

# The Political Consequences of Civil Wars\*

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This Version: November 2010.

## Abstract

What are the political consequences of civil wars? In this paper we argue that these cannot be deduced simply from either the preferences of initial power holders or rebels because civil wars mobilize new groups. This is particularly the case in developing countries with urban bias and weak states where rural elites are often discriminated against. Such elites have the most to lose from rural insurgencies, so they have an incentive to form paramilitary groups to fight the rebellion. Once formed, such groups may forge a coalition with rural elites making them much more powerful politically even to the extent of changing the post civil war political equilibrium and reversing urban bias. However, the paramilitaries may become autonomous and independently contest power. We develop a model of an ongoing civil war where the rural elite may form a paramilitary group. We study the extent to which rural elites are able to collaborate with a paramilitary group to increase their political power. The model suggests that the rural elite will be able to collaborate when the presence of paramilitaries do not generate too much ‘collateral damage’ and when urban bias is high. Paramilitaries are willing to collaborate with rural elites when it is difficult for them to independently contest power and when urban bias is low. Civil wars lead to political change when urban bias is relatively high, the state is difficult to overthrow and when there is intense rural class conflict so that paramilitaries are relatively beneficial for the rural elite. We illustrate these outcomes via the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Colombia.

Extremely Preliminary - Comments Welcome!

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\*We are grateful to Fotini Christia, Jorge Dominguez, James Fearon, Steve Haber, Oliver Kaplan, Elizabeth Wood and seminar participants at the Rockefeller Center at Harvard and Stanford for their comments and suggestions. We thank Diana Maclean for help with the diagrams.

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# 1 Introduction

A small, select group of civil wars have formed the basis of the foundational works on political development. The English civil wars of the seventeenth century are perhaps the most prominent examples of internal conflicts that have become central to our understanding of historical political economy, but one could also include in this group the American, Russian, and Chinese civil wars, the Meiji Restoration, and the Mexican Revolution. Dating at least to the classic work on the relationship between violence and political modernization of Huntington (1968) and Moore (1966), and including, among many others, the work of Skocpol (1979) and North and Weingast (1989), Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) and Pincus (2009), scholars have argued that these conflicts have had powerful, long-lasting effects on the political economy of these countries. To describe only a few typical cases, Ransom (2005) and Moore both argued that the United States would not have become an advanced democracy had the Confederacy won; meanwhile, Moore and North and Weingast saw the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, respectively, as fundamental causes for the remarkable pace of political and economic development in England.

Given the prominence of these civil wars in the literature, it is surprising that we lack a systematic understanding of the political consequences of civil wars. We lack, for instance, answers to questions such as the following: when do civil wars change the long-run political equilibrium of a given country?; when, if at all, do they give rise to new ruling coalitions?; and what kinds of equilibria or coalitions are created by civil wars under different circumstances? This paper provides an initial step in this broader research agenda. Using detailed case study evidence from Sierra Leone and Colombia and a theoretical model, it proposes and documents one mechanism that can explain the variation in the political consequences of civil war.

There can be many possible ways in which a civil war could stimulate political change. An obvious idea is that mobilization for warfare can spur particular groups to solve the collective action problem and enter politics as an organized interest in ways which they have not done before. For example, the origins of the Tory and Whig party in Britain can be traced to the competing sides - the Cavaliers and Roundheads - in the English civil war of the 1640s (Trevelyan, 1938). One can think of many other political parties which have similar roots: the Kuomintang in Taiwan, the political parties that currently control Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe and both the main political parties in Angola and Mozambique.

But while one can cite such examples there are also many other civil wars that do not lead to such political change. Moreover, the groups that get organized and the resulting political

change which stems from civil wars is not always what one might anticipate. For example, many civil wars pit some disaffected group demanding social or institutional change against an incumbent regime. In some cases the rebels are defeated with little subsequent impact on politics, as were the Sendero Luminoso rebel group in Peru. In other cases, such as the Maoists in Nepal or the Frente Farabundo Marti in El Salvador, the rebels go on to form a political party which has a major impact on democratic politics. In fact, the conventional wisdom in political science is now that rebellions either succeed or fail with few instances of actual settlement or deals (Pillar, 1983, Licklider, 1995, Fearon and Laitin, 2008).

But civil wars do not always either fail or move the democratic political equilibrium to the 'left' because the mobilization of such groups may induce a corresponding reaction at the other end of the political spectrum. A salient example of this is Colombia. Since the 1960s the government of Colombia has been facing numerous left-wing rebels forces, most notably the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC—The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) the ELN and M-19 the first two of which are still committed to socialist revolution. These groups became particularly powerful beginning in the 1980s and expanded throughout much of the country. As they did so they engaged in 'taxation' (known as the *vacuna* - or the 'vaccination'), kidnapping and extortion. In response to this extortion, and also to the prospect that the Colombian government would offer radical policy compromises to bring the conflict to an end, various types of paramilitary groups began to organize throughout the 1980s. By 1997 the numerous paramilitary groups in Colombia were unified by Carlos Castaño into the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC—United Self-Defense Organization of Colombia). The paramilitaries had long been cooperating with politicians but in the early 2000s they systematically entered national politics in a very new way. They did this in the 2002 and 2006 elections where possibly one third of legislators were elected with 'support' from the paramilitary groups (Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos, 2009; López, 2010). Methods of support included intimidation, coercion and mass fraud. Indicative of the dramatic political change in Colombia which happened at this time was the expansion of new political parties. Since at least the 1850s (and arguably the 1830s) Colombia had been dominated by two political parties the Liberals and Conservatives. Since they had formed, prior to 2002 no other party had ever elected a president and in addition to losing the presidency their combined vote share dropped to around 15%. Neither candidate in the run-off election for president held in May 2010 was from the traditional parties.

This tectonic shift in Colombian politics was not a shift to the left; on the contrary, political

change went in the direction opposite to the guerrilla's preferences because it was driven by the mobilization of those most opposed to the FARC and ELN. One of the main driving forces behind paramilitarism had been rural landed elites who wanted protection from kidnapping and the *vacuna* and were strenuously opposed to compromises which would come at their expense. Once mobilized for security and subsequently offense against the guerrillas, paramilitaries proved very powerful in shifting the political equilibrium in a conservative direction.

Just as rebels or radical groups mobilized during civil war do not necessarily have a long-run impact on politics, neither do paramilitary groups. We suggest in this essay that an especially interesting contrast— and a plausible counterfactual— is given by the case of Sierra Leone. After the Sierra Leone civil war started in 1991 rural elites such as paramount chiefs found themselves unprotected and vulnerable to attacks by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). In consequence, just as the Colombian rural elites did, they began to form paramilitary groups to fight back. The role of Castaño in unifying these groups was played by Sam Hinga Norman who emerged as their leader, first *de facto* and then *de jure* and was promoted to deputy Minister of Defense. Just as in Colombia, the Sierra Leonean paramilitaries, the Civilian Defense Force (CDF) developed a political program, but unlike the Colombia case this did not involve close cooperation with rural elites and electoral manipulation for the benefit of new political forces. Instead, it developed into a project to overthrow the state and set Norman up as president. This project failed, and as a result, when the RUF finally collapsed in 2001 there was neither a radical nor a conservative political legacy of the civil war in Sierra Leone. Instead, politics returned to the status quo ante dominated by the same parties that had contested power since independence in 1961 (the All People's Congress Party (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)). Though Richards, Bah, and Vincent (2004) and Bellows and Miguel (2009) argue that the civil war may have led to increases in the political participation of some of those involved in it, the overwhelming fact about Sierra Leone is the amazing recreation of the pre-war political equilibrium since the war ended.<sup>1</sup>

As alluded to above, there is little systematic discussion of the political consequences of civil wars in the social science literature. This issue, for example, is not mentioned in the prominent and extensive surveys of civil war by Sambanis (2002), Kalyvas (2007) or Blattman and Miguel (2010). There have been studies (e.g., Richards et al (2004); Bellows and Miguel (2009); Blattman (2009)) that have looked at changes in individual attitudes and political activities in the wake of civil war, but these have not examined the broader questions of, to name

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<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, the recent work by Gberie (2010) appropriately titled "Sierra Leone" Business More Than Usual."

two examples, whether these individual shifts will shift the equilibrium policy or whether the structure of political interactions between key interest groups has changed. To our knowledge, there are two strands of literature that look at related questions, but not systematically. First, there are studies that draw a connection drawn between civil war, counterinsurgency, and state formation. As shown by Bensel (1991), the US Federal government was small and relatively weak until after the civil war, when it expanded in large part to meet the demands placed on it by Reconstruction. Similarly, Richard Stubbs, for instance, has argued that fighting Malayan emergency precipitated an (ultimately beneficial) expansion and consolidation of Malaysian state institutions (1997, 2004).<sup>2</sup> Slater (2010) has generalized these ideas into a theory of how the response to internal disorder led to the development of state capacity in Southeast Asia. Second, work by those scholars who emphasize ‘grievance’ would implicitly argue that successful rebels would induce political change. Therefore factors that lead to successful rebellion in these cases would explain radical political change, for instance in El Salvador or Nepal.

Most theoretical models of civil war focus on the conflict between the government and the rebels, examining the circumstances under which the war continues or ends, whether the end comes with negotiation or defeat, what role there might be for third party intervention, and what parameters determine these different outcomes. The fact that civil wars led by grievances and radical rebels induce potentially offsetting mobilizations by conservative groups seems not to have been noted in the literature on civil wars before, though there is a nascent literature on paramilitarism. The above observations about Colombia and Sierra Leone however suggest that an understanding of when threatened elites manage to successfully organize and turn this military organization into a political movement must be crucial for developing a fuller understanding of the political consequences of civil wars.

Based on the contrast between Sierra Leone and Colombia, in this paper we develop a theoretical model to examine when conservative interests mobilize and when they are able to shift the subsequent post-civil war political equilibrium. While the model is naturally geared to provide a structure for the case studies certain aspects of it are generalizable and provide important tools to study the political consequences of civil war. We highlight these presently. First, drawing from the case studies, we posit that pervasive ‘urban bias’ in the politics of de-

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<sup>2</sup>One study especially worth mentioning is that of Abinales (1997) on counterinsurgency in the Philippines, which provides an interesting alternative to both the Colombian and Sierra Leonian trajectories. Provincial landed elites had been in charge of powerful private armies for decades, but these were disbanded under the Marcos dictatorship as political power became increasingly centralized in Manila. The Communist insurgency, however, constrained Marcos in such a way that, through local alliances with the insurgency, these landlords could maneuver back into political power. Thus the civil war caused a reversal in the process of centralization. Future versions of the paper will incorporate insights from this case into the model.

veloping countries is a general mechanism that leads to underinvestment in counterinsurgency by incumbent governments and explains the persistence of civil wars. Urban bias, as described in the landmark work of Lipton (1979) and Bates (1981) is the phenomenon by which, in most poor countries, politicians tend to appeal to urban interests, while discriminating against rural constituencies. In Africa, urban bias was due to the fact that urban groups typically led the independence struggle and formed the first successful political parties, outmaneuvering traditional rural elites such as chiefs (Boone, 1995, 2003). A similar development took place in 20th century Latin America, where populist parties, such as the Peronists in Argentina, based themselves on urban constituencies and adopted policies that were highly adverse to the interests of those in the rural sector. We point out that, in addition to finding economic and social policy stacked against it, the rural sector felt its impact disproportionately. Indeed, civil wars are fought primarily in the countryside (Fearon and Laitin, 2003) and rural groups, not urban powerholders, bear the greater cost.

Second, our model identifies the commitment problem between specialists in violence and coercion, who lack the human capital to create long-lasting institutional arrangements, manage organizations, and succeed in political and bureaucratic infighting, civilian elites, who have this capital but are not effective in the use of violence, as a key mechanism that helps explain whether or not civil wars ultimately have political consequences. We argue that the rise of successful interest groups out of civil war is intimately related to the complementarities between these two subgroups. There is, so-to-speak, an implicit contract between these groups to use these complementarities for political gain in the post-civil-war period, but the structure of incentives creates the possibility for renegeing on this bargain.

We focus in the model on a situation where rebellion is ongoing, and elites first face the decision problem of whether or not to form paramilitary armies. If the rebellion fails, the elite can try to forge a mutually beneficial bargain with the paramilitaries they have armed in order to influence politics together. If elites and paramilitaries honor this implicit contract, they can undo the urban bias of the system and induce a conservative movement in national policy. In Colombia, this phenomenon was known as *Parapolítica*, a term we will use hereon to refer to this type of political equilibrium. However, as argued above, this framework could be applied more generally to study when it is that civil war leads to powerful post-war political factions, whether the topic at hand is right or left wing groups

This equilibrium may not come to be because elites and paramilitaries face a two-sided commitment problem. Firstly, depending on the balance between costs imposed by the presence of

these irregular armies (in terms of protection fees or collateral damages) and the economic benefits this presence might bring (paramilitaries could expropriate peasants or eliminate workers' unions, thus producing rents for the elite), rural elites might withdraw their support from the paramilitary even if the latter are willing to collaborate. Indeed, if we assume that there are inefficiency costs associated with having paramilitaries in their midst, rural elites may well prefer the political status quo and resulting urban bias to the *Parapolítica* equilibrium. Secondly, even if the rural elite want to influence politics with the help of the paramilitary, once they arm it, they lose all effective control over the group (since we assume rural elites are civilians and paramilitaries are specialists in violence). In particular, the paramilitaries may renege on the implicit deal and try to overthrow the state on their own to capture government rents. This strategy will be more attractive for them the more likely it is to succeed, i.e., the easier it is to capture the state by force. The attractiveness of this strategy may also depend on the extent of urban bias, since urban bias will determine what the rural elite might do. Our solution partitions the parameter space into different kinds of equilibria that characterize and rationalize the outcomes from the case study evidence.

The comparative statics of the model captures well the evidence from Colombia and Sierra Leone we present. In Sierra Leone Hinga Norman turned against the rural elites that had helped the paramilitary movement form, and he hatched a plan to overthrow the state. It seems plausible that he anticipated that the rural elites would refuse to collaborate with him, since from early on they severely disliked the collateral damage caused by the kind of counterinsurgency he wanted to pursue. In this situation it was more attractive for Norman to overthrow the state the more likely this was to succeed and the greater was urban bias. On the other hand, in Colombia rural elites did not dislike the collateral damage wrought by the paramilitaries or the inefficiency losses produced by their rent-seeking; in fact, since the paramilitaries helped them deal with the problem of rising peasant protest and radicalism, in net they benefited greatly from 'hosting' these private armies. Thus rural elites were happy to collaborate. Why did the Colombian paramilitaries agree to *Parapolítica*? The model suggests that this was because it was very unlikely that they would succeed in trying to overthrow the state themselves, which is plausible given the greater relative strength of the Colombian state.

In addition to developing this theoretical model, a major contribution of this paper is that based on original fieldwork we provide an new and detailed political history of the mobilization of rural elite interests and paramilitarism in Sierra Leone. In particular we study the political projects which emerged from this struggle to fight against the RUF rebels. Though there

is an important academic literature on the civil war in Sierra Leone this topic has by and large not been systematically researched or theorized. While Włodarczyk (2009) is the first coherent narrative of civilian defense militias in Sierra Leone, new evidence shown in this paper documents crucial developments not noticed in the above work and adds key insights into the motivations and strategic calculus of the different actors involved.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section we present our theoretical model and outline the predictions. Section 3 develops our narrative of Sierra Leone. Section 4 then examines Colombia. This section is based on secondary sources and published interviews. Section 5 concludes.

## 2 The Model

There are four players, the urban elite of mass one which is the incumbent government, superscripted  $u$ , the rural elite also of mass one, superscripted  $r$ , a rebel group,  $g$ , also mass one and a rural paramilitary group, superscripted  $p$ , which again has the same size as the other groups. The model lasts for two periods in the first there is a civil war which succeeds with some probability which depends on whether or not a paramilitary group has been formed. In this case the rebels groups forms the government in the second period. If the rebellion fails then the guerillas vanish from the scene in the second period.

