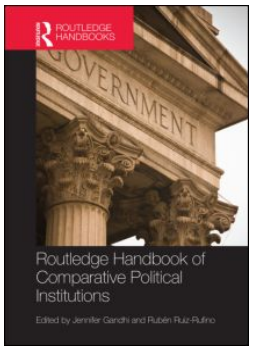
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26
POLITICAL VIOLENCE
An institutional approach

Laia Balcells

Are institutions relevant for understanding political violence? The relationship between violence and institutions is as old as Hobbes (Levi and Menaldo, Chapter 2). In fact, if we assume that *political violence* and *order* are two sides of the same coin, we can argue that the fundamental questions that have inspired political theorists for centuries are necessarily related to political violence.[1]

Among the literature on conflict and political violence, which has developed significantly during the last three decades, there have been approaches emphasizing its political side (e.g. Clausewitz 1832/1976; Schmitt 1976; Tilly 1992; Della Porta 1995; McAdam *et al*. 2001) as well as rationalist approaches highlighting its economic determinants (e.g. Collier 2000a; Keen 1998; Esteban and Ray 1994). Institutions have nevertheless been the focus of attention of many scholars, independently of the approach and the discipline. Indeed, even the work of prominent economists such as Daron Acemoglu has given a fundamental role to institutions in explaining outcomes such as coups, revolutions, and mass protests (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).[2]

This chapter starts off with a brief overview of the existing literature on political violence by reflecting on how institutions can account for the different varieties of political violence that we observe in contemporary world. It then focuses more specifically on the role of institutions in accounting for a predominant form of political violence: *civil wars*. The chapter concludes by highlighting several avenues of future research on the relationship between institutions and violent conflict.

Political violence and institutions

"Political violence" is an ambiguous concept and its definition involves some controversy (Della Porta 1995: 2) for it implies defining not only what is "political," but also what is "violence." In general, we can understand political violence as "repertoires of collective action that involve great physical force and cause damage to an adversary in order to impose political aims" (Della Porta and Tarrow 1986: 614, cited in Della Porta 1995: 2). Political violence includes phenomena that range from mass protest, coups, and terrorism to riots, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, and genocide (Kalyvas 2013).

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Why should institutions be taken into account in the study of political violence? Institutions are systems of rules, beliefs, norms, and organizations that together generate a regularity of (social) behavior (Greif 2006, cited in Levi and Menaldo, Chapter 2). Hence, we can expect institutions to have a critical role in explaining violence with political aims because institutions themselves are very often likely to be the target of political violence. In addition, institutions also shape the opportunities and capacities for using violence: if institutions are such that citizens under their rule are satisfied with them and everyone perceives that there is inclusiveness, violent conflict should not be taking place. At the other end of the spectrum, if institutions are too repressive (i.e. in autocracies), even if people are likely to be dissatisfied, there are no opportunities for the organization and perpetration of political violence and therefore violent conflict should not occur (Hegre *et al.* 2001; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Vreeland 2008).[3] Furthermore, electoral *politics* and *violence* can be conceived as strategic *substitutes* (Dunning 2011), and, in fact, some argue that elections function peacefully only when the electoral chances of competing parties reflect their military force "in the shadow" (Przeworski *et al.* 2014).[4] Last but not least, institutions should be relevant for understanding political violence because they can have a crucial role in solving the commitment problems that generate inefficient conflict (Fearon 1995) and/or that impede the resolution of conflict (Walter 2001; Werner 1998; Wittman 2009; Powell 2006; Fearon 2014). This chapter provides an overview of all these different ways in which institutions relate to conflict.

Institutions and varieties of political violence

Despite the significant development in the scholarly study of conflict in the last thirty years, we still lack a comprehensive theory of political violence. Theories explaining low intensity forms of political violence are not fully able to explain civil wars or more intense forms of political violence (Sambanis 2004) despite the fact that civil wars "grow out of lower-level state dissident interactions and the key to understand them lies in identifying the escalatory process that leads from one form of contention to another" (Davenport 2013: 3). Even though they tend to be studied separately, different forms of political violence have important connections: for example, *popular protests* very often precede *coups* (in fact, they are their most consistent predictor, according to Belkin and Schofer 2003), *coups* sometimes precede *civil wars* (Kalyvas 2006; Fearon 2004; Balcells and Kalyvas 2014),[5] and *terrorism* is very often part of *civil war* fighting (Sambanis 2008). In addition, *terrorism* and *contentious politics* might work as complements or as substitutes (Sánchez-Cuenca and Aguilar 2009), and civil wars sometimes escalate as a response to *state repression* (Della Porta 2014; Sambanis and Zinn 2005).[6] Also, *criminal violence* has several important connections with all forms of political violence, to the point that some authors have even considered insurgencies as "quasi-criminal activities" (Collier 2000b). Despite all these links, bringing different forms of political violence under the same explanatory umbrella is undoubtedly challenging and that is probably why it has not yet been done successfully.[7]

