruling establishment, despite enduring political tensions that often undermine tight collusion.

Ideological Projects and Militia Politics in South Asia

This comparison provides evidence that my argument can explain important patterns that the dominant approach struggles with. Similar counterinsurgency challenges and a shared colonial legacy have not led to similar patterns of militia politics. Delegation and outsourcing do not simply emerge from functional imperatives. The intertwining of politics, religion, and language before and after partition established different political roles for different kinds of militias. Some demands and symbols have been seen by state security managers in each country as more legitimate and acceptable than others. These perceptions have important implications for strategy, even when operational incentives also matter. There is no way to make sense of Indian and Pakistani strategies without understanding what their governments want and who they fear.

Implications

Political conflict fundamentally involves political ideas. Yet the dominant conventional wisdom rarely treats ideology as an object for systematic theory and comparison. This article has made a case for taking ideas seriously, even in a realm as allegedly apolitical and nonideological as militias. Regimes need to make sense of threats and opportunities, and ideology helps to identify enemies, friends, and options. A contextual, historically embedded approach to ideological projects can be used for comparison and generalization. The evidence from South Asia reveals that differing government ideological projects explain patterns that the delegation/ outsourcing approach cannot. This plausibility probe shows the benefits of moving past political science's "materialist mainstream" (Hanson 2010, xviii).

Several other implications emerge from these arguments. First, creating a state monopoly of violence is not always synonymous with a government's political interests. There is nothing inevitable about movement toward a Weberian ideal type of state dominance of social violence. Sometimes enduring containment and collusion policies are perfectly compatible with a government's ideological project. For groups that do not pose an unambiguous political threat, there is wide latitude in how governments can choose to respond to armed mobilization.

This means that the distinction between "strong" and "weak" states is of limited use. Most states have some coercive capacity; the key question is where and how

they choose to use it. We need to instead examine variation in the spatial and functional distribution of state presence, capability, and behavior. Historically embedded explanations of the government preferences guiding these policies are necessary: not all governments will respond to armed mobilization in the same way, even if the military balance of forces, state structure, or electoral coalitions are identical.

Second, the distinction between "insurgent" and "militia" groups needs to be rethought. Armed actors do not have fixed or intrinsic relationships with states. Insurgents can cooperate, militias can rebel, and private armies can oscillate between alliance and defiance. Future research should delve into how armed groups push back against state strategies to create varying long-run trajectories of armed order (Hidalgo and Lessing 2014; Staniland 2015). The political roles I have identified provide an analytical link between different kinds of armed groups. The NSCN-IM in Nagaland is technically an insurgent group, for instance, but has cooperated with India's collusion strategy since 1997 and thus has become more "prostate" over time.

Militias should therefore be placed in dialog with insurgents, electoral armed groups, criminal networks, and private armies as key players in the armed politics that emerge when states and armed groups clash, cooperate, and combine. The conventional focus on "civil war" in isolation from electoral violence, state building, or regime politics is analytically unhelpful. Armed politics provides a more fruitful intellectual lens through which to study order and violence.

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Notes

1. See also Reny (2014) on Chinese government strategies toward Christian churches.
2. Ideology can matter in armed groups as well. See Oppenheim et al. (2015) and Sanín and Wood (2014).
3. Davenport (2007) notes that ideology receives little attention in literature on state repression.
4. This is the only possible way to conceptualize ideology. It is necessary to choose an approach in order to engage in research, but other researchers focusing on other issues may have good reasons to adopt a different one. Overviews include Eagleton (1991), Gerring (1997), and Hanson (2010).
5. I owe this phrase, though with a quite different meaning, to Auyero (2007), who uses it to describe blends of legality and illegality in the context of contentious politics.
6. For related arguments about the ideological roots of dominant parties, see Levitsky and Way (2012) and Tudor (2013). See Sirnate (2013) on state perceptions of different kinds of tribal groups in India, Lalwani (2014) on in-group/out-group dynamics in counterinsurgency, and Boudreau (2004) and Callahan (2004) on the ideological pillars of authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia.
7. See also Shelef (2010) on change over time and Levi (2006, 11), on "governmental cultures."
8. This is mentioned in some research on militias, but not theoretically central. For instance, Wilkinson (2004) simply notes that for his argument to work, "An important enabling condition here is the presence of some preexisting antiminority sentiment among members of the ethnic majority" (p. 4, fn. 10).

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