Each player has a per-period quasi-linear utility function which is linear in consumption of a private good and also depends on the provision of a public good. Urban and rural agents differ in the type of public good they prefer. Let  $G^u$  refer to the public good preferred by urban residents and  $G^r$  that preferred by rural residents. Utility is therefore

$$c^i + V(\mathbf{I}^i G^u + (1 - \mathbf{I}^i) G^r)$$

for  $i \in \{u, r, g, p\}$  where  $\mathbf{I}^i$  is an indicator function such that  $\mathbf{I}^i = 1$  if group  $i$  is an urban group and  $\mathbf{I}^i = 0$  otherwise. An urban agent only receives utility for urban public goods and rural agents only receive utility if the rural public goods are provided. We assume that if paramilitaries remain in a coalition with rural elites they have rural preferences and thus value  $G^r$  but if they overthrow the state and become a new urban elite they only value  $G^u$ . We assume that  $V : \mathbb{R}_+ \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  is differentiable and strictly increasing with  $V' > 0$  and strictly concave with  $V'' < 0$  and normalize so that  $V(0) = 0$ . Every agent has an exogenous income of  $y$  per-period and we assume that if the paramilitary is created and not disbanded in the second period then the rural elite gets a net extra payoff of  $\Delta y$  which can be positive or negative as



we discussed in the introduction.

The government budget constraint is

$$3\tau + Z = \sum_{i \in \{u, r, g, p\}} T^i + G^u + G^r$$

where  $\tau$  is a lump-sum tax levied on each agents' income, except for the rebels, and  $Z$  are exogenous rents, for example from natural resources. Government revenues are spent either on rural or urban public goods or on direct transfers either to all urban elites, denoted  $T^u$ , rural elites  $T^r$ , or paramilitaries  $T^p$ . This implies that  $c^i = y - \tau + T^i$ . We use the notation  $\mathbf{T} = (T^u, T^r, T^p)$  to refer to the vector of targeted transfers and  $\mathbf{G} = (G^u, G^r)$  the vector of public goods. We only allow  $T^g > 0$  to be feasible in the situation where the guerillas have won the civil war and become the government. This implies that it is not feasible to redistribute to the guerilla in the context of an ongoing civil war, which seems plausible. More generally we assume that the urban elite cannot use other instruments to buy off the rebels and that there cannot be any negotiation between the rebels and the government, possibly because such a negotiation is incredible, and that it is costless to continue to fight. Also assume for now that there is no possibility for the rebels to form a political party (if they do they will all be killed like the Unión Patriótica in Colombia). We also assume that the urban elite has no other instrument to reduce the probability that the guerillas win the civil war.

If the rebels overthrow the existing urban elite they set themselves up as a new urban elite with the same preferences. In the first period the rebels win power with probability  $\pi$  if no paramilitary group has been formed. If the state is weak then  $\pi$  can be large. If a paramilitary group has been formed then the probability that the rebels win is  $\chi < \pi$ .

Initially the urban elite dominates politics and exert undue influence over the equilibrium policy vector. More specifically we model the political equilibrium following Grossman and Helpman (1994, 2001) as one where politicians maximize a weighted sum of social welfare and the transfers from organized interests. We assume initially that only the urban elite (the only urban group in the model) are organized which implies that the equilibrium policy vector maximizes a weighted sum of the utilities of the different groups where the urban elite has a larger weight than rural groups.

All agents aim to maximize the expected present discounted value of utility and everyone discounts second period utility by the same factor  $\beta \in (0, 1)$ . We will focus on characterizing the pure strategy subgame perfect equilibria of the game.

The timing of play in the game is as follows:

1. In the first period the political equilibrium determines the policy vector  $(\tau, \mathbf{T}, \mathbf{G})$ .
2. The rural elite decides whether or not to form a paramilitary group with  $\sigma = 1$  indicating that it does so and  $\sigma = 0$  denoting that no such group is formed.
3. Nature determines whether or not the rebellion succeeds. If no paramilitary group has been formed then the rebellion succeeds with probability  $\pi$  and it fails otherwise. If a paramilitary has been formed the rebellion succeeds with probability  $\chi < \pi$ . If it succeeds then the rebels take power in period 2 and determine the second period policy vector to maximize its own payoff.
4. At the start of the second period if the rebellion fails and  $\sigma = 1$  then the paramilitary group decides whether or not to overthrow the state itself. If it does so, denoted  $\rho = 1$ , then it succeeds with probability  $\theta$  and fails otherwise. If it succeeds then in the second period the paramilitary group forms the government and determines the policy vector to maximize its own payoff. If it fails we assume the paramilitary collapses leaving the urban elite as the only organized group in the determination of the political equilibrium.
5. If the rebellion fails and  $\rho = 0$  then the rural elite has to decide whether to collaborate with the paramilitaries, denoted  $\omega = 1$  or alternatively abandon them  $\omega = 0$ . If  $\omega = 1$  then together they enter the political equilibrium in the second period as an organized interest. If  $\omega = 0$  then the paramilitary collapses and the political equilibrium returns to the status quo ante controlled by the initial urban elite.

To see how payoffs look for the entire game it is useful first to examine the value function of the urban elite. Let  $W^u(C)$  be the expected present discounted value to the urban elite at the start of the first period. This value satisfies the following equation

$$\begin{aligned}
W^u(C) &= \tilde{c}^u(a) + V(\tilde{G}^u(a)) & (1) \\
&+ \sigma \beta \left[ \chi W^u(R) + (1 - \chi) \left( (1 - \rho) \left( \omega W^u(N|P) + (1 - \omega) \left( \tilde{c}^u(a) + V(\tilde{G}^u(a)) \right) \right) \right) \right. \\
&+ \rho \left( \theta W^u(P) + (1 - \theta) \left( \tilde{c}^u(a) + V(\tilde{G}^u(a)) \right) \right) \left. \right] \\
&+ (1 - \sigma) \beta \left[ \pi W^u(R) + (1 - \pi) \left( \tilde{c}^u(a) + V(\tilde{G}^u(a)) \right) \right]
\end{aligned}$$

In the first period the political equilibrium determines a particular policy vector, which we discuss below, giving the urban elite a flow payoff of  $\tilde{c}^u(a) + V(\tilde{G}^u(a))$ . The interpretation of the continuation (second period) value is as follows: since a rebellion is ongoing, it may succeed

at the end of the first period with the urban elite being overthrown giving it continuation value  $W^u(R)$ . If no paramilitary has been formed by the rural elite,  $\sigma = 0$ , the probability that this happens is  $\pi$ . If a paramilitary has been formed,  $\sigma = 1$ , then the rebels win with probability  $\chi$ . Thus in the second line of (1) we see that when  $\sigma = 1$  the paramilitary has been formed and the probability  $\chi$  applies. If the rebellion fails in this case, an event with probability  $1 - \chi$  the continuation value of the urban elite depends on the strategies of the paramilitaries and rural elites. If the paramilitary goes it alone ( $\rho = 1$ ) then it overthrows the incumbent urban elite with probability  $\theta$  in which case the elite get  $W^u(P)$  while if it fails the payoff  $\tilde{c}^u(a) + V(\tilde{G}^u(a))$  recurs since we assume the paramilitary returns to the rural sector and the political status quo ante is restored. If the paramilitaries do not go it alone ( $\rho = 0$ ) then if the rural elite collaborate with them ( $\omega = 1$ ) they enter politics together as an organized interest which generates the continuation value is  $W^u(N|P)$  which takes into account the new political equilibrium for the urban elite with an organized rural sector. If the rural elite decide not to form a coalition with the paramilitary then again the initial payoff recurs since the urban elite remain in control. The final line of (1) is the expected payoff when no paramilitary has formed. If the rebels win then the urban elite get the value  $W^u(R)$  again while if they fail the status quo ante payoff of  $\tilde{c}^u(a) + V(\tilde{G}^u(a))$  recurs again.

To study the nature of equilibria in the game let us first make some observations about the payoffs in different states which we can use to simplify the above and subsequent expressions. First consider the determination of the policy vector in the first period. We assume, following Grossman and Helpman (1994, 2001) that there is a single politician who values social welfare but also the transfers from special interests. The parameter  $a$  captures the extent to which the politician values social welfare so that when  $a = 0$  the politician only cares about money while when  $a \rightarrow \infty$  the politician acts like a utilitarian social planner. Grossman and Helpman prove that in this case the equilibrium policy vector solves a weighted function of the utilities of the different groups where unorganized groups get a weight of  $a$  while organized groups get a weight of  $1 + a$ . We shall model urban bias in the initial political equilibrium by assuming that only the urban elite are organized and to guarantee this we assume  $0 < a < 1$ . In this case the equilibrium policy vector is the solution to the following maximization problem

$$\begin{aligned} & \max_{\tau, \mathbf{T}, \mathbf{G}} (1 + a) (y - \tau + T^u + V(G^u)) + a \sum_{i \in \{r, p\}} (y - \tau + T^i + V(G^r)) \\ \text{subject to: } & 3\tau + Z = \sum_{i \in \{u, r, p\}} T^i + G^u + G^r \end{aligned}$$

It is clear that at the optimum the politician sets  $\tilde{\tau} = y$  and  $\tilde{T}^{i \neq u} = 0$ . Letting  $\lambda$  denote the Lagrange multiplier on the government budget constraint we have the first order-conditions

$$\begin{aligned} (1+a)V'(\tilde{G}^u) &= \lambda \text{ if } \tilde{G}^u > 0, \\ 2aV'(\tilde{G}^r) &= \lambda, \text{ if } \tilde{G}^r > 0. \end{aligned}$$

Assuming an interior solution these conditions imply that

$$\frac{V'(\tilde{G}^u)}{V'(\tilde{G}^r)} = \frac{2a}{1+a}.$$

Since  $0 < a < 1$ ,  $\frac{2a}{1+a} < 1$  so that  $\frac{V'(\tilde{G}^u)}{V'(\tilde{G}^r)} < 1$  implying that  $V'(\tilde{G}^u) < V'(\tilde{G}^r)$  or, since  $V$  is strictly concave  $\tilde{G}^u > \tilde{G}^r$ .

The final first-order condition is

$$1+a = \lambda \text{ if } T^u > 0$$

which pins down the value of the Lagrange multiplier. Returning to the first-order conditions for public goods supply we see that at an interior solution

$$V'(\tilde{G}^u) = 1 \text{ and } V'(\tilde{G}^r(a)) = \frac{1+a}{2a}.$$

We index these solutions by  $a$  since this conveniently parameterizes the degree of urban bias initially. Note that  $\tilde{G}^u$  is actually independent of  $a$  while  $\tilde{G}^r(a)$  is increasing in  $a$ . Finally the level of transfers is given by the government budget constraint  $\tilde{T}^u(a) = 3y + Z - \tilde{G}^u - \tilde{G}^r(a)$  which is decreasing in  $a$  since  $\tilde{G}^r(a)$  is increasing.

Now let's examine what happens in the state where the paramilitaries and the rural elite collaborate. In this case we assume that both the rural and urban interests are organized. When all groups are organized the Grossman and Helpman Theorem implies that the equilibrium policy vector simply maximizes the sum of utilities. Therefore the equilibrium policy solves the problem

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{\tau, \mathbf{T}, \mathbf{G}} \quad & y - \tau + T^u + V(G^u) + \sum_{i \in \{r, p\}} (y - \tau + T^i + V(G^r)) \\ \text{subject to:} \quad & 3\tau + Z = \sum_{i \in \{u, r, p\}} T^i + G^u + G^r \end{aligned}$$

It is obvious that the solution to the above program involves  $V'(\hat{G}^u) = V'(\hat{G}^r)$  so that  $\hat{G}^u = \hat{G}^r = \hat{G}$ . We use a caret above a variable to denote these equilibrium values. Moreover, as

long as  $Z \geq 2\hat{G}$  then the solution implies  $\tau = 0$ . If  $Z > 2\hat{G}$  then  $\hat{T}^i = \hat{T} = \frac{Z-2\hat{G}}{3} > 0$  for all  $i$ . If  $Z < 2\hat{G}$  then  $\hat{T}^i = 0$  for all  $i$  and  $\tau = \frac{2\hat{G}-Z}{3}$ . For simplicity we proceed by assuming that  $Z > 2\hat{G}$ .

The final set of policy variables to determine is what happens when either the rebels or the paramilitaries take power, which we assume are very similar situations. In this case one can make various assumptions but a simple one is that either group chooses the policy vector to maximize their own payoff. Since they are now in urban areas we assume that they value urban public goods. The equilibrium policy vector implies  $\bar{\tau} = y$  and  $\bar{T}^{i \neq p} = 0$ ,  $\bar{G}^r = 0$ ,  $\bar{T}^p = 3y + Z - \bar{G}^u$  where  $\bar{G}^u$  satisfies  $V'(\bar{G}^u) = 1$  so that  $\bar{G}^u = \tilde{G}^u$ . If the paramilitary groups fails in its attempt to overthrow the state we assume that it gets some bad outcome which we normalize to zero, perhaps indicating that they are put in prison.

To characterize the subgame perfect equilibria in the model we apply backward induction folding in the observations made about the payoffs from different political equilibria made above. The important case to study is when  $\sigma = 1$  so that the rural elite have formed a paramilitary group in the first period. We return to investigating the circumstances under which this is optimal for them. This means that we first have to consider the problem facing the rural elite as to whether to collaborate with the paramilitary group in the subgame where the paramilitary group has decided not to try to overthrow the urban elite itself. The rural elite must solve the problem

$$\max_{\omega \in \{0,1\}} \omega W^r(N|P) + (1 - \omega) \left( \tilde{c}^r(a) + V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \right)$$

where  $W^r(N|P)$  is the payoff the rural elite gets from collaboration. In this case we know from above that the policy vector  $(\hat{G}, \hat{T})$  is the relevant one so we can re-write this problem

$$\max_{\omega \in \{0,1\}} \omega \left( y + \Delta y + \frac{Z - 2\hat{G}}{3} + V(\hat{G}) \right) + (1 - \omega)V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \quad (2)$$

also imposing that  $\tilde{c}^r(a) = 0$ . Recall that if the paramilitaries are formed and not disbanded then the rural elite get an extra flow payoff of  $\Delta y$ . Clearly,  $\omega = 1$  is the solution to this maximization problem if

$$y + \Delta y + \frac{Z - 2\hat{G}}{3} + V(\hat{G}) \geq V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \quad (3)$$

This condition is very intuitive. Recall that  $\hat{G} > \tilde{G}^r(a)$  since when the rural elite collaborates with the paramilitary they can exert greater influence in the political equilibrium and therefore get more public goods in the rural sector. Nevertheless, this condition is not necessarily satisfied

since the net benefit of collaborating  $\Delta y$  can be negative. This may be so if the paramilitaries cause a lot of chaos and collateral damage. If this is the case, even though the paramilitaries have decided not to overthrow the government autonomously and even though collaborating with them can bring political benefits the elite may nevertheless decide not to collaborate with them. Clearly the smaller is  $a$  the more attractive it is to collaborate with the paramilitaries since the worse returning to the political status quo will be. From (3) by the Implicit Function Theorem we can implicitly define a function  $a^*(\Delta y)$  such that if  $a \leq a^*(\Delta y)$  then  $\omega = 1$  while if  $a > a^*(\Delta y)$  then  $\omega = 0$ . Note that  $a^*(\Delta y)$  is increasing in  $\Delta y$ ; as the net benefit of having the paramilitary around increases the level of urban bias required to induce the rural elite to set  $\omega = 1$  decreases.

We now examine the decision problem of the paramilitaries about whether to try to overthrow the state themselves. They solve the problem

$$\max_{\rho \in \{0,1\}} \rho \theta \left( \bar{T}^p + V(\tilde{G}^u) \right) + (1 - \rho) \left( \omega \left( y + \frac{Z - 2\hat{G}}{3} + V(\hat{G}) \right) + (1 - \omega)V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \right) \quad (4)$$

There are two salient cases to consider. Consider first the simpler situation where situation where  $a > a^*(\Delta y)$ . In this case  $\omega = 0$  and by backward induction  $\rho = 1$  is the solution to (4) if

$$\theta \left( \bar{T}^p + V(\tilde{G}^u) \right) \geq V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \quad (5)$$

The left-hand side of (5) is the expected utility from attempting to overthrow the state. This attempt succeeds with probability  $\theta$  and  $\bar{T}^p + V(\tilde{G}^u)$  is the indirect utility the paramilitaries get by setting their preferred policy after having taken over the state. The right hand side is the opportunity cost of doing this. Given that the rural elite will not collaborate with the paramilitaries they know that the political status quo ante will establish itself so that the urban elite set the public goods level  $\tilde{G}^r(a)$  and since  $\tilde{c}^p(a) = 0$  the payoff to the paramilitaries is  $V(\tilde{G}^r(a))$ . Even if the paramilitaries know the rural elite will not collaborate with them they may still decide not to overthrow the state and disband.