Institutions and civil wars

In this chapter, we will focus on one particular form of political violence: *civil wars*. Kalyvas (2006) defines civil wars as armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign unit between parties subject to a common authority.[8] Although civil wars imply the perpetration of political violence by groups in conflict, they are more than the mere aggregation of violent events. Civil wars "must involve an extended contest of arms to win state power" (Payne 2011: 1). Civil wars are usually fought over political and institutional issues, for example: demand for

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self-determination, regime or leadership change. Hence, because they are *objects of violent contention*, institutions can be expected to be crucial in accounting for the incidence of civil wars.

The existing civil war literature has unsurprisingly taken institutions very seriously. This has been the case in the study of both ethnic and non-ethnic civil wars. Ethnic conflict scholars (e.g. Horowitz 1985; Reynal-Querol 2002; Cedermann *et al.* 2011; Cederman *et al.* 2010; Wimmer 2013) emphasize the role of institutions in preventing this type of violence.[9] In his seminal work, Horowitz (1985) explains that the distribution of economic and political power between ethnic groups is crucial to understand ethnic conflict. Reynal-Querol (2002, 2004) highlights the importance of a political system's degree of inclusiveness in explaining ethnic and religious violence, and she does it by connecting the ethnic conflict literature with that of consociationalism (Lijphart 2004). In her theoretical model, institutions allowing the participation of ethnic minorities are crucial in the prevention of ethnic conflict.[10] More recently, Cederman *et al.* (2010, 2011) have analyzed what they call ethnic "horizontal equality" and its effect on conflict. They distinguish between political and economic horizontal inequality. *Political* horizontal equality refers to equal access of ethnic groups to politics that occur at the center of the state. "Civil wars and armed conflicts are most likely in ethnocracies that violate the principles of ethnic self-rule" (Wimmer 2013: 6).[11] From this perspective, institutions ought to be not only inclusive but also flexible, so that inclusiveness is guaranteed across time.[12] *Economic* horizontal inequality, which captures wealth differences between groups in a society,[13] also has an impact on ethnic conflict, with more unequal societies more prone to ethnic civil conflict (Cedermann *et al.* 2011). In this regard, redistributive institutions have an important role in civil war prevention.[14]

Beyond the study of ethnic conflict, authors such as Hegre *et al.* (2001) and Fearon and Laitin (2003) have also found an impact of institutional factors on civil wars. Specifically, they study the role of regime type, finding that "semidemocracies" (or so-called "anocracies") are more likely to experience internal conflict as compared to either democracies or autocracies.[15] The rationale they bring forward is that these regimes generate exclusion while not repressing enough to impede the organization of insurgent violence. As Vreeland summarizes it:

> Under pure dictatorship, opportunities to organize are too limited and the probability of successful collective action low. Pure democracy presents the possibility for peaceful collective action. Semidemocracies or "anocracies" are caught in the middle: they allow dissidents to organize, but nonviolent collective action may be too restrictive to be effective. In this context, violence is more likely to be seen as the most effective recourse for dissidents, and the state reacts with violence accordingly. An inverted U-shaped relationship between level of democracy and the probability of political violence is predicted.
>
> *(Vreeland 2008: 401)*

Some authors have challenged these results due to measurement issues in the independent variable "anocracy" (Gleditsch and Ward 1997; Vreeland 2008).[16]

From a slightly different angle, Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) also argue that civil conflict is highly determined by the nature of institutions in place. According to them, violence is more likely where there are "extractive" institutions because individuals will want to extract a share of the pie in a context in which the state is expropriating any product that is being generated. In their framework, political violence is a characteristic of societies with extractive institutions, and not of societies with "inclusive" institutions.[17] Carles Boix (2002, 2008), for his part, also conceives political violence as an instrument to change redistribution patterns, given existing institutions.[18]