If  $a \leq a^*(\Delta y)$  then  $\omega = 1$  so by backward induction  $\rho = 1$  if

$$\theta \left( \bar{T}^p + V(\tilde{G}^u) \right) \geq y + \frac{Z - 2\hat{G}}{3} + V(\hat{G}). \quad (6)$$

It is useful to think about (5) and (6) as equalities and defining critical values for  $\theta$  at which the paramilitaries are just indifferent between setting  $\rho = 1$  and  $\rho = 0$ . Let (5) define a critical value for  $\theta^*(a)$  which is increasing in  $a$ . When  $a$  increases urban bias falls and the payoff to the paramilitaries from the political status quo increases. Therefore  $\theta$  must be higher in order

for it to be attractive for them to try to overthrow the incumbent government. From (6) we can define a  $\theta^{**}$  such that at  $\theta^{**}$  the paramilitary group are just indifferent between trying to overthrow the state or not in the case where if they did not attempt to do so the rural elite would agree to collaborate with them. Note that  $\theta^*(a^*(\Delta y)) < \theta^*(1) < \theta^{**}$ .

The remaining problem is whether or not the rural elite will wish to form a paramilitary in the first place. At the start of the game their value function is

$$\begin{aligned} W^r(C) = & \max_{\sigma \in \{0,1\}} \tilde{c}^r(a) + V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \\ & + \sigma \beta \left[ \chi W^r(R) + (1 - \chi) \left( (1 - \rho) \left( \omega W^r(N|P) + (1 - \omega) \left( \tilde{c}^r(a) + V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \right) \right) \right) \right. \\ & \left. + \rho \left( \theta W^r(P) + (1 - \theta) \left( \tilde{c}^r(a) + V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \right) \right) \right] \\ & + (1 - \sigma) \beta \left[ \pi W^r(R) + (1 - \pi) \left( \tilde{c}^r(a) + V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \right) \right] \end{aligned}$$

There are four cases to consider in determining the solution to this optimization problem. The first, when  $a \leq a^*(\Delta y)$  and  $\theta < \theta^{**}$  so that  $\rho = 0$  and  $\omega = 1$ , is straightforward. In this part of the parameter space the paramilitaries do not attempt to overthrow the incumbent government but form a coalition with the rural elite to enter politics. Since it is optimal from the point of view of the rural elite to form this coalition and since it is costless to create the paramilitaries and this gives them a lower possibility of a bad outcome - a successful guerilla take-over - it must be the case that  $\sigma = 1$  is optimal.

In the second case  $a \leq a^*(\Delta y)$  and  $\theta \geq \theta^{**}$  so that  $\rho = 1$  and  $\omega = 1$  so that even though the rural elite are willing to form a coalition with them the paramilitaries attempt to overthrow the incumbent. Here  $\sigma = 1$  is optimal if

$$\chi W^r(R) + (1 - \chi) \left( \theta W^r(P) + (1 - \theta) V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \right) \geq \pi W^r(R) + (1 - \pi) V(\tilde{G}^r(a)) \quad (7)$$

note that since we have  $W^r(R) = W^r(P)$  then forming the paramilitary will be optimal when it puts more weight on the higher payoff  $V(\tilde{G}^r(a))$ . Though forming the paramilitary reduces the change of getting  $W^r(R)$  it only increases the probability of getting  $V(\tilde{G}^r(a))$  when  $\rho = 1$  when  $(1 - \chi)(1 - \theta) \geq 1 - \pi$  thus we can define from (7) a critical value of  $\theta$ , denoted  $\theta^+(\chi)$  where

$$\theta^+(\chi) = \frac{\pi - \chi}{1 - \chi}$$

such that when  $\theta \leq \theta^+(\chi)$  the rural elite find it optimal to form a paramilitary. Given  $\pi$  and  $\chi$  it is intuitive that low  $\theta$  would be necessary for a paramilitary to be created in this case since this is the probability that the paramilitaries will succeed in their bid to take over the state.

Note that  $\theta^+(\pi)$  is increasing in  $\pi$ . Holding  $\chi$  constant, the greater is  $\pi$  the greater the impact of the paramilitary on the probability that the guerillas overthrow the state and therefore the elite are more willing to form the paramilitary when  $\theta$  is higher.

The third case is when  $a > a^*(\Delta y)$  and  $\theta < \theta^*(a)$  then  $\rho = 0$  and  $\omega = 0$  so that even though the rural elite are not willing to form a coalition the paramilitaries do not try to overthrow the incumbent government. In this case it is also easy to see what the solution is. If the paramilitary is formed then the probability of a revolt goes down. There is no benefit in terms of a change in the future political equilibrium but neither is there a threat since the paramilitaries do not try to overthrow the state. Therefore  $\sigma = 1$  must be optimal.

Finally we have the situation where  $a > a^*(\Delta y)$  and  $\theta \geq \theta^*(a)$  then  $\rho = 1$  and  $\omega = 0$  so that anticipating that the rural elite are not willing to form a coalition the paramilitaries try to overthrow the incumbent government. It is clear that the condition under which this happens is identical to that under which  $\sigma = 1$  is optimal when  $\rho = 1$  and  $\omega = 1$ , namely (7). If the paramilitary decides to try to overthrow the state then the decision of the elite as to whether to cooperate with it in politics is irrelevant.

Thus once we have characterized the solutions to (2) and (4) the nature of the equilibria turns on the relationship between  $\theta$  and  $\theta^+(\pi)$ . Note that  $\theta^+(1) = 1 > \theta^{**}$  while  $\theta^+(\chi) = 0$  thus by the Intermediate Value Theorem there exists some critical value of  $\pi$ , which we denote  $\pi^+ \in (\chi, 1)$  such that  $\theta^+(\pi^+) = \theta^{**}$ . As long as  $\pi > \pi^+$  we are guaranteed that  $\theta^+(\pi^+) > \theta^{**}$  and this is sufficient to guarantee that there will exist equilibria where even though  $\rho = 1$  we have  $\sigma = 1$ .

We can sum up the nature of equilibria in the game in the following proposition.

**Proposition 1** *Assume  $\pi > \pi^+$ . There are 4 types of pure strategy subgame perfect equilibria in this game. (1) When  $a \leq a^*(\Delta y)$  and  $\theta < \theta^{**}$  then  $\sigma = 1$ ,  $\rho = 0$  and  $\omega = 1$ . The rural elite forms paramilitaries who do not attempt to overthrow the incumbent government but form a coalition with the rural elite to enter politics; (2) When  $a > a^*(\Delta y)$  and  $\theta < \theta^*(a)$  then  $\sigma = 1$ ,  $\rho = 0$  and  $\omega = 0$  so that paramilitaries are formed and even though the rural elite are not willing to form a coalition with them they do not try to overthrow the incumbent government; (3) When  $a \leq a^*(\Delta y)$  and  $\theta \geq \theta^{**}$  then  $\rho = 1$  and  $\omega = 1$  so if the rural elite forms a paramilitary then the paramilitaries attempt to overthrow the incumbent government even though the elite will form a coalition with them; (4) When  $a > a^*(\Delta y)$  and  $\theta \geq \theta^*(a)$  then  $\rho = 1$  and  $\omega = 0$  so that anticipating that the rural elite are not willing to form a coalition if a paramilitary is formed it will try to overthrow the incumbent government. In both these last*



two cases if  $\theta \leq \theta^+(\pi)$  then  $\sigma = 1$  and a paramilitary is formed, otherwise  $\sigma = 0$ .

The main points of interest is that the paramilitary is more likely to try to overthrow the state when they are relatively likely to be successful ( $\theta$  is big). The rural elite are more likely to want to collaborate with the paramilitaries when urban bias is relatively high ( $a$  low) and when the presence of paramilitaries does not generate large negative externalities from them ( $\Delta y$  not too negative). They are more willing to form paramilitaries when they are effective ( $\pi$  is large relative to  $\chi$ ) and not likely to become autonomous ( $\rho = 0$ ).

These simple ideas can partially help explain the different outcomes in Sierra Leone and Colombia. In Sierra Leone it was quite plausible that Hinga Norman could have overthrown the state and twice in the 1990s (1992 and 1997) dissident groups of soldiers had done exactly that.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that  $\theta$  is much larger in Sierra Leone than Colombia. No army has marched from the provinces in Colombia and captured Bogotá since General Mosquera did so in 1859-1860. As we will see later there was urban bias in both cases. It is not clear if urban bias was higher in Colombia but the case study evidence does show that  $\Delta y$  was much larger in Colombia. Rural elites were far more willing to tolerate the chaos and damage caused by paramilitaries because they benefitted more from the collateral damage since they lacked traditional instruments of control. Rural elites in Sierra Leone got no such benefit. This means that in thinking about where Colombia and Sierra Leone we have to consider that the  $a^*(\Delta y)$  locus is shifted down in the Sierra Leone case. Denote  $\Delta y^{SL}$  and  $\Delta y^C$  the net benefits in the two countries with the other parameters being  $a^j, \theta^j$  where  $j \in \{SL, C\}$ . Then  $\Delta y^{SL} < \Delta y^C$  so that  $a^*(\Delta y^{SL}) < a^*(\Delta y^C)$  which means that we can have  $a^{SL} < a^C$  but still have  $a^{SL} > a^*(\Delta y^{SL})$  and  $a^C \leq a^*(\Delta y^C)$ . So the degree of urban bias in Sierra Leone can be higher than in Colombia but we can still have  $\omega = 0$  and  $\rho = 1$  in Sierra Leone and  $\omega = 1$  and  $\rho = 0$  in Colombia.

The above proposition says that in case (1) when  $a \leq a^*(\Delta y)$  and  $\theta < \theta^{**}$  then  $\rho = 0$  and  $\sigma = \omega = 1$  the mobilization of rural paramilitaries in the civil war leads to a change in the post civil war political equilibrium which wipes out the urban bias. Thus civil war results in a policy change in the direction of that preferred by the rural elites.

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<sup>3</sup>It was also likely that he would have been recognized by the international community, though the model has nothing to say about this.

### **3 The Rise and Fall of Hinga Norman’s Political Project**

This section recounts the essential features of the history of the Sierra Leonean Civil Defense Forces (CDF) and its predecessors, taking particular note of its political roots and its failure to pursue a large political project in the way that the Colombian AUC did.

From the first incursion of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) into Sierra Leone in 1991, up to the time of its overthrow by a group of discontented young military officers in 1992, the government of Joseph Momoh had pursued what specialists agree was a half-hearted counterinsurgency effort against the RUF. In the first decade after assuming power, the All People’s Congress (APC) government (mostly associated with the Temne and Limba in the North of the country, as opposed to the Sierra Leone Peoples Party, which was mostly associated with the Mendes in the South and East) had slowly marginalized and gutted the military after a series of coup d’etats and coup attempts by the predominantly Mende army (Cartwright, 1970). As a result, by the time of the RUF invasion, two decades of one-party rule by the APC had left the remaining army forces underfunded and ineffective. Moreover, the near collapse of state institutions under one-party rule had turned army units into private, for-profit fiefdoms controlled by local officers (Keen, 2005). Units assigned to counterinsurgency missions in the Southeast border, the epicenter of the insurgency, would as often as not collude with the guerrilla to share in the rents of illicit diamond mining (Keen, 2005).

Factions within the military, however, grew malcontent over the tepid counterinsurgency efforts, and in 1992 Momoh was overthrown in a coup d’etat by a group of young officers and cadets known as the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). This military junta set out to wage a much more aggressive war against the RUF, and it is in that context of early NPRC rule that the first self-defense organizations and militias arose.

Though most ethnic groups in the country had started to arm their hunting societies to some extent by 1992, two cores of paramilitary activity in the South and East were especially central to the eventual formation of the CDF. We discuss them presently, and we show how the CDF sprung from an alliance between elite SLPP politicians representing provincial interests and rural military entrepreneurs. Finally, we show how their larger political project was undermined by the same mechanisms we highlight in our model.

#### **3.1 The Brawn**

The central figure in Sierra Leone’s paramilitary movement was Chief Samuel Hinga Norman. We briefly discuss his trajectory prior to assuming leadership of the CDF, since it illustrates

how he stood at the crux of a military class, the Mende rural elite, and the SLPP.

His military career began at the age of fourteen, when he became part of the first batch of students enrolled as “West African child soldiers,” a late-colonial British initiative to raise battalions in the West African colonies. After training both in Sierra Leone and England, Norman had ascended to the rank of Lieutenant on the eve of independence. Perhaps his most notable assignment in his time in the army, other than his later involvement in a coup attempt, was to the UN troop contingent sent to deal with the Congo independence crisis of 1962 (Norman, 02-01-06, p. 45-56.)<sup>4</sup>

His political involvement dates to 1967, when he formed part of the coup by the Mende officer corps against the impending election of the leader and founder of the APC, Siaka Stevens. During the coup, Norman was assigned by his superiors to guard and hold the Governor General so as to prevent him from certifying the election. For his role in the *coup d’etat*, Norman was tried and sent to jail shortly after Stevens regained power in a counter-coup by northern soldiers. He was released in 1972, but his political involvement would continue to haunt him long after that. After a second coup attempt against Siaka Stevens’s government in 1974 (in which Norman claimed not to have been involved), the APC regime arrested and jailed him once more, this time without trial. He spent thirteen months in solitary confinement. Upon being released from his second stint in jail, he joined the SLPP youth and canvassed for the party in the election of 1977. After a number of his colleagues in politics were, in his words “killed in mysterious circumstances” (p. 54) he realized that he was almost surely on an APC assassination list and therefore went into exile in Liberia. He remained there until 1989, when that country’s political situation started worsening. Almost immediately after returning to Sierra Leone, Norman began to rise in the chieftom hierarchy in his native Valunia chieftom: upon his arrival, the tribal elders name him chieftom spokesperson “to recognize [his] service” to the Mendeland (p. 55).

His military background and his experience with the APC regime therefore made him uniquely well-suited as a local partner for the NPRC in the South of the country. In 1994, the Mende-led military junta appointed him Regent Chief for Jiama Bongor Chieftom. The strategic importance of this chieftom speaks to the strength of Norman’s political connections and credentials. Jiama and Bongor had been amalgamated under Norman’s predecessor (hence the name, “Jiama-Bongor”), which had proven extremely unpopular in both chieftoms. Norman had inflamed these tensions further by moving the chieftom headquarters to Bongor

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<sup>4</sup>All references of this form (Name, mm-dd-yy) refer to transcripts from the CDF trial in Special Court for Sierra Leone.

(Hoffman, 2007, 648). The coming of the war had thus presented an opportunity to the elders of Jiama, who had been made subordinate to the chiefdom council in Bongor, to secede by allying themselves with the RUF. To preempt this, the NPRC had established a military base at Koribundu. Nor was this merely a matter of routine meddling by the central government in small-town affairs. This base (and by extension the chiefdom) was of further strategic value because it lay at the junction between the Bo-Punjehun and Moyamba-Kenema roads; in fact, a number of the largest battles in the war were fought over Koribundu. That the NPRC entrusted the government of Jiama Bongor to Norman then makes clear Norman's clout and his close ties to the regime.

### **3.2 Sierra Leone's *Hombres de Bien***

However, the ability of Norman, the military entrepreneur, to mobilize an organized militia depended on the political maneuvers, financial means, and social capital of prominent politicians such as Albert Demby, who would later be the vice-president for the SLPP government elected in 1996 and 2002. More generally, it was this connection between the military class and the political elites representing the traditional rural rulers (a role taken historically by the SLPP) that allowed the Civil Defense Force to thrive as it did. Demby is of a similar social extraction as Norman and the rest of the paramilitary leaders (Mende, wealthy, part of a ruling house the elite families from whom a paramount chief must come, and with strong British connections) and would be instrumental in Norman's first forays into civil defense.

According to his Special Court testimony, Demby's involvement in civilian defense and paramilitary organization dates back to 1993, when Lt. Tom Nyuma (an important Kailahun politician today, then the Secretary of State for the East in the NPRC) convened a meeting of notables from the eastern region to ask for help from local hunters in counterinsurgency operations. The meeting was especially opportune for Kenema. In the months preceding the meeting, Kenema town had been flooded by refugees from neighboring areas. Kono and Kailahun were entirely occupied by the RUF, while only four of sixteen chiefdoms in Kenema District were not occupied (Demby, 02-09-06, p. 105). In December 1992 Albert Demby and Dr. Alpha Lavalie, a Deputy Secretary General of the SLPP and a lecturer at a local university, had formed the Eastern Region Defense Committee (ERECOM) (Gberie, 2005, p.82).<sup>5</sup> Demby, at the time a notable physician in Kenema and a man of means, was treasurer, while Alpha Lavalie was appointed as chairman of the organization (Demby, 02-09-06, pp.101-103). Even

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<sup>5</sup>Some sources refer to it as the EREDC, but multiple references in the special court transcripts refer to it as ERECOM. See Special Court Transcript (Witness TF2-079, 05-26-05, , p. 8-9).

under Joseph Momoh, the overthrown APC president, local youth and hunters had served as guides for the Sierra Leone army, but under Lavalie's ERECOM they were organized more formally into subordinate army units. ERECOM, with help from the NPRC, helped arm and train hunter units for the army to deploy in the war front, and these hunters would be deployed for months at a time in counterinsurgency missions.

The ERECOM had two main sources of logistical support. First, Demby claimed in his testimony that the organization was funded by an extra levy on local taxes. Guns were provided by traditional hunters, who were outfitted occasionally with ammunition by the NPRC. Lavalie also apparently had extensive connections in the diaspora. Already by 1993, desperate at the lack of decisive action by the state, Lavalie had traveled to London, where he had raised substantial funds for logistics and guns.<sup>6</sup> Peter Penfold, the high commissioner to Sierra Leone from 1997 to 2000, confirmed in his testimony to the Special Court that meetings of the sort were taking place. During his cross-examination in the CDF trial, he said, "I mean, for example, I'm aware of meetings that were taking place in London in the early '90s where it was being explained to people in the UK about the Kamajor movement. People in UK have told me about those meetings" (Penfold, 02-09-2006, p. 86).

The NPRC regime, with help from ERECOM and South African mercenaries, had come close to defeating the RUF definitively towards the end of 1993. Demby narrates in his testimony an episode that beggars belief and is strongly suggestive of the kind of collusion between warring factions in Sierra Leone documented by Keen (2005). Civil society and the army had been preparing a victory parade to celebrate the routing of the RUF in the region, after most of the rebels had been pushed back into Liberia. But, in Demby's words, there were "security lapses." The army left its deployment areas by the Liberian border and went to Kenema allegedly to collect supplies for the parade; while they were gone, the RUF re-invaded and captured a large army cache of guns and ammunition—large enough that, from that point on the war escalated irreversibly (Demby, p. 109).

Demby fled Kenema after this RUF counterattack, but he went back to his home chiefdom of Bomo (also spelled Boama in the documents) with a business model ripe for replication. Once there he persuaded his uncle, Paramount Chief AS Demby III to coordinate with other chiefs in the region and form a local militia. Demby and his uncle then convened a meeting of neighboring Paramount Chiefs. Norman's first connection with the paramilitary movement in Sierra Leone dates from this meeting, since he was one of the chiefs invited by Demby's uncle,

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<sup>6</sup>Interviews with senior CDF commander 3, ERECOM Steering Council member.

whose chiefdom was adjacent to Norman's. At the meeting the chiefs of Jiama Bongor, Bomo, Wunde, Gboyama, Tikonko, and one nearby Punjehun chiefdom agreed to form a "chiefdom committee" to lobby the NPRC for help. This chiefdom council sought to replicate the successful ERECOM model on a larger scale, with a more organized and self-sufficient militia. Whereas in the ERECOM initiative, volunteers for the most part worked as a subordinate part of army patrols, these militias would be "chiefdom boundary guards" under the command of their respective chief. Ultimately, the chiefs decided to volunteer 75 young men per chiefdom, vetted by them as citizens in good standing in the community. These men then received training by the NPRC (and at times by mercenaries with the firm Executive Outcomes; see Wlodarczyk, 2009, p. 77) in basic military skills and tactics and returned to their respective chiefdoms to serve as paramilitary defense units.

By his own account, Norman then spent the rest of 1994 and early 1995 using his military know-how to train his troops for more advanced forms of warfare. He was in the middle of one of these drills when he was attacked in Telu supposedly by a large RUF contingent.<sup>7</sup> It was a large, well orchestrated maneuver, and (at this point in the war, with all sides underfunded, a rarity) the attackers carried RPGs, AK 47's, and grenades. Norman very narrowly survived this attack, in which 50 of his 75 men were killed. And yet, even though the day ended in defeat, the incident earned Norman enormous fame and praise, for it was viewed as a landmark in successful military resistance by civilians.

Norman subsequently fled to Bo town, and then to Freetown. As the stories of his battle of Telu spread, he began to attain national prestige as a sort of popular hero in the struggle against the RUF and the Sobels ('soldiers by day, rebels by night; see Keen (2005)).<sup>8</sup> According to his testimony, at one point during the battle in Telu he was captured and being led to his execution by a band of chanting men, when gunfire broke out and gave him a chance to escape. In his words, "I count myself very lucky. In Sierra Leone that luck had earned me very miraculous issues and names " (Norman, 01-24-06, p. 60).

The attack also seems to have further improved Norman's standing with the NPRC regime. This political capital allowed him to position himself in such a way that he could later co-opt and centralize the different paramilitary movements in the country. While in Bo, Norman was

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<sup>7</sup>In his testimony, Norman is coy about the actual group behind this attack: "Q: The RUF rebels attacked Telu. Is that what you are saying? A: This was very difficult to tell whether it was RUF or who, but then we felt it was a rebel attack. They led and some of them in military attire and some of them were in different clothes so you could not say whether they were civilians or soldiers or rebels, whoever " (Norman, 02-01-06, p. 59-60). Among those interviewed there was little doubt that dissident army factions, jealous of Norman and threatened by his growing influence and military power, faked a rebel attack in order to be rid of him.

<sup>8</sup>Interview with senior CDF commander 1 .

summoned by the then-NPRC-president Valentine Strasser. Strasser had decided to increase his military support of Norman, with much larger quantities of shotguns and ammunition for his men. More importantly, though, it was during this visit to Freetown that Norman became part of a council of exiled chiefs in Freetown who were starting to think more strategically about self-defense in their chiefdoms.<sup>9</sup> At that point, he claimed in his Special Court testimony, he learned that the NPRC had already begun distributing large amounts of shotguns to hunter groups around the country, in arrangements similar to his own. Both because of his military experience and his national prestige, he was chosen as the spokesman to the NPRC for this chiefdom self-defense council. For the next few months before the military conceded power in the 1996 elections, this council, led by Norman, held bi-weekly “coordinating” meetings with the NPRC Ministers of Internal Affairs and Defense.<sup>10</sup> Democratization in 1996 brought the SLPP, the traditionally Southern, Mende party, to power after decades of APC one-party rule. Because of his background, his unique position in this chiefdom self-defense council, his connections with the vice-presidential candidate (Demby), and his credibility within the military, Norman was an obvious choice for post of Deputy Defense Minister in the SLPP government of Tejan Kabbah.<sup>11</sup>

Two features of Norman’s role as deputy minister before the AFRC coup of May 1997 stand out. First, he furthered the paramilitary cause by helping pass through parliament laws that made legitimate the carrying of heavy weapons by chiefdom hunters. Effectively, Norman legalized the distribution by the NPRC of “huge quantities of shotguns” to chiefs throughout the country (Norman, 01-25-06, p. 8). Second, he used his office and national platform to gain control from afar of paramilitary groups in Kenema. After Demby’s escape from Kenema, ERECOM had continued to grow, but fortuitously for Norman, it was leaderless at the time of his designation as Deputy Defense Minister. Lavalie, who was a lecturer at a Polytechnic Institute in Kenema, started recruiting students and trappers into independent vigilante groups<sup>12</sup> and ERECOM<sup>13</sup> gained popularity and power quickly.<sup>14</sup> Soon the group had an independent power base and was accumulating enough men and firepower to threaten the (local) military. It appears to be common knowledge that the army conspired to murder Lavalie

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<sup>9</sup>Interview with Moyamba Paramount Chief

<sup>10</sup>From Norman’s testimony, 01-25-2006, p. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup>Kabbah named himself as minister.

<sup>12</sup>Interview with senior CDF commanders 1 and 3.

<sup>13</sup>Nallo called the EREDC, but multiple references in the special court transcripts refer to it as ERECOM. See Witness TF2-079 (05-26-05, pp. 8-9.

<sup>14</sup>There was also a Kenema District Defense Committee, KENDECOM, that apparently was comprised of Paramount Chiefs in the area, though their role is unclear. WITNESS: TF2-079, p.

in late 1995. An army unit in the area asked him over to the war front for a “coordinating” meeting but laid the road with landmines in advance.<sup>15</sup> From his position at the ministry, Norman was able to co-opt the organization by funneling state resources and patronage.<sup>16</sup> As argued by Hoffman (2007), hierarchies of authority within the factions of the Sierra Leonean civil war were not really given by a defined structure, by seniority, or even by the level of involvement in military operations. Rather, the access to weapons and logistics determined an individual’s standing in the organization. Even a young upstart who, through skill or deceit, secured a better source of patronage could name himself commander (and be heeded as such) over his older, politically prominent superiors (Hoffman, 2007, pp. 653-655). Therefore, Norman’s access to state coffers, when combined with his national prestige, allowed him within months to graft himself onto the top of this paramilitary formation.

It is clear, then, that Norman’s rise to prominence as the national leader of the civilian defense was due partly to his political connections in the Mende elite. It is also evident, however, that his early alliance with Albert Demby is largely responsible for Norman’s trajectory. In fact, the rapport between these men caused suspicion as early as 1997. Demby claims to have read, around the time of the AFRC coup, a newspaper editorial claiming that he and Norman were about to throw a coup themselves if not for the AFRC’s earlier coup preempting their plan (Demby, 02-10-06, p. 24). Along similar lines, it seems particularly telling that Colonel Khobe, in charge of the West African peace keeping ECOMOG force in Sierra Leone, apparently misled Vice-president Demby in the lead-up to the ousting of the AFRC Junta, and did not tell him of his intention to retake Freetown without any Kamajor involvement (Demby, 02-10-06, p. 34).

### **3.3 “The Miracle in the Mendeland”**

There was a second major current of paramilitarism, developing parallel to that formed by Norman, Demby and the NPRC. The term “Kamajor” refers to traditional Mende hunters in general, and eventually it came to be associated with the entire self-defense movement in Mendeland. However, the iconic image of the Kamajors in the folklore of the Sierra Leonean civil war refers to a particular cultural trend where holy men or priests (“initiators”) would cast spells on hunters that made them immune to bullets. This legend spread throughout the country at remarkable speed, and it motivated thousands of men to join the self-defense

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<sup>15</sup>Interview with senior CDF commanders 1 and 3. 3 noted that after Lavalie died, he was replaced first by a Kenema section chief named Brima Kargbo.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with CDF Commander 1.



movement.

At some point in 1994, in Bundapi, Punjehun, a Muslim sheik by the name of Mohammed Sheriff claimed to have received divine inspiration that showed him how to concoct protective charms for the local group of hunters that had been defending the town from the RUF. And on the first mission after receiving the charms, the hunters, though barely armed, captured substantial numbers of rebels and weapons, all while remaining completely unharmed. This episode was considered at the time a “miracle from God in the Mendeland.” When they received news of Sheriff’s achievement, Paramount Chiefs in the chiefdoms nearby (Kwamebai Krim Nongoba Bullom in Bonthe District) lobbied Sheriff to replicate this for their local militias. All of these chiefdoms, they said, had local herbalists, Muslim Mystics, or juju-men, who could be trained to impart Sheriff’s “gift” in their own areas. These Pujehun chiefdoms organized a gathering in 1994 to coordinate armed self-defense around this model. Three attendees stand out because of their later significance for the Civil Defense Force. Two of the proposed new initiators were Allieu Kondewa and Kamoh Lahai. Both became main initiators in the CDF; Kondewa, in particular, would be the head priest of the organization and Norman’s right hand man. Meanwhile, among the elders there was Moinina Fofana, the CDF’s Director of War. (Kondewa and Fofana were the only two people in the CDF, other than Norman, to be indicted by the Special Court for war crimes).<sup>17</sup>

This organization was then responsible for the enormous groundswell of popular support for the Kamajors. This corps trained initiators who would travel to different parts of the country and start new “cells,” which would initiate hundreds of new members at a time. Crucially, all of this happened under the strict supervision of traditional rulers. Only the chiefdom authorities had a final say on who could be initiated. They made sure that members were people “in good standing” in their communities and “respectful of their elders.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, well into 1996, the Kamajors were completely under the control of the chiefs and the initiators.<sup>19</sup> Whereas intellectuals like Alpha Lavalie and long-time politicians formed part of the ERECOM-type paramilitaries, these new cells were much poorer and more rural, and most often illiterate.<sup>20</sup>

According to Special Court witness testimonies, Norman used his position of authority as Deputy Minister of Defense to merge the more “secular” wing of paramilitarism with the ritual-based Kamajor wing, therefore centralizing paramilitarism in Sierra Leone under one

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<sup>17</sup>Interview with CDF Commander 1.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with senior CDF commander 1.

<sup>19</sup>Interview with senior CDF commander 1.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with Former Kamajor

common social organization. In 1996, already in government, he travelled to Kenema and convinced paramilitaries in the area (mostly associated with the original ERECOM faction) to be initiated into the Kamajor society. Norman then sent Mohammed Sheriff to Kenema in September of that year, whereupon thousands of paramilitaries from the East travelled to Kenema to receive Sheriff's blessing (Witness TF2-079, 02-26-05, p. 11-12). It is unclear why exactly, but it appears that Norman's initiation decree carried singular force. A senior Kamajor commander, who at that point had spent years fending off RUF attacks in his district and was in charge of dozens of armed men insisted that initiation was "compulsory."<sup>21</sup>

This centralization, however, could proceed only haltingly so long as chiefs and local elders retained control over the selection of recruits and the initiation process. It is not clear from the sources why it was the case, but it seems that the legitimacy and guidance of the original initiator, Mohammed Sheriff prevented the usurping of the chiefs authority. Consequently, the centralization of power increased dramatically after his death. Sheriff was killed in October 1996 in a battle with a rogue army unit, and the Kamajors elected Kamara Brima Bangura to succeed him as head priest. Bangura was happy to accept initiates traveling to see him, regardless of recommendation, so long as they paid (Witness TF2-079, 02-26-05, p. 14)

Making paramilitarism depend on ritual initiation and centralizing it around Norman occurred almost simultaneously. After the rise of Bangura, almost immediately, claimed one witness, Norman was able to make "the organization . . . a national issue. The organization was now controlled by Chief Hinga Norman, being that [sic] he was the Minister of Internal Affairs and Deputy Minister of Defence." As Norman gained authority, the old structures, both those of chiefs and initiators, and those laid by ERECOM, declined: after Norman took over, "the defence [sic] committee were [sic] slowly dying down" (Witness TF2-079, 02-26-05, p. 15).

### 3.4 The Coup

A faction of the army, allied with the RUF and disgruntled at Kabbah's support of the paramilitaries, overthrew the Kabbah government in May 1997. The military junta, known as the AFRC, saw eliminating the Kamajors and paramilitary forces as their first objective. Nonetheless, the AFRC coup proved to be a boon for Norman, both because it granted him ultimate control over the entire paramilitary movement, and because it made the political elites in Freetown completely dependent on him.