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Note that, in these approaches, institutions are conceived both as the *object of violent contention* and as *shaping the opportunities and capacities for using violence*. These two dimensions of institutions are highly intermingled because if institutions are such that they allow for inclusiveness and peaceful collective action (and thus they limit the opportunities for using violence) they are also less likely to be the object of contention. With regards to *institutions as a substitute for violence* (or violence as a substitute of peaceful interaction), they have been explored mostly in theoretical approaches to conflict. If war is politics by other means (paraphrasing Clausewitz 1832/1976) it makes sense to think of violence and democratic competition as strategic substitutes (as in Przeworski *et al.* 2014), and to try to understand the conditions under which rational actors will engage in violence instead of bargaining (as in Fearon 1995, 2014).[19] Factors such as relative military capabilities between contesting actors, as well as commitment and informational problems are deemed as crucial for explaining conflict and violence. Even though there is a vast formal literature on the rational explanations of war (see, for example, Skaperdas 1992; Leventoglu and Slantchev 2007; Slantchev and Tarar 2011; Leventoglu and Tarar 2008; Esteban and Ray 1994), empirical explorations of these issues are still scarce (see, for example, Reed 2003; Chacón *et al.* 2011; Esteban *et al.* 2012).

Within the study of civil wars, a fundamental and yet quite underdeveloped line of research is one that bridges institutions and *wartime dynamics*. Can institutions explain violence during conflict? According to Posen (1993), war implies the collapse of the political center and generates fear among ethnic groups, which must take actions to reduce threats to their security. In his approach, violence is due to the absence of institutions that allow for the solution of commitment problems between groups. Fearon and Laitin (1996) challenge Posen's basic assumption and explain that there are two different institutional mechanisms that emerge to deal with problems of opportunism, which, according to them, is what generates inter-ethnic violence: *spiral regime* and *in-group policing regime*. Thus, according to these authors, in the absence of formal institutions, ethnic violence should not be the norm.[20] Stathis Kalyvas (2006) develops a strategic explanation of violence that emphasizes the tactical and strategic incentives of armed groups and civilians. Institutions are an important element to explain irregular warfare because state-building processes are a crucial tool to win the hearts and minds of the population (that is especially the case for insurgents).[21] Roger Petersen (2001) gives particular relevance to local institutions (i.e. the community) in explaining violent rebellion against military occupation.[22] Balcells (2011, 2014) explains that local level institutions and political leadership have a crucial role in the perpetration of different forms of violence against civilians during civil war.

Authors such as Metelits (2010), Mampilly (2011), and Arjona (2010) have recently explored institutions of governance during armed conflict, namely how institutions are shaped by war. While Metelits and Mampilly explore variation across civil wars and armed organizations, Arjona focuses on variation within civil wars and organizations. This author argues that during irregular wars there are different types of institutions that originate from the interactions between armed groups and civilians. Armed groups have an interest in becoming *stationary bandits* (Olson 1993) instead of just extracting resources from the civilian populations they control militarily; yet, these populations do not always agree to being governed by insurgent groups. The interaction between insurgents and local populations generates different "contracts" or forms of governance. Arjona argues that these local level contracts are highly conditional on the characteristics of prewar local institutions, which determine the incentives and the ability of local populations to influence the actions of the rebel groups.[23] Jeremy Weinstein (2006) also emphasizes the role of institutions in explaining violence dynamics during civil war: his focus, however, is the armed organization as an institution. Weinstein distinguishes between

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"justice-oriented" and "greed-oriented" armed groups, which attract different types of individuals. The former are organizations that emerge when resources are limited and are characterized by strong social networks permitting recruitment, as well as cohesion and discipline. They achieve restraint in violence. Greed-oriented groups emerge in resource rich contexts, and they attract individuals that are motivated by greed. The latter generates organizational environments that do not allow for restraint of violence.[24] These organizations are those perpetrating the worst human rights violations, including sexual violence (Wood 2006; Cohen 2013).

There is a vast literature on *institutions as a form to resolve violence*. This literature is composed of both formal and empirical approaches. Based on the idea that groups in conflict face commitment and informational asymmetry problems (Fearon 1995), authors such as Werner (1998), Walter (2001), Wittman (2009), or Cunningham (2011)—among others—have explored empirically the conditions that make negotiated agreements more likely. Some authors have explored mediation institutions that are more likely to be successful at promoting peace (e.g. Kydd 2003; Beardsley 2012). Others, such as Regan (1996), Doyle and Sambanis (2006), Fortna (2008), or Toft (2009) have analyzed peacekeeping operations and their impact on domestic institutions for war termination and war recurrence. Brancati and Snyder (2012) have studied the effect of early elections on civil war recurrence, and other authors have explored the impact of postwar electoral institutions on the duration of peace (Cammett and Malesky 2012). The main take away from this literature is that both international and domestic institutions have an impact on the likelihood of war termination as well as on war recurrence and peace duration.[25] Nonetheless, finding the optimal peacekeeping institutions is not an easy task as there are a lot of context-dependent factors that affect their likelihood of success.

Next steps

When in the late sixties Samuel Huntington referred to the role of institutions in explaining "disorder" in society, he probably established the foundations of institutional explanations of political violence to come afterwards, which are more sophisticated (empirically and theoretically). Today, from the large literature on conflict, we know that institutions matter, and they do so in multifaceted ways. Institutions can have diverging effects on political violence depending on the form of violence considered. Thus, there are a myriad of ways in which the study of institutions can potentially be bridged to political violence, and scholars of violence should try to establish these links in further research. Below, I list a set of additional avenues of research on this area.

First, as scholars of contentious politics such as McAdam *et al.* (2001), Della Porta (1995), or Davenport (2013) argue, we need to better understand cycles of protest, repression, and "action-reaction" escalation processes leading to civil wars. Yet, we also need to better theorize the impact of institutions on the different phases of escalation. One particular institution might have a significant impact in the early stages of a rebellion, but have no impact at later stages. This could be better explored both formally and empirically.

Second, research on violence dynamics has mostly focused on *lethal political violence*, but there is room for improvement in the understanding of other types of violence. On the one hand, we need to understand better *non-lethal* forms of *political violence* such as displacement (see, for example, Steele 2010), sexual violence (see Wood 2006; Cohen 2013), torture (Rejali 2007), and forms of violence that have been called "extra-lethal" (Fujii 2013). These forms of violence often take place in conjunction with lethal violence, and they act as complements (Hoover-Green 2011), but they have their own dynamics and determinants. On the other hand, we need

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to understand better the role of institutions in *criminal violence*, as well as on what some authors have called "social violence" (Fox and Hoelscher 2012). Criminal violence does not comply with the characteristics associated with political violence, as their actors do not have clear political aims and they do not attempt to rule or govern. Yet, cases such as the recent conflict in Mexico (the so-called "war on drugs") and the politicized character of some criminal organizations make increasingly obvious that the distinction between political and criminal violence is blurry.[26] Scholars should take criminal violence seriously and systematically compare its patterns with other forms of political violence.

Third, we have a lot of knowledge about the effects of institutions on conflict, but we still do not know much about the impact of conflict on institutions. Tilly's seminal work (1992) argues that state structures as we know them appeared in the Middle Ages as a by-product of the efforts to organize the means of war. More recently, excellent work has been done on war and institutional change (e.g. Scheve and Stasavage 2009; Karaman and Pamuk 2013), as well as on the effect of ethnic war on partition and the creation of new states (see, for example, Kaufmann 1996; Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl 2009; Chapman and Roeder 2007; Etzioni 1992; Fearon 2004; Downes 2001). Yet, more should be done along the lines of establishing theoretical connections between all forms of political violence (that is, not only war) and institutional development.[27]

Fourth, the relationship between international institutions and domestic conflict dynamics should be further researched. An extensive literature in International Relations has contributed to the understanding of the role of international institutions on international conflict (Goldstein 2012). Indeed, from the perspective of liberal institutionalism "international institutions are important actors in international politics, powerful enough to help push states away from war and to promote peace" (Mearsheimer 2013: 571).[28] Yet, international institutions such as the UN are thought of bringing not only international, but also domestic peace (Mearsheimer 2013: 571). According to Goldstein (2012), for example, the end of the Cold War led to increased peace within countries because of the role of international institutions. The post-Cold War has observed more civil war terminations, which have benefited from third party interventions (Walter 2001; Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2008). In addition, international peacekeeping institutions, despite important weaknesses (Autesserre 2009), have also been seen as having a positive impact on postwar stability and non-recurrence (Fortna 2008; Toft 2009), as well as on civilian protection (Hultman *et al.* 2013). More research could be undertaken in order to understand the impact of international institutions on all forms of violence processes, ranging from non-lethal violence to mass displacement and genocide.