After the coup, the cabinet (including Norman) fled to Conakry, Guinea. With the army in

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<sup>21</sup>Interview with senior CDF commander 2.

rebellion, the government was completely dependent on civilian defense forces and ECOMOG (the mostly Nigerian force from ECOWAS). Yet it is at this point that the first fissures emerge in the relationship between Norman and the traditional Mende/SLPP elite. Norman and President Kabbah had had a particularly strained relationship, even before the coup. According to Norman, conflict between them escalated even further when they arrived at Conakry. They were refusing to coordinate at all until an intervention by the international community forced them to. The Nigerian and British High Commissioners, the American ambassador, and the UNDP representative to Sierra Leone pledged their financial and (through ECOMOG) military support for the restoration of the Kabbah government, but conditioned it strictly on full collaboration between Norman and Kabbah (Norman, 01-25-06 p. 17-22). Kabbah's cabinet, together with a few other prominent politicians who had fled to Conakry, became a "War Council" that was to coordinate between the government and civilian self-defense.<sup>22</sup> Norman was appointed "National Coordinator of Civil Defense" and taken to the Liberian border, from where he would, with help from ECOMOG-Liberia, establish contact with a large group of paramilitaries who had gathered at Bo Waterside after the coup and create supply lines of weapons and food for these paramilitary units.<sup>23</sup>

Norman's control of the supply lines from the Conakry government and ECOMOG gave him unprecedented authority over all paramilitary groups in the country. Shortly after the coup and Norman's arrival at the Liberian border, the CDF organized their home base at Talia, in Yawbeko Chiefdom, Bontho District. In September 1997, Norman moved to "Base Zero" (the headquarters at Talia). He then furthered his control over the Kamajor, ritual-based wing of the movement by co-opting its remaining leaders to the highest positions in the newly-formed CDF. He named Fofana "Director of War," purportedly in recognition of his role as a pioneer of the Kamajor Movement, since he connected his chiefdom militia with Mohammed Sheriff and supported the spread of Kamajor cells. Sheriff had been killed by the time of Norman's arrival at Base Zero, but in his stead, Norman appointed Kondewa as head initiator.<sup>24</sup> According to one of the interviewees familiar with Council proceedings, Norman appointed them because "he wanted only 'yes men'" surrounding him, and he knew

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<sup>22</sup>The term "War Council" refers in the sources to two separate organizations. One, as used above, was the group of national politicians in exile to whom Norman reported, but this usage is rather informal. The second, more relevant use, refers to the commission of notables (Paramount Chiefs, local politicians, businessmen from Bo and Kenema) established at Base Zero to oversee and advise Norman in his running of the CDF. We describe this second organization in greater detail below.

<sup>23</sup>Włodarczyk (2009) shows that, while Norman and the CDF/Kamajors had close relationships with the ECOMOG force in Liberia, their interactions with ECOMOG-II, the ECOWAS force assigned to Sierra Leone, were much more strained (168-169, fn. 40-41).

<sup>24</sup>Interview with CDF Commander 1 and 3.

Fofana and Kondewa would be especially pliable.<sup>25</sup> There is also evidence in Special Court Transcripts supporting the view that Norman was seeking to appoint cronies to positions of power without the Council's consent. For instance, Fofana's appointment by Norman was a highly controversial issue in the former's CDF trial. One of the witnesses for the prosecution, who had belonged to the War Council and testified largely in closed session because of threats to his personal security, asserted that Norman had given Fofana and Kondewa their titles and powers without consulting the Council; moreover, the witness seemed to imply that the defendants had forged documents to obscure this fact (Witness TF2-005, 16-02-05, 54-55). Multiple interviewees complained about the fact that Fofana was illiterate, while his job as Director of War involved reading field reports and drafting orders.

In stark difference to his position before the coup, now Norman had access to a large source of ECOMOG patronage. Up to that point, the only weapons available to self-defense groups had been hunting shotguns and whatever they could capture from RUF combatants. Thanks to his position as CDF Coordinator and as ECOMOG's only connection to the self-defense movement, Norman, in contrast, could supply RPGs, explosives, and automatic weapons, which made him virtually unassailable. (Although he tried to paint himself as subordinate to the Conakry Council during the trial, Norman himself made clear that these national politicians were quite divorced from the CDF on the ground. For instance, he recounted how in the months immediately after his return to Sierra Leone in 1997, he would travel to Conakry and brief the War Council-Conakry on his dealings with ECOMOG. By his admission, they were delighted and surprised (Norman, 01-25-06, p. 52)).

To Norman's chagrin, powerful political business and traditional leaders from the south and east migrated to Base Zero shortly after his arrival. These local notables formed a body with the CDF also known as the "War Council". In theory, the War Council's main role was to advise Norman on strategy and on administering the everyday affairs of the CDF.<sup>26</sup> However, members of the War Council apparently wanted it to fulfill a broader, political goal. According to a number of people interviewed, the Council wanted to "create institutions and give the thing some structure." Włodarczyk (2009, p. 73) argues that the dramatic expansion of the paramilitary movement in 1996-1997, when many thousands of recruits were initiated into the Kamajor society, had severely undermined the organization and discipline of the movement. It is probable, then, that Norman was under pressure, in particular from his backers in Conakry,

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Southern politician involved in the CDF and CDF Commander 1.

<sup>26</sup> The defense in Norman's trial tried to argue that the War Council was above Norman and ultimately responsible for war-time decision-making, but given the weight of the evidence, this theory beggars belief.

to allow this kind of supervisory body. At the same time, the traditional SLPP elites (both those in exile in Conakry and the West, and those who had migrated to Base Zero), seem to have been concerned about maintaining a broader pro-rural, pro-SLPP political mission in the paramilitary movement. Ultimately, the Council's efforts were for naught, as Norman retained absolute authority over the CDF.<sup>27</sup>

Crucially, the War Council consisted of regional notables whose human capital was instrumental to any long-term paramilitary political project. In particular, the organization needed their leadership experience and administrative savvy to build the parastatal institutions with which to cement a political presence and govern territory. According to a witness for the prosecution in the trial of the CDF leaders, the appointed members of the War Council were

the stake holders who were there, because of their presence, their caliber, they were reported by the National Coordinator to be in the council . . . because of their talents they would be able to construct civilian [administrations], map out strategies and other things, so they were appointed by the National Coordinator (Special Court transcript 11-16-2004, Witness TF2-008, p. 72).

Most of these members were either Paramount Chiefs or prominent SLPP politicians, as well as business and community leaders.<sup>28</sup>

During his time at Base Zero, before the restoration of the Kabbah government, Norman sought to shake off two sets of shackles. First, while he could not entirely dispense with the local elites and Paramount Chiefs, it seems that Norman sought to nullify any influence these regional notables might have had over the military wing of the movement. In interviews with the authors, a number of civilians and Paramount Chiefs involved in the CDF claimed that Norman did not want any institutions to form that he did not directly control; moreover, they saw Norman's concentration of power under his hands as the main reason why the CDF's long run political project. In the words of a Southern SLPP politician, "this [the CDF] could have been a good thing, a really good thing" if only they had been allowed to "put structures in place"; this politician claimed it was impossible to create any institutions for the CDF because "that man [Norman] was a tyrant." Second, Norman wanted to sever the paramilitary movement from the SLPP government and the national-level political elites in Conakry.

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<sup>27</sup>See, for instance, Witness TF2-008 (11-16-04, p. 77), and Witness TF2-014, (03-11-05, p. 16, 18).

<sup>28</sup>The Council included, among others, Paramount Chiefs Charlie Caulker, JW Quee and Sam Demby; local politicians and leaders included Alhaji Daramy Rogers, a prominent businessman in Bo and one-time government minister for the APC under one-party rule, and George Jambawai (Witness TF2-079, 26-05-06 p 66).

We address first the relationship between Norman and the War Council. While it is unclear from the sources exactly how this Council came to be, it is abundantly clear that Norman and his lieutenants soon perceived it as an obnoxious check on their authority; as Kondewa would tell his troops, motivating them to harass the members, “that council is a fake one, they are just there to complicate matters” (Witness TF2-079, 26-05-06, p. 47). Soon after the War Council was formed, Norman, together with Kondewa and Fofana, set out to undermine its authority and limit its ability to restrain the military leadership. A Special Court witness described the way in which the military leadership cowed the Council . “The War Council made laws,” argued the witness, but “those laws were being flouted.” The usual tactic employed by Norman, Kondewa, and Fofana (called “The Holy Trinity” by other dissident commanders (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 24)) was to incite the Kamajor rank-and-file against the civilian leadership. At one point, said the witness, “they made laws pertaining to how the Kamajors should put up good behaviors, but the next morning they [the troops] were seen pelting the War Council with stones” (p. 47).

Soon these episodes of intimidation had effectively silenced the council. Albert Nallo,<sup>29</sup> one of the leading witnesses for the prosecution, described in his testimony an episode where he travelled to Base Zero to report a Kamajor commander by the name of Vanjawai who had allegedly murdered innocent civilians. Nallo wanted the War Council to lobby Norman to punish Vanjawai, but they responded that “they can’t touch this case . . . [b]ecause the National Coordinator, Chief Hinga Norman, had threatened them and created fear in them regarding the Kamajors . . . [Norman warned] that if they did not stop reprimanding the fighters . . . if the fighters kill them [the War Council members], they wouldn’t blame anybody” (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 21) (i.e., nobody would be blamed for their deaths).

Seen in isolation, Norman’s clashes with the Council could perhaps be construed as a rather petty administrative affair: the Council tried to tell Norman how to run his war, which Norman could not countenance. Yet when one sees it together with Norman’s maneuvers against the SLPP national-level elite, the broader political project he pursued becomes clear.

While Norman— who after all depended on the good graces of the Kabbah administration to continue to receive military support from ECOMOG— was careful to portray himself as seeking the restoration of the SLPP government, he and his key lieutenants had a different long-term vision in mind. Almost immediately after the establishment of Base Zero, Norman

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<sup>29</sup>Nallo was National Deputy Director of Operations of the CDF. Given the illiteracy of Moinina Fofana, the official Director of War, Nallo was often effectively in command of most military and logistical affairs in the Southern region.

endeavored to transform the CDF into his personal political base. A crucial first step in that mission was to turn the rank and file against the SLPP establishment, since the overwhelming majority of the troops were Southern, Mende, and would probably have voted for Kabbah in 1996 if they voted at all. According to Nallo, even as Kabbah's government-in-exile helped bankroll the CDF, Norman would harangue the rank and file against the traditional political elites. For instance, he would tell the troops that "Kabbah and the SLPP government . . . [have] failed to give us arms and ammunition. Tejan Kabbah doesn't believe in the Kamajor movement, he doesn't want to hear about the Kamajor movement (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 32)." Norman was successful enough in delivering his message that the Kamajors "did not want to hear [Kabbah's] name]" (32). In particular, Norman seems to repeatedly have emphasized that the fountain of privilege – in weapons and food– flowed through him only: "the food, arms and ammunition that the national coordinator brought for us, he got them from one of his friends, an ECOMOG general who was in the Liberia, Abdulai Mohammed One" (p. 32).

Of course the natural conclusion of this line of reasoning was that Norman and his inner circle, supported by the Kamajors, should take control of the government themselves. It seems that this is precisely what the CDF top brass were planning to do during their time in Base Zero. Multiple witnesses corroborate the hidden political agenda of the commanders in Base Zero. The details of how they planned to rule the country are not entirely clear, but there was constant discussion of the fact once the CDF defeated the AFRC regime, they would not allow the Kabbah government to return to power. Rather, the CDF intended to be "in control of this nation for three years before inviting Tejan Kabbah to come" (Witness TF2-008, 11-16-04, p. 88).<sup>30</sup> We have no theory as to why Norman and his commanders claimed to limit their stay in power to three years; most likely, given the CDF's rhetoric about "restoring democracy" and the fresh memories of the devastation that authoritarian rule had brought to the South and East, this was a necessary (if temporary) sugar-coating of the ultimate political project. One should note, in any case, that there were plans to make this state of affairs more permanent. Nallo witnessed discussions where Norman suggested that, after taking Freetown, "if we find out that it is necessary for us to hand over we would, but if we don't find out that it is necessary then we will take over the reign of government and form the government" (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 32). Interviewees referred to this as a "secret agenda in the back of all our minds" from 1997 until the restoration of the Kabbah government.

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<sup>30</sup>See also the statement by Nallo to that effect. Since the Kabbah government had abandoned the Kamajors, Norman would tell his troops, "we were fighting on our own and when we fight on our own and when we capture the entire country we would rule the country for three years" (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 32).

Sierra Leone's paramilitary therefore oriented its counterinsurgency toward capturing the central state and acquiring direct control over the country's institutions— unlike the AUC in Colombia, which used the political influence gained from counterinsurgency success to manipulate the central state by proxy, never directly threatening the national political elite. The national-level political class (in particular, the cabinet in Conakry) was the most immediate victim in this scheme, but the agenda was equally threatening to local, provincial elites in the rural Southeast. A member of the War Council who was privy to these deliberations recounted that “any time we were seated around the fire or the War Council meeting, the Kamajors council – all commanders were having this at the back of their mind, so some areas the commanders were section chiefs, town chiefs, paramount chiefs, you know, because of that.” (p.88) Some of the significance in this statement is lost in the witness's broken English. What he alludes to, however, is crucial to understand why the old guard Southern elite was threatening to Norman and ultimately turned against him. In effect, the paramilitary political project, as envisioned by Norman, would endanger the rural, traditional interest that had given birth to the self-defense movement. If Norman got his way, the paramilitary elite “was to be in control of the chieftom power in the country.” The class that the War Council sought to represent and the mainstay of the SLPP's power and social base would lose all its power and influence.

Even though the Council had proved unable to create institutions that regulated the paramilitary movement, in the end they managed (by proxy) to check Norman's rise to power. It appears that Norman came tantalizingly close. In early 1998, shortly before the AFRC regime was finally overthrown, General Maxwell Khobe from ECOMOG met with the CDF top brass in Base Zero to plan the final operations to retake the major cities. At that meeting, Khobe had initially coordinated a joint effort with Norman, which involved the latter sending 7,000 of his men to retake Freetown. As shown by a witness who had belonged to the War Council, the regional notables in the council, aware of Norman's designs, approached General Khobe behind Norman's back and revealed that Norman intended to seize control of the government. An alarmed Khobe “realised that if he allowed the 7,000 Kamajors to come here [to Freetown], there will be a problem . . . if he allowed 7,000 Kamajors to take Freetown, the Kamajors will definitely not leave Freetown for three years” (Witness TF2-008, 11-16-04, p. 91). He then proceeded to fool Norman. ECOMOG attacked Freetown without any Kamajor involvement, far in advance of the date of deployment he had agreed on with Norman. It is deeply significant, as alluded to above, that Khobe did not apprise Vice-President Demby of his plans either. Khobe, it seems, knew or presumed that an alliance existed between Norman



and Demby, so that if Demby found out about the change of plans, Norman would, too, and would be prompted to attack Freetown himself.<sup>31</sup>

The timing of the episodes of intimidation against the War Council and the plot to seize power is slightly ambiguous, so that we cannot ascertain with precision which came first. In particular, we cannot discern perfectly whether Norman had harassed the Council hoping to control them, hoping in other words to stifle the kind of dissent that led to his betrayal. Or alternatively, whether he believed that his political project was so clearly in their best interest as privileged members of the CDF that he spoke to them freely about the plan, and the intimidation against them was just incidental. Given Norman's candor in discussing this plan among War Council members, it seems most likely that Norman thought that the Council would support his coup attempt, but threatened them in order to centralize power of the CDF in his hands. If indeed the CDF was to take control of the country, it would do so as Norman's personal fief, not as an institutionalized paramilitary movement representing the interests of the Southern rural elites.

### **3.5 Out of the Bush**

In March 1998, ECOMOG forces removed the AFRC from Freetown and reinstated the Kabbah government before Norman's Kamajors could deploy to the capital. This development allowed the CDF to come out of hiding in the jungles of the southern and eastern regions, gave it further prestige as the main party responsible for the restoration of democracy. And yet, coming out of the bush proved a mixed blessing for Norman and the paramilitary elite. On the one hand, after this military victory, the CDF became a legitimate *de facto* government in the large urban centers of the South and East, giving the paramilitary elite access to far greater rents. On the other, being out of the bush and getting partly integrated into the SLPP government's bureaucracy meant that, in the short term, some of Norman's political adversaries acquired much greater control over the CDF.

In particular, Norman found to his dismay that the War Council he had so assiduously undermined held indispensable human capital and privileged standing with the SLPP government. If the CDF was to govern its territory without quickly running afoul of President Kabbah, he needed them: they were, by definition, the most competent and reputable administrators in the CDF. By that point, Norman had succeeded in dismantling the War Council for all intents and purposes. As described by Nallo, "at that time we had no constitution because

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<sup>31</sup>This was widely confirmed by interviewees, both civilian and in the CDF's military wing, who were at Base Zero.

the War Council had become dormant; it was not active any more” (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 28). Norman maintained ultimate authority over the organization and could appoint whoever he wanted to administer the areas under CDF control. Yet it is relatively safe to assume that he must have felt significant pressure from the Kabbah government and ECOMOG to appoint War Council members to run local government, since he appointed them in spite of the fact that, at that juncture, he knew that someone in the War Council conspired with ECOMOG to disrupt his takeover of Freetown.

Within weeks of the AFRC being ousted, the CDF established parastatal government administrations in the areas under their control (Witness TF2-079, 05-26-06, p. 67). Initially, these administrations were organized at the regional level (South, East, North, West and Freetown). By 1998, only Bo and Kenema districts were really under full CDF control. George Jambawai became the regional administrator for the East. Tellingly, Alhaji Daramy Rogers, the (informally) designated representative of the Kabbah government in Base Zero,<sup>32</sup> became the administrator for the South. With this newfound authority, the War Council members began to implement the measures of oversight and institutionalization of the paramilitary that had been torpedoed by Norman and Kondewa at Base Zero. In Kenema, said someone involved in the civil administration there, expropriation and the level of rent extraction by the military side of the CDF dropped sharply: “The incident of looting, burning, commandeering of vehicles became minimised, and then the harassment of civilians was minimised during the Jambawai’s administration.” (Witness TF2-079, 05-26-05, p. 81).

This was an unstable equilibrium, however. The CDF’s top brass apparently bristled under the control of the War Council administrators, and Norman and his allies engaged in heavy-duty political jockeying to rid themselves of political opponents. At one point in mid 1998, Norman was actually making preparations to attack ECOMOG forces, since it had become apparent that they were a central obstacle for his political project. He summoned Nallo and ordered him to fight against ECOMOG. Expelling ECOMOG from his area of influence would also allow Norman to capture a new flow of rents; he “wanted to fight so that the supply of rice would be taken away from them and placed in the hands of Chief Norman” (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 64). Nallo flatly refused, which led Norman to come up with strategies to dislodge him from the CDF leadership.

At the same time, the Kabbah administration also began maneuvering to rein in Norman and gain control over the CDF. Norman was still at this point Deputy Minister of Defense,

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<sup>32</sup>See, for instance, (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 67).

and officially the CDF was that ministry's purview. But soon after coming back to power, Kabbah transferred legal control of the organization to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, even though Norman retained de facto control as its supreme military leader. It is telling that this administrative controlled was transferred to Charles Margai, in many ways the epitome of the rural Mende elite and the SLPP establishment, who was then Minister of Internal Affairs. Norman was furious, and intended to retaliate with force. When he heard the news, "Chief Norman said that if they remove the CDF under his ministry, as if he's a baby child, and take it to another ministry, they should create a chaotic atmosphere in the country" (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 65). He was preempted, however, by an immediate official visit of Margai and his entourage. Nallo sealed his fate with Norman and the rest of the paramilitary top brass when he was recorded in an interview as supporting the transfer of authority to Margai.

Even though he found himself at odds (and under political fire from) the traditional rural elite and the SLPP establishment, Norman could still use his early alliances with a faction of the national political elite. Namely, Vice-President Demby, the man who had helped him launch the paramilitary movement, held considerable power and legitimacy within the Kabbah administration. Demby seemed to have extracted from the Kabbah administration a key policy concession with which Norman could consolidate his absolute control over the CDF once and for all. Under the guise of "decentralizing" the de facto CDF governments so that they could function more effectively, Demby decreed in June 1998 that "Kamajor activities are at a district level, so [Kamajor administration] should return to the district level" (as opposed to the current regional-level organization; (Nallo, 03-11-05, p. 67)).

This had the extremely convenient side-effect of purging the CDF of all potential challengers to Norman's authority, all those who could interfere with his political agenda, and replacing them with reliable subordinates. "All those with regional positions [were] nullified," narrated Nallo. This included Jambawai and Rogers, the War Council members who had tried to reign in Norman while at Base Zero, ratted him out to ECOMOG Commander Maxwell Khobe, and restricted the rent-seeking of the paramilitary leaders in Bo and Kenema. And it also included Nallo, the high-ranking commander who had disrupted Norman's plans against ECOMOG.<sup>33</sup>. Predictably, almost immediately the level of rent extraction in CDF areas soared. In Kenema, after Jambawai was sacked, a base was opened at a refugee camp where civilians were detained and "harassed." Similarly "Kamajors at that time were charged with the order of taking every property, commercial vehicles – traders' properties, their commercial vehicles, were taken to

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<sup>33</sup>Interviews with CDF commanders, Southern politician involved in CDF

the direction of Tongo” (Witness TF2-079, 05-26-05, p. 82).

### **3.6 Territorial Defense Force**

The final try to consolidate the CDF power into a permanent institution came after the end of the war, under the rubric of a “Territorial Defense Force.” Some of the events surrounding the TDF fiasco are illuminating in regards to the interaction between the political elite, Norman, and the social base of the CDF.

After the formal end of the war, both Kabbah and the British military mission to Sierra Leone sought to create more permanent, institutionalized forms of civilian defense that would help maintain political order after the withdrawal of foreign forces. In particular, there was a plan to form a “Territorial Defense Force.” With the help of the British military, the Kabbah administration meant to arm and train 100 former CDF men in every district.

The project was jettisoned, however, because of concerns that Norman would wield undue influence over the institution (and by extension, over politics in the country); in many ways, this concern was dependent deeply related to the fact that Norman had severed the movement from the control of traditional rural leaders and . There were to main sources of opposition to the project. First, the British military decided to withdraw its support for the project. One of Norman’s commanders described a meeting with officers from the British military mission in Sierra Leone, where they vetoed Norman as the leader of the TDF unless he relinquished his post as Defense Minister, or vice-versa: “you cannot be both player and referee,” said British colonel to Norman.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, a Paramount Chief from the Southern region suggested that the chiefs collectively lobbied Kabbah to abandon the plan. They feared that, if the TDF came to be, no government would ever be elected or remain in power again that did not serve entirely at the pleasure of the paramilitary forces.<sup>35</sup> In the end the opposition of the British and the Paramount Chiefs was insurmountable, and the idea of a Territorial Defense Force was ruled out completely.

## **4 Colombia and the Success of Paramilitary Politics**

In this section we describe the trajectory of paramilitarism in Colombia, with particular emphasis on the political project of the paramilitary and the social class they represented and the factors that enabled this project to come to fruition. The common pattern, as in the case of

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<sup>34</sup>This passage mostly derives from Interview with senior CDF commander 3.

<sup>35</sup>Interview with Moyamba Paramount Chief.

Sierra Leone, is that the paramilitary groups represented the interests of a class of rural elites who had the most to lose from the insurgency. This class, in turn, mobilized to defend itself in because of a subpar (in their view) political equilibrium, which, as a result of being biased towards urban interests, ignored counterinsurgency altogether. Almost invariably, the paramilitaries were organized, with the support and funding of this social class, by a section of these rural elites who had expertise in the business of violence, either from prior military experience, involvement in the drug trade business, or (as was the case for the future leaders of the first major paramilitary group in Colombia) from involvement with the guerrilla groups themselves during an earlier period. In contrast to the Sierra Leonean case, the alliances formed in order to create the paramilitaries endured and this coalition of rural elites was therefore able to effect a dramatic change in the party system and permanently embed the protection of its interests into the political equilibrium.

First, we describe the changes in the political environment that led to the military mobilization of rural elites. Second, we elaborate on the form and trajectory of the paramilitary organizations that sprung from this mobilization. In particular, we illustrate their shifting relationship with traditional national politicians and the evolution of their political intentions. Moreover, we emphasize how the success of the paramilitary's long term political project (in contrast to the failure of the CDF's political project in Sierra Leone) depended on and was made possible by their carefully managed alliance with the elites that had helped form them.

#### **4.1 Urban Bias and the Waning of Counterinsurgency in the 1980s**

Before the election of Belisario Betancur (Conservative) as president in 1982, the state had, in fact, pursued counterinsurgency with a force and severity that agreed with the preferences of mid to large rural landowners. As soon as he came into office, Liberal president Julio Cesar Turbay (1978-1982) acquiesced to the military's request for a scorched-earth counterinsurgency campaign that could address the growth in guerrilla activity in the years. So that the army could act "without the obstacles of traditional legal considerations" Turbay declared a state of siege and passed a decree (the "Security Statute") that gave the military judicial powers and allowed it, among other things, to enter private homes as well as detain and interrogate civilians without warrants. Tacitly, the administration also started endorsing the use of torture by the army during interrogations of suspected guerrilla fighters or collaborators. According to an estimate published by the Ministry of Defense at the time, between August 1978 and July 1979, over 60.000 people were detained and interrogated under the new policy (Melo, 1990, p.

485).

Aside from radical factions within the military, the main constituency in favor of this policy direction was a class of mid-to large scale rural landowners that had most often been the target of extortion by guerrilla movements.<sup>36</sup> Across the country, rural landowners– cattle ranchers in particular– had been the main victims of the guerrilla, subjected frequently to extortion and kidnapping. Cattle-rancher guilds were therefore crucially supportive of this Cold-War inspired counter insurgent strategy. This situation was especially clear in the Magdalena Medio region and the town of Puerto Boyacá, Santander (which would become the birthplace of the first major paramilitary group in the country) where the deep roots of leftist movements had allowed guerrilla groups to spread quickly and gain territorial control. All social groups in this region, from large-scale landowners to small farmers, had endured extortion and kidnapping by the FARC on a different order of magnitude from the extortion this group practiced in the rest of the country. Moreover, a number of influential landowners had been kidnapped even though they had been instrumental in helping the FARC achieve territorial control in the area and had even helped arrange arms deals for the group. This group therefore vehemently supported even the more brutal forms of counterinsurgency. Even before the Security Statute was enacted, some of the landowners had already started to retaliate against the guerrilla in short, furtive raids (see, for instance, the interview in Corporación Observatorio Para La Paz, 2002, p. 93-99). They had also begun to collaborate with the more radically anti-communist elements of the local army battalions, but before the state of siege was in full force, this collaboration had been sporadic. The establishment of this policy coincided with successes from the isolated raids by landowners which convinced the army of their effectiveness against the guerrilla. Thus, under Turbay's new counterinsurgency policy, higher ranks from nearby army bases had both the ability and motivation to get involved with these home-grown "specialists in violence"; the army therefore "decides to train [them] and arm them well, and incorporates them into a scorched earth strategy against the FARC" (Corporación, p. 99). With support from a large swathe of the local population, during 1979 and in particular 1980 army units and rural elites thus began to capture, torture and massacre known or suspected collaborators of the FARC (Melo, 1990, p. 490).

With good reason, then, Melo writes that "during the government of [Julio Cesar] Turbay

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<sup>36</sup> As we discuss later, these constituencies of conservative (lower case "c") rural landowners were overwhelmingly *Liberal* (capital "L") and from regions where the Liberal party had been hegemonic for decades. In that sense they are a very different class from the ultra-conservative landlords one usually associates with Latin American right-wing parties.

there did not exist much of a reason for [creating] paramilitary organizations dedicated to carrying out illicit activities against subversive groups because the Armed Forces and the police were already doing as much" (Melo, 1990, 491). This is to say that up to 1982, one did not see large-scale, independent and organized paramilitarism because the political system still properly represented the interests of these rural elites.

And yet, this state of affairs could not last, if for no other reason because the counterinsurgency campaign, and the violations of civil liberties that came with it, were incredibly unpopular with urban voters— who were arguably also the country's the swing and median voters.<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, a rift appeared in the Liberal party between Turbay's faction, which represented the party's coalition of provincial and rural political bosses, and a dissident reformist group, led by Luis Carlos Galan, which represented the more progressive, urban elements of the party and was particularly popular among middle and lower classes in the major cities. This latter faction strenuously opposed the repressive policies pushed by the traditional (also more rural) party bosses and endeavored against the party's majority wing in 1982. (Romero, 2007, p. 457).

On the other hand, after seeing their party relegated to a near-permanent minority status, strategists in the Conservative party tried to leverage the unpopularity of counterinsurgency in order to co-opt the country's new urban majorities. The party had at that point lost two presidential elections in a row, which had not happened since the 1930s, and was completely overshadowed in congressional elections. In the words of one of Belisario Betancur's campaign managers, who later would become his Minister of Foreign Affairs, before 1982 "we were playing [a game of] partial democracy, because only one side was allowed to win, [the Liberals], who were quote, unquote, the majority" (Romero, 2007, p.459). At the same time, in contrast to the rural, more reactionary core of the Conservative party, most of these party leaders seeking a change in strategy subscribed to tendencies within the Catholic Church that advocated progressive social reform and social welfare policies to help the urban poor (Romero, 2007, p. 458). Not surprisingly, these political leanings led to a radically different attitude toward the counterinsurgency campaign and the conflict in the countryside. One of Betancur's most prominent allies had defied the state of siege under Turbay and established dialogues with the M-19 guerrilla, and he went so far as to publicly advocate the typical slogan of far-left Latin American peasant movements, "land is for those who work on it" (p. 460) Thus a powerful faction formed within the party that sought to transform the Conservatives into

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<sup>37</sup>The following three paragraphs rely heavily on on the interpretation in Romero (2007).

a viable electoral force in the cities with a joint platform of progressive social reforms and peace negotiations with the different guerrillas. Belisario Betancur and his allies could make optimal use of these currents within the party, especially since he had been a popular Minister of Labor and during a previous failed presidential run had gained the endorsement of the country's Catholic-inspired, anti-communist labor unions (Pecaut, 2006, p. 103-104).

Hence, the pressure of the urban swing voter in Colombian politics appeared to have turned the erst-while natural advocates of strong counter-insurgency (the Conservative party, with its heavily rural base) into the most dovish faction in the country's electoral landscape. In 1982, the Conservative reformists allied with the breakaway, urban-middle-class faction of the Liberal party; their electoral gambit paid off almost immediately, for Betancur was elected with the largest number of votes for a presidential candidate in history (Kalmanovitz, 1990, 203).<sup>38</sup>

Betancur drastically rolled back Turbay's counterinsurgency strategy. He suspended Turbay's Security Statute, which had given the military judicial powers and the ability to arbitrarily restrict civil liberties. Signaling his shift away from the Cold War counterinsurgency vision dictated by the US, he had his Minister of Foreign relations ask for the removal of American military advisors from El Salvador. And most importantly, less than three months after taking office, he got congress to pass a law giving unconditional amnesty to all rebel groups (Pecaut, 2006, 305- 306). He made repeated overtures to the M-19 throughout 1983 and 84, and in 1984, his negotiations with the FARC resulted in a declaration of cease fire toward that group. Crucial for later developments is the fact that, as a result of these peace accords with the FARC, this guerrilla could found a political party (the "Unión Patriótica" (UP)) in 1985. (Melo, 1990, 496; Pecaut, 2006, 330).

At first, Betancur's enormous popularity forced the radical elements in the military to acquiesce to the amnesty law. Yet it is illustrative of its malcontent towards the new policy that in early 1983, Betancur's own Minister of Defense, General Landazabal wrote in the Armed

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<sup>38</sup>This new policy so threatened the rural bases of the party that a number of Conservative 'elder statesmen,' including former president Misael Pastrana Borrero and Alvaro Gomez Hurtado (son of the most popular and far right Conservative president in the twentieth century) publicly denounced Betancur. The background of these two leaders is worth expounding on, since it makes especially clear the constituencies that felt abandoned by transformation of the the Conservative party. The paramount priority of Pastrana Borrero's administration (1970-1974) had been to completely dismantle land reform programs from previous governments, which it accomplished in just a few years. This had sparked the largest peasant protest movement in the country's history, as thousands who had benefitted from the reforms invaded agricultural estates in the north. Pastrana not only brutally repressed the peasant movement, but also implemented a number of policies to help mid- to large scale landowners establish modern agro-industrial export businesses. Alvaro Gomez's father, Laureano, had been president during the early 1950's when numerous rural guerrillas arose to challenge the Conservative government. At the time Laureano Gomez created and armed posses of Conservative loyalists who massacred peasants in Liberal areas.



Forces Journal that downscaling counterinsurgency was leading to “a struggle of incalculable, unforeseeable proportions” in the near future. In his end-of year letter to the troops, he added that in his view “amnesty is a thing of the past.” Numerous generals make public statements supporting Landazabal’s stance, and according to Pecaute, by early 1984, the general declared open disobedience to his civilian bosses: he declared on a televised statement that “a cease fire is something that the Armed Forces will not concede ... we have given [the guerrilla] amnesty, and now they want dialogue. If we gave them dialogue, they would ask for something else . . . where they really want to get is the presidential chair, but they are not going to get [there]” (Pecaute, 2006, 323-324). Betancur was then forced to remove the general, and he suggested in public statements that members of the political class were encouraging the military to depose him (327). Thus, starting in 1982, segments in the army that wanted to continue the scorched-earth campaign against the guerrilla started to look for illegal alliances and opportunities that would allow them to do so.

## **4.2 The Rise of Armed Self-Defense**

The malcontent brewing in certain factions of the army was certainly one of the main developments that fostered the growth of the paramilitary movement. And yet, while factions in the military may have been ideologically opposed to Betancur’s peace initiatives, they were not the constituency that had most to lose from the new political consensus. Rather, this position was reserved for a substrata of rural landowners and farmers in areas of guerrilla influence. In regions where the core of the paramilitary movement developed— the department of Córdoba, the Urabá region, and the Magdalena Medio region— the truces, cease-fires and other limitations placed on the army exposed all but the richest rural landowners and farmers to an unmitigated campaign of extortion by the FARC, ELN, and EPL guerrillas, which used those years to finance their military expansion through forced contributions and kidnapping ransoms.

In light of the political atmosphere of the early 1980s, one can easily rationalize the timing of the first sprouts of armed self-defense in Colombia. The early 1980’s under peace negotiations were crucially formative years for the main paramilitary leaders and the social class that supported them. Some, like vigilante posses operating in Puerto Boyacá and the Castaño brothers in Northeastern Antioquia, saw this new equilibrium as empowering and emboldening the very groups whose victims they had been before the peace process.

As mentioned above, as early as 1980 landowners in Puerto Boyacá had begun to collabo-

rate with radical elements in the nearby army battalion to systematically eliminate the FARC and its collaborators in the area. The process that followed in the wake of Betancur's peace initiatives closely resembled the formation of Alpha Lavalie's ERECOM in Sierra Leone. In 1982, in part sensing that the army's ability to rout the guerrilla would be (at least on a legal, official level) severely constrained in the years to come (and that the guerrilla would surely take advantage of this fact), a group of landowners, politicians, merchants, and businessmen from the area helped transform this incipient vigilantism into the first real self-defense militia in the country. They established a 200 million pesos fund to provide for the defense of the region, while local army officers started providing significant training and weapons to cadres of landowners and their farm workers (Melo, 1990, 494; on the rural elites' recruitment of subordinates and dependents for paramilitary troops, see Gutiérrez Sanín and Barón, 2005, 12). Vigilante groups were organized at the hamlet level to keep FARC units out of the area. Trying to distance itself from the tacit approval of repression under Turbay, Betancur's government denounced the group and numerous massacres of left-wing activists in which it was involved, and tried to discipline military officers who had collaborated with these paramilitary massacres. The Puerto Boyacá paramilitaries and the rural elite backing them responded to this and the increasing guerrilla threat by becoming even more autonomous and self-sufficient. By 1984, these rural elites formed the ACDEGAM (*Asociación Campesina de Agricultores y Ganaderos del Magdalena Medio*). This institution sought to create a broad base of social support against the FARC's incursions. It therefore pooled resources to reinvest in local public goods; it built primary schools, arranged for medical services for the town's poorer farmers, and set up a network of communal stores to stimulate the local economy and provide jobs. More importantly, the ACDEGAM served as the coordinating institution for the 'military' effort against the FARC. In large part with the help of drug-traffickers who had purchased substantial lands in the area, the organization arranged for more advanced military training (even bringing in foreign mercenaries who gave courses in counterinsurgency) as well as indoctrination courses, where recruits for the self-defense force were taught the evils of communism and the virtues of the paramilitary cause (Melo, 495; Gutiérrez Sanín and Barón, 2005, 12-13). Up to the late 1980s, when the group almost disintegrated over the issue of drug-trafficking, this community structure made the Puerto Boyacá paramilitaries into the most effective and brutal anti-subversive force in the country.

Likewise, during the 1980s the Castaño brothers, sons of a mid-scale cattle rancher who had been kidnapped and murdered by the FARC in 1981 in the town of Segovia, (Aranguren,

2002, p.) reacted to developments in the peace process by carefully constructing, and then unleashing, a “scorched earth” campaign against the guerrilla and its supporters, real or imagined. What separated the Castaños from other rural landowning families that suffered this same fate was that Fidel, the eldest son, had acquired an expertise in violence that others in his social class lacked. As a teenager, he had left the farm in Antioquia where his family lived in order to try his luck (Aranguren, 2002, 83). He had gotten involved and made a small fortune working with the cartels controlling the emerald trade, and had also worked for the Medellín drug cartel (Mendez, 1992, 12). Thus, in 1981 the Castaños had already been able to seek and execute the clandestine FARC collaborators who had helped stage the kidnapping, and indeed they had remained involved in assassinations of FARC-associated civilians throughout.

Nonetheless, Castaños’ persecution of FARC supporters was in some sense only a petty vendetta until Betancur’s peace initiatives allowed the FARC to form a political party in 1985. In the following years, Fidel Castaño transformed his criminal outfit into a much more organized deadly paramilitary group that slowly started to resemble the large, institutionalized army his brother led in the 1990s; moreover, he did so largely in response to the military and political advantages that, in the view he and most rural elites espoused, these new policies were giving to the insurgency. Following the creation of its political wing, the FARC tapped into, and greatly magnified, a wave of popular discontent from traditionally marginalized groups, such as workers’ unions, poor farmers, and landless peasants. While many, if not most of the activists in the UP were long time labor organizers with no direct links to the FARC, a significant faction within the party was in fact helping guerrilla in its broader strategy of territorial control. For instance, Zamosc (1990) shows that, of 139 large peasant protests between 1985 and 1987, seventy-one were organized by the new political wings of the different guerrillas in the areas where they had a military presence. And of these, the *Unión Patriótica* had staged 69%, acting through settlers’ committees and other organizations (345-347). Thus, at the same time that rural landowners endured extortion from the military wing of the guerrilla, they felt threatened by the social disturbances promoted by its political wing. The following statement from the time by Córdoba’s cattle farmers illustrates how the paramilitaries and their supporters in the rural elite perceived these popular protests: the guerrilla, they claimed,

sought to obtain the same goals that they wanted to achieve by force of arms, only now they make use of [popular] agitation. In effect . . . distributed in key places across the national territory, in articulation with elements of both the civil and ecclesiastical left, many of them have been [executing] a plan of veritable

social perturbation [i.e., disturbance], promoting and organizing invasions and occupations of farms and estates and, in sum, [stoking] the fire of class warfare, now no longer clandestinely, but in more or less ostensible ways (Romero, 2003, 123).

At the same time, immediately after its inception, the UP achieved sizeable electoral victories in the left-leaning regions and the country, which included Segovia and Castaño's area of influence. And in a move that was deeply threatening to rural elites, the national government chose to acknowledge the remarkable electoral success of the UP in the 1986 elections (Romero, 2003, 198) for congress and local legislative councils by giving 23 mayorships to the UP in areas where they had shown majority support. Under the current constitution, there were no popular elections for mayor, so in the eyes of rural elites this gave insurgents and their sympathizers a unique opportunity to subvert the social order in their communities and further their campaign of extortion.<sup>39</sup>

Fidel Castaño and his brother Carlos therefore started to think more strategically about their war against the FARC (and by extension, much of the left) around 1985. They invested in lands in Córdoba and Urabá, north of their region of origin. By 1986, in preparation for the first elections in which the UP could present candidates, Fidel Castaño formed a paramilitary squad by the name of MRN (Muerte a Revolucionarios del Nordeste Antioqueño, Spanish for "Death to Revolutionaries of Northeastern Antioquia") with the goal of suppressing "*guerrilleros de civil*" ("civilian guerrillas"), i.e., the leftist civilian activists thought to be associated with the FARC (Mendez, 1992, 13-14). That same year, they started cooperating with the Puerto Boyacá paramilitaries and received training from rogue army officers in the Magdalena Medio region. Yet Fidel's dirty war against the FARC began in earnest in 1988, when it was becoming apparent that the UP was poised to win the first popular elections for mayor in Segovia, the same town where his father had been kidnapped a few years earlier (Romero, 2002, p.). Shortly after the election, Fidel's men virtually cleansed the town of every UP organizer or sympathizer, killing 43 people in one day. Similarly, the Castaños began using their new foothold in the Urabá region to counter the growing influence of the guerrillas in this banana growing region, targeting, in particular, those areas where the UP had made significant gains and where it seemed that their mobilization of peasant discontent most threatened the rural elites. As Romero argues, Castaño's *modus operandi* "coincided with the start of elections for mayor and was effective in eliminating the leadership of the groups that had arisen from the peace accords between the guerrilla and the government, and in disbanding their activists and sympathizers in

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<sup>39</sup>The first popular elections for mayors were held in 1988.

regions where they had the possibility of breaking regional political equilibria” (2002, 196-197).

Others who would not necessarily take up arms themselves also learned during the 1980s that the political status quo now had little interest in dealing with the guerrilla. Many of the key constituencies behind the paramilitary political project arose in those years. Tellingly, for instance, it was in the early years of Betancur’s administration that the FARC kidnapped and murder the father of Álvaro Uribe, future president of Colombia. While no conclusive evidence has linked Uribe to the paramilitaries directly, their coincidence of their political projects and interests is made clear by the extensive electoral fraud they committed in his favor in 2002,<sup>40</sup> and by the fact that during his term as Governor of Antioquia Álvaro Uribe was able to press for a law that the formation of armed “cooperatives” for private security, known as the CONVIVIR. Naturally, paramilitary forces co-opted the CONVIVIR, which gave them legal cover to expand briskly from 1995 to 1997.

Similarly, the events of the 1980s led a broad coalition of cattle farmers in the department of Córdoba to turn away from the official channels and toward the anti-subversive project of Fidel Castaño. This support, in turn, allowed the Castaño family to grow their operation even further; with the social roots and funding that the cattle farmers afforded them, the Castaños slowly transformed their outfit from the death squad that had operated around Segovia into a fighting force of hundreds of armed men. While this force was not yet the institutionalized, ‘formal’ army that it would become under Carlos’s leadership in 1994, it was dramatically more effective at fighting the guerrilla. “When people call us ‘paramilitary’ they forget about our past history, when we asked, insisted, and even begged to be given armed forces who could protect us from the guerrilla. It was as though we were not even part of Colombia,” recounted Rodrigo García, president of Córdoba’s Cattle Ranchers Association and a friend and mentor to Carlos Castaño since the late 80s.<sup>41</sup> As early as 1984, the association was issuing communiques in the national media complaining about government inaction toward the 117 kidnappings that occurred that year across the country (Romero, 2003, 123). According to García, the EPL and the FARC kidnapped more than ninety cattle farmers in that region, shot 7000 heads of cattle and robbed about 50000 more (Aranguren, 2002). Romero (2003) in fact quotes former EPL commanders recognizing that in those years ‘forced contributions’

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<sup>40</sup>See Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos, 2009, which documents the evidence and argues that in all likelihood, the fraud was not the result of coordination between Uribe and the paramilitaries, but rather reflected the fact that his political preferences were aligned with their own.

<sup>41</sup>As we discuss in the section on Castaño’s elite connections, Garcia’s mentorship was crucial for the last and essential step in the institutionalization of the Castaño’s project. In 1994, Garcia helped Carlos Castaño organize his men into a formal army, with an official command structure, uniforms, and internal codes of conduct.

in Córdoba reached absurd proportions: “a man with fifty cows or with even half a farm was deemed rich [for our purposes] . . . imagine that, [*guerrilleros*] used to living in misery, now handling millions;”; similarly, another EPL commander interviewed by Romero remarked that “the [policy] was to ‘get money in alarming quantities because the war was so very expensive,’ which led [us to] create lots of financial commissions” (139). And yet, García claimed that when Betancur’s Secretary of Government visited the region and addressed the cattle farmers, he told them, “Gentlemen, let me tell you that nothing is the matter. This is a joke of a guerrilla” (Aranguren, 2002, 185). Eventually, in the mid 1980s, the region was given an army brigade, though severely underfunded and with very few troops. For instance, “soldiers would wear sandals around the base because [there not being enough boots to go around] they had lent theirs to the soldiers out on patrol.” At this point, rural elites in the region solved their collective action problem in a way that would be deeply significant for the later expansion of Castaño’s ACCU. García described how cattle-ranchers in Córdoba opened a secret bank account where they deposited private fund to help the local army units. “For the army we bought everything from gasoline to mattresses” (Aranguren, 2002, p. 187). García recalled receiving frequent donations from cattle ranchers for the local army unit base throughout the 1980s, but argued that these were insufficient to counter the guerrillas, who could finance exponential growth through kidnapping and extortion. Thus, when in 1987 Fidel Castaño purchased large swathes of cattle farming land in Córdoba and moved his base of operations to the region, “[t]he total and embarrassing absence of the Colombian state led us to think that the only option left to insure our survival was Fidel Castaño”, said García. “[Fidel] who was “an angel of justice and payback” (Aranguren, 2002). Landowners in the area decided to subsidize the growth of the paramilitary, instead of supporting the lukewarm counterinsurgent effort by the army.

Moreover, it became clear to the paramilitary social class that even when the state invested itself in counterinsurgency, it had no interest in doing so in a long-term, committed manner. In the late 1980s, the government finally moved a full fledged army brigade to Córdoba for the first time to combat the FARC and EPL. By 1990, Fidel Castaño’s incipient paramilitary organization had, with the help of this brigade, effectively expelled the EPL guerrilla from the region. The EPL and the government then negotiated a peace agreement in 1991 that gave the *guerrilleros*, but not Castaño’s group, political status. At that point, narrated Carlos Castaño in his autobiography, rural landowners and politicians approached Fidel and asked him to demobilize, for they worried that he would try to destabilize the peace agreement after being

left out of the political settlement. With the guerrilla around, they preferred having Fidel and his men to the alternative; but as unarmed civilians and businessmen, they much preferred not having any roaming armies in their midst altogether. Fidel agreed with the landowners that he would lay down his weapons on one condition: that the government keep its promise to establish a permanent battalion in the Alto Sinú region, which comprised much of Córdoba and Urabá. Carlos Castaño claimed that this lobbying by prominent families in Córdoba in the end had an effect on Fidel, whose armed force lay down its weapons at the end of that peace process. However, the government did not install a permanent battalion; in fact, barely a few months after the agreement, the government withdrew the mobile brigade. Predictably, the FARC and a recalcitrant EPL faction that did not demobilized returned to the area and retaliated harshly against landowners and former EPL fighters with a spate of killings and kidnappings. Aside from instilling in the Castaños a distrust of the national politicians on the whole (to be described later), the withdrawal of the army brigade was fundamental in the growth of an independently powerful paramilitary force because it led hundreds of trained, hardened formerly EPL guerrilla fighters to join Fidel Castaño's organization in search of protection. Throughout the nineties, these recruits would form the core of Carlos Castaño's institutionalized, extremely effective army, the ACCU and were a main reason for its military success (Aranguren, 2002).

It is important to note, however, that it was not the landowning class as a whole that bore the brunt of the insurgency. In many ways, the group that helped launch the paramilitary was closer to a sort of rural upper-middle class than it was to the great *latifundistas* (estate owners) usually associated with the Latin American right. The social force behind the paramilitary is undoubtedly a rural landed elite, and, as argued by Gutiérrez Sanín and Barón (2005) “the notion that paramilitarism [as its leaders would have us believe] is a rebellion of ‘small tenants’ or ‘peasants’ is untenable” (10). And yet, the truly wealthy landowners were so connected to the urban sector that they hardly belonged to same interest group. The wealthiest landowners, who had influence, political capital, and connections to the connections to capital cities, could administer their ranches from Bogotá or Medellín (capital of the department of Antioquia); moreover, recounted one landowner who was not so fortunate, they could “obtain the close and generous cooperation of the Armed Forces” and could count on “army officers in helicopters” to safeguard their interests (Romero, 2003, 139).

In fact, Carlos Castaño and his inner circle were quite explicit in arguing that the political class, urban voters, and economic elites (both urban and rural) were part of the same coalition

that was entirely disinterested in counterinsurgency. He went through great pains to distinguish himself from what he called the country's 'oligarchy.' Since the guerrilla was overwhelmingly rural, urban voters did not have to deal with the violence and extortion perpetrated by the insurgency on the countryside. Nor did the wealthy in the main cities, owners of banks and factories, feel like investing in counterinsurgency. And the true landed oligarchs, who after all lived in the cities, could count on the protection of the state. Finally, politicians, who catered in part to the urban voters and in part to the 'aristocracy' had no incentive to wage costly rural wars. Hernan Gómez Fernandez, a leftist academic who became disillusioned with the guerrilla and later became a good friend and confidant of Castaño, described behind the AUC, the national alliance of for paramilitary groups crafted by Castaño) in the following terms, which are worth reproducing in their entirety:

Thus came together the most dissimilar group in the world: retired military, *guerrilleros*,<sup>42</sup> cattle ranchers, entrepreneurs, merchants, rice farmers, cacao farmers, coffee farmers, palm farmers, the country's croppers and cultivators, and the transport guild. In short, the [rural] middle class. The victims of the guerrilla got together to orient themselves all in the same direction, and they acclaimed Carlos Castaño as their commander. They were lacking a leader, but then they found one, which permitted the creation of the AUC. Herein is represented a group of people left unprotected by the central state.

On the other side the situation is quite different. The owners of the country, that is to say the economic combines, have the army and the police to look out for their interests. Let me give you an example: if in Colombia you have twenty armed men guarding your farm, you are considered a paramilitary, even if their weapons all have permits. But the owners of the banks have thousands of men as their armed escort that are not at all considered paramilitary only because they are in the city. On its own, the personal detail of the functionaries and the families of the owners of the Luis Carlos Sarmiento Angulo [Group]<sup>43</sup> may have close to a thousand armed men and they are not called paramilitary either, for the same reason: they are all the city. As for all of us in the countryside? Screw them!" (Aranguen, 2002,

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<sup>42</sup>Principally from the EPL, a left wing guerrilla that used to operate in the Carlos Castano's Autodefensas Campesinas de Cordoba y Uraba's (Peasant Self Defense Force of Cordoba and Urbaba, or ACCU) area of influence but clashed militarily with the FARC. After they disarmed, they were persecuted by the FARC, so a large number of them joined the ACCU (Aranguen, 2002, p. 221-232).

<sup>43</sup>One of Colombia's two largest conglomerates, with interests in beer, airlines, manufacturing, and media, among other things.



pp. 200-201).

### 4.3 The Paramilitaries and the *Hombres de Bien*

Before describing the paramilitary's interactions with national politicians, we elaborate on their carefully managed relationship with the elites that helped form them. While these groups, like Hinga Norman's, would have had motive and opportunity to renege on their implicit contract with the rural elites, they chose instead to retain and cultivate those connections. These elite connections, in turn were essential, not only for the military expansion of the self-defense force, but also for the consolidation of its long term political project.

For one thing, the paramilitary's close relation to these traditional rural elites gave their actions significant legitimacy (and often outright legality). Up to 1989, in spite of their brutal tactics, the majority of paramilitary groups in the country (and most notably, the ones in Puerto Boyacá, run by ACDEGAM, and Fidel Castaño's, operating in Córdoba and Urabá) had been operating legally, under a presidential decree from 1968 that had allowed for the formation of self-defense units and created the legal figure under which these could be issued army-grade weapons. This legal veneer had allowed the paramilitaries to prosper, not least because it gave legal cover to army units who trained and armed them in spite of the Betancur administration's peace initiatives.

However, the reckless behavior of the generation of paramilitaries preceding him, often under the control of the Medellín drug cartel had undermined this legitimacy and threatened to undermine the long term political interests of rural elites. For instance, in 1989, the wing of the Puerto Boyacá paramilitaries, under the control of drug-trafficker Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, organized the assassination of the first presidential candidate for the UP, Jaime Pardo Leal, a leftist politician and union organizer who was well regarded by people across the political spectrum. This murder shifted the political mood decisively against the paramilitary project, and it was the first step in a chain of events that led important Liberal politicians to forsake the Castaños and the Puerto Boyacá self defense. The Puerto Boyacá group, in particular, was abandoned and denounced by its Liberal allies. By late 1989, the Barco administration (1986-1990) had passed decrees outlawing them and had forced army officers who helped these groups into early retirement (Melo, 1990).

The fallout from the murder, however, was in the end useful for the paramilitaries in that it catalyzed a rapprochement between Carlos Castaño and political elites favorable to the "antissubversive" political project. In his memoir, he described how, in the days following the

murder of Pardo Leal, he was approached by “The Group of Six,” a cabal of, as he called them, “men of the highest standing in Colombian society . . . the creme and the crop!” (Aranguren, 2002, 116). One cannot fail to appreciate the irony in Castaño’s account of these meetings. “It is thanks to those men,” he said, “that I am did not become a mere bandit” (Aranguren, 2002, 116). The group of six admonished Castaño for the recklessness of the paramilitaries: “By God, why would you ever kill Jaime Pardo Leal, that tarnishes the antsubversion movement” (117). At that point, Castaño and his elite backers began to plot a redefinition of the paramilitary project; in particular, they considered how to discipline it and rescue its reputation in the wake of Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha’s “misuse” of the troops. “There must at least one person here [i.e., in the paramilitary] who can get this thing back on track, Carlos. In Colombia there are people like you [people] we can work with . . . all that’s missing is a bit of political orientation, a clear ‘north,’ and some directions” (117). From there on, the group, which by virtue of their social circles had access to information about the guerrilla connections of prominent people, would help Castaño target his political assassinations to optimally weaken the guerrilla’s influence in the cities.

Carlos Castaño’s formulation of a coherent, long term counterinsurgency strategy would have to wait until after his brother’s death in 1994. While never criticizing Fidel, Carlos made clear that under Fidel Castaño the self defense movement would have had no real effect on Colombian politics, not least because of his brother’s recklessness. “Back then”, said Carlos Castaño, referring to the period under Fidel, “in the organization no one would be [examining] closely the methods and consequences of the military actions we engaged in, nor did we [have] tactical or strategic exercises with frequently [enough] . . . never a clear north star, only immediatist goals” (Aranguren, 2002, 161). After the death of Fidel in 1994, Carlos Castaño reoriented the paramilitary force towards its social roots in the rural elite and strengthened its connections with the Córdoba cattle ranchers. With the help of Rodrigo García and other cattle ranchers linked to the Castaños, they created an institutional design for the paramilitary that would allow it to grow at an unprecedented rate. The contrast with the analogous stage in Sierra Leone’s paramilitarism is striking. Whereas Norman resented and sabotaged the rural elites’ efforts to give the CDF a formal, institutional structure, Castaño described in his autobiography that he and García would meet for hours on end to discuss “doctrine” and “principles” for the new organization: “on institutional matters [this discussion] was perfect for me, since at that time I was trying to give the organization some identity” (Aranguren, 2002, 186). For instance, it was García who convinced Castaño to have internal discipline statutes

and a regular hierarchy. “Any self-respecting organization,” García would tell Castaño, “has a prayer, one sole uniform, a coat of arms, and a hymn” (186). At this point, the paramilitary movement transformed from a well-run death squad to a formal standing army.

This institutionalization provided the ACCU (*Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá*, Spanish for “Peasant Self Defense of Córdoba and Urabá”), the new entity that grew out of the conversations between Castaño and García, with broad legitimacy and acceptance among rural elites in other regions. Consequently, the legitimacy accruing from their good “elite relations” also allowed for motivated politicians from similar social origins to pursue policies favorable to the rural interest; the Castaño’s allies could then co-opt these policies to further expand their organization. We have mentioned, for instance, how Álvaro Uribe successfully lobbied for a law creating the CONVIVIR. Under this law, Castaño’s future second in command, Salvatore Mancuso, coordinated the formation of multiple paramilitary cells under across the Atlantic coast under the guise of legitimate, local cooperatives. After an arrest warrant was issued for Mancuso and the CONVIVIR were declared unconstitutional, Mancuso simply merged these cells with Carlos Castaño’s ACCU (see Martínez, 2004, cited in Valencia, 2007, 21).

It was also this institutional framework and organization, forged with the help and consultation of key members of this social class, that allowed Castaño’s new group to become the most successful paramilitary force in the country. On the one hand, by standardized the command structure, it provided an easily replicable model, with which the ACCU could expand quickly and raise armies quickly in new regions of influence. On the other hand, the ACCU’s exponential expansion allowed it to claim leadership over all paramilitary groups; in doing so, it transformed a number of disjoint local militias into a project of national scope. The ACCU’s unprecedented expansion gave way to even greater ambitions on the part of Castaño and his backers, so that by 1997 he had confederated all of the isolated self-defense groups in the country under the same organization, the AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*).

#### **4.4 The Paramilitaries and the Political Class**

Early experiences with the political class, reinforced by Andres Pastrana’s peace talks with the FARC from 1998 to 2001, seem to have caused to an evolution in the political strategy of the paramilitary movement. Throughout, they conceived of their military campaign as an inherently political. As they saw it, both their confrontations with the guerrilla and their massacres of left-wing activists and known or suspected collaborators served the same long term purpose

counter insurgent purpose: by murdering the guerrilla's urban connections, they believed they were helping curtail the ability of the guerrilla to steer policy away from counterinsurgency and against the interests of rural elites. But their direct interactions with politicians and parties changed, as they realized that politicians were, in the words of Gutiérrez Sanín and Barón, "prone to unholy alliances," and that neither the Liberal nor the Conservative parties "had the least intentions of pursuing an anti-subversive program in a country that traditionally has favored radical candidates" (2005, 7).

Initially, both the Puerto Boyacá group and Fidel Castaño's death squads in the 1980s directed much of their military efforts and massacres to help traditional politicians, mostly Liberal, deflect entry from the left (Gutiérrez Sanín and Barón, 2005, 7). For instance, the Supreme Court of Justice has recently indicted Liberal congressman Cesar Perez for his alleged collaboration in Castaño's infamous 1988 massacre in Segovia, where in a single day his men murdered forty-three and wounded fifty people associated with the UP. Perez was a powerful Liberal *cacique* (political boss) who at the time of the massacre served as president of the House of Representatives. The growth and success of the UP in the region, however, had drastically eroded his electoral base in the region. Romero argues that with Castaño's cooperation, Perez had hoped to dissuade the population from voting for any and all left-wing alternatives (Romero, 2003, 200-201).

The commitment of the Puerto Boyacá paramilitaries to the Liberal party was such that they would even reject or ignore overtures from political groups that would arguably have been much more committed to their anti-subversive political goals. After news of their success against the FARC spread, the Puerto Boyacá paramilitaries became incredible popular and sought after among extreme right wing factions across the country. The radical anti-communist army officers that had helped arm and train them tried to introduce them to fascist-leaning politicians from Bogotá and Manizales,<sup>44</sup> hoping that Perez and his men would lend their support for a new political party, MORENA ("*Movimiento de Reconstrucción Nacional*"). It was only reasonable to expect that Perez would be amenable to this, since the politicians' extreme hatred of left-wing politics should have been sufficient guarantee that they would be harsh against the guerrilla. Henry Perez had agreed and allowed MORENA to campaign in Puerto Boyacá, but had quickly decided that voters in the town did not like it enough. He had then dismissed the project altogether: "Why do we need a new party, if we're all Liberals here anyway?" (Corporación Observatorio Para La Paz, 2002, 173).

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<sup>44</sup>This is the capital of the department of Caldas.

And yet, the Puerto Boyacá self-defense organization slowly realized that all the support they had given to Liberal politicians had not earned them any measure of loyalty or political capital. In the late 1980s, a large portion of their military apparatus had fallen under the influence drug-trafficker Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha. Gacha had purchased substantial lands in Puerto Boyacá and the Magdalena Medio and had helped ACDEGAM in the early stages by providing weapons, funding and training. In the late 1980's, however, as the Medellín Cartel's war against the Colombian state escalated, Gacha used these troops to execute several well-publicized massacres of functionaries and judicial staff. The paramilitaries not aligned with Gacha had hoped that their traditional Liberal allies would give them legal cover, but even local bosses that had been elected by the Puerto Boyacá group caved to pressure from party leaders and denounced the ACDEGAM. Thus, as Gutiérrez Sanín and Barón make clear, by the late 1980s the Puerto Boyacá group felt betrayed by the Liberal party and realized that its national leadership could not be trusted. A letter from the paramilitary leaders described the reasons for their disappointment in particularly cogent terms:

Politicians, sirs: the Peasant Self-Defense Groups will participate massively in the electoral process, we will vote, we will elect. But sirs, our votes will not go to the old opportunists. We have had ugly experiences with the political class, who as greedy vote gatherers promise and mislead in pre-electoral periods to obtain the votes they need. But after elections [are over], they forget our regions, and our leaders and *caudillos* that [had] helped them reach to [sic] the top, where they show off, exploiting our blood, our sweat, and our tears (Gutiérrez Sanín and Barón, 2005, 7).<sup>45</sup>

Particularly offensive to these paramilitaries was the fact that many of the UP's greatest electoral victories had been the result of local alliances of convenience with the Liberal and Conservative parties, and that the same politicians they had helped elect would quickly become "appeasers." As a result of this disillusionment, throughout the 1990s, the Puerto Boyacá group shifted in its political strategy toward the control of local offices, rather than trying to influence politicians in national-level offices. Similarly, they started supporting the creation of regionally based third party initiatives and candidates against traditional Liberal bosses, the reason being that these bosses national parties responded to a set of electoral incentives which the paramilitary could not control (Gutiérrez Sanín and Barón, 2005, 19).

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<sup>45</sup>Translation by Gutiérrez Sanín and Barón.

As we discussed above, this process is exactly parallel to the one that the Castaño brothers underwent in Córdoba at in 1990 and 1991 after the botched peace accords with the EPL. At that point Fidel had not only demobilized, but in a show of grandeur had also redistributed thousands of hectares of his best land to peasants in the region, and had invested substantial sums in social charities for the local population (Mendez, 1992, 13; also Aranguren, 2002, 159). The government's renegeing on the deal to put a permanent battalion was a profoundly formative experience for the political ideology of Fidel and Carlos. Carlos narrated in his autobiography that shortly thereafter, his brother— who was much more attached to the status quo than he was— told him that “[he] did not want to be a useful idiot of the system, of the corrupt political and economic class [running] this country . . . But let's not talk about it, Carlos. In the end, they will trade us in, anyway” (Aranguren, 2002, 160-161). Carlos took Fidel's lesson to heart, deciding to eschew legitimate institutions altogether. “Fidel had an exaggerated respect for [them].” Therefore, said Carlos, Fidel was a paramilitary in the pure sense of the word— attached and subordinate to state institutions— whereas, taking the experience of the 80s and early 1990s into account, Carlos sought to create, not a paramilitary, but an autonomous “Civilian Self-Defense” (94, 161).

Just as a new, pro-urban faction within the Conservative party had sparked the paramilitary movement in the 1980s, the return to power of this faction under Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) sparked a transformation in their relationship with the political class. Disciples of the strategists that had advocated peace negotiations in 1982 were in Pastrana's inner circle. Pastrana himself had been mayor of Bogotá and had built a political career around urban constituencies, even though he was the son of Misael Pastrana Borrero, a staunch defender of landowner interests. Thus, he campaigned and won on his ability to establish direct dialogues with the FARC. Almost immediately, Pastrana proved willing to grant a number of requests that were acutely inimical to rural interests. For instance, he granted the guerrilla's request to clear a substantial zone in the southeastern plains of state presence, so the FARC it could exercise sovereign control. Moreover, he considered proposals for extensive agrarian reform.

Castaño believed (as did a number of prominent Liberal politicians who publicly stated as much) that Pastrana's ultimate goal was to create a constitutional assembly with the FARC; since the costs imposed by these reforms would fall almost entirely on the electorally irrelevant rural sector, and the policies would probably be popular with the urban poor, Pastrana could cement a new long-term winning coalition