A final avenue of research lies in incorporating time and time changes in institutional explanations to violence. Indeed, most institutional approaches are somehow path-dependent. As a consequence, they manage to explain cross-sectional variation but they are not as proficient at explaining over-time variation in violent outcomes. Even though institutions are hard to change, they do seem to transform and evolve over time. We need better theories to account for institutional change,[29] and about the impact of this change on political violence. Bisin and Verdier (2013) have recently modeled the joint dynamics of culture and institutions. Similar approaches, emphasizing the determinants of institutional change over time, as well as the dynamic impact of institutions on political violence would constitute significant contributions to a literature that so far has been better at explaining static outcomes than dynamic ones. The latter is particularly relevant in the study of conflict because, as explained, civil wars and other forms of political violence often have an impact on institutions. Only by taking into account the bidirectional relationship between institutions and violence can we understand patterns of conflict change and continuity across time and space.

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Notes

1 Samuel Huntington (1968) made this palpable when he established a clear dichotomy between "ordered" and "disordered" societies: political communities are ordered (i.e. well-functioning) when there is a good fit between social forces and institutions; in contrast, when there is a misfit, there is social disorder and therefore violence.

2 Yet, it must also be said that institutional approaches are becoming somewhat rare. This is partly due to the fact that scholars tend to focus more on the effect of specific variables (for example: natural resources, wealth, inequality, polarization) while abandoning comprehensive macro-level explanations of conflict and violence.

3 Note, however, that a prevalent form of political violence in autocracies is *state terror*, which is unilateral on the side of the state.

4 According to Przeworski (1991) "democracy is an equilibrium" when there is parity between competitors. In other words, democracy will be stable when the two competing blocs have a high chance of winning the election.

5 Given that "the use or threat of force" is a fundamental component of their definition, *coups* should be considered a form of political violence. The likelihood of coups is explained by economic factors (Londregan and Poole 1990), but also by institutional factors, including the democratic/autocratic nature of institutions.

6 Also, a fundamental question in the study of contentious politics has been which institutions turn terrorism into legitimate dissent (Lichbach 2005: 163).

7 McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, for example, have aimed at providing general theories explaining "contentious politics," which they believe should account for events ranging from the 1789 revolution in France to the nationalist mobilization that led to the breakup of the Soviet Union. They argue that "different forms of contention—social movements, revolutions, strike waves, nationalism, democratization, and more—result from similar mechanisms and processes" (McAdam *et al.* 2001: 4). However, their theory does a better job at describing mechanisms than at identifying causal mechanisms.

8 "Civil war, as a form of armed conflict within a single political unit rather than a foreign war between two different polities, is one of the oldest forms of strife" (Payne 2011: I).

9 Ethnic violence is a particular form of political violence, which can take the form of civil war or not. Brubaker and Laitin (1998) define ethnic violence as "violence perpetrated across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state (or a representative of a state), and in which the putative ethnic difference is coded—by perpetrators, targets, influential third parties, or analysts—as having been integral rather than incidental to the violence" (428). Despite ethnic violence being perceived to be the norm, Fearon and Laitin (1996) explain that peaceful and ethnic cooperation between ethnic groups is more common than large-scale violence.

10 This author tests her predictions with different sets of variables capturing the inclusiveness of the political system, which she conceives as "the ability of a system to avoid political exclusion" (Reynal-Querol 2004: 446). In her approach, democracies can have different levels of political inclusiveness depending on the electoral system (proportional vs. majoritarian), and on the number of checks and balances, among other factors.

11 Wimmer (2013) has a comprehensive approach and considers that ethnic conflicts can take place both at the center, between included groups (what he calls *infighting*), and at the periphery, between included and excluded groups. While the former conflicts aim at changing existing state institutions, the latter aim to create a new state and therefore a new set of institutions.

12 Indeed, constitutional rigidities might contribute to conflict. Lebanon is one example of a country where consociationalism became controversial when the demographic distribution of Muslims and Christians in the country shifted in a way that the political system was no longer guaranteeing inclusiveness.

13 *Horizontal* economic inequality is different from *vertical* economic inequality. While the former measures *between-group* inequality, the latter captures *within-group* (and between-individuals) inequality (Cedermann *et al.* 2011).

14 A caveat: several authors have recently highlighted the potential endogeneity problems in the relationship between ethnicity and conflict: ethnic categories can be created and/or reinforced during conflict and therefore can be endogenous to the conflict itself (Kalyvas 2009; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Balcells 2012). In addition, ethnic categories are not totally exogenous to start with (Lieberman and Singh 2012, Posner 2005). Hence, it is not totally obvious that we should be focusing on the total number of ethnic

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groups in a country (and their degree of polarization and fractionalization) in order to explain mobilization along ethnic lines and, ultimately, ethnic violence.

15 There has also been a large literature linking regime type to *terrorism*, the main finding being that partial democracies and fractionalized democracies are the kind of regimes most likely to experience terrorism (Chenoweth 2013: 359).

16 Gleditsch and Ward (1997) and Vreeland (2008) warn against using the Polity index to measure *anocracy*. This index includes measures of political violence, which implies that, by using it, we are ultimately using political violence to predict political violence. Vreeland introduces a revised index that does not include the components defined with respect to political violence and finds that it has no significant effect on civil war.

17 Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) use settler mortality at times of colonization as an instrumental variable for "type of institutions." High settler mortality determined the non-adoption of "neo-Europe" settlements, and the establishment of "extractive" institutions (as opposed to "inclusive" institutions, which were established in areas with low settler mortality). Note that they assume that early institutions have either persisted or highly determined current institutions in former colonies.

18 Boix (2002, 2008) has provided a comprehensive model for guerrilla conflict and civil wars, which is based on the nature of economic endowments and their distribution within society. His model accounts mostly for class-based political violence.

19 Note that violent conflict and electoral politics can also be viewed as "strategic *complements*—so that politicians use violence in part to advance electoral aims" (Dunning 2011: 328).

20 In Fearon and Laitin's model (1996) inter-group violence only occurs under the spiral regime, in which the members of group A indiscriminately punish all members of groups B for opportunistic behavior by an individual in the latter group. Violence does not occur under the in-group policing regime, in which members of group A identify opportunists in the group and punish them.

21 In fact, Kalyvas defines his theory as one "of the informal institutions of civil war" (Kalyvas 2009).

22 Inspired by Jack Knight's (1992) definition of social institutions Petersen argues that "the community is a set of social, familial, economic, and political interactions, indeed, a history of socially shared interactions, which produces information and expectations about how sanctions and rewards will operate during the period of rebellion" (Petersen 2001:19).

23 Perhaps one of the most interesting implications of this type of institutional approach is that it allows for the establishment of a clear link between behavior at the micro-level (of civilians and armed organizations) and macro-level patterns. For example, at a cross-national level, Balcells and Kalyvas (2014) identify different types of wars associated to different patterns of institution building by insurgents, and they observe significant correlations with war length and war outcomes. Irregular wars, where insurgents are more likely to build high quality institutions such as those described by Arjona (2010), are significantly longer than wars in which rebels avoid engaging with the population and establishing durable forms of governance.

24 Staniland (2012) argues that the nature of social networks mediates the relationship that Weinstein finds between economic endowments and nature of armed organizations.

25 From the aforementioned literature we learn, for example, that elections should not be instituted in early phases of peace in order not to destabilize countries (Brancati and Snyder 2012), that proportional electoral institutions, which are more inclusive, are overall beneficial for peacekeeping (Cammett and Malesky 2012), or that security sector reform is overall desirable in order to make postwar countries more legitimate and therefore more stable (Toft 2009). Also, international peacekeeping operations should build on local politics in order to be functional and not counterproductive (Autesserre 2009).

26 Interestingly, Fox and Hoelscher find that political-institutional factors play a significant role in explaining interpersonal violence. They find that it peaks in "hybrid" political orders: "weakly institutionalized democracies are uniquely prone to social violence" (Fox and Hoelscher 2012: 432).

27 On the institutional impact of violence, we can find some isolated contributions in the study of social movements and contentious politics (e.g. McAdam *et al.* 2001; Della Porta 1995; Beissinger 2002) or terrorism (e.g. Lichbach 2005), but there still is plenty of room for more comprehensive approaches to this relationship.

28 As Mearsheimer (2013) puts it, from a "realist" perspective, institutions cannot do much to change states' behavior because they are diplomatic instruments that the great powers employ selfishly. Put otherwise, institutions are irrelevant in realist approaches to international relations and international war because institutions will be beneficial for the great powers and, when not, the great powers will just ignore them.

29 For example, how do we go from Acemoglu and Robinson's (2006, 2012) "extractive" to "inclusive" institutions? Or how do we go from Huntington's (1968) "bad" institutions to "good" ones?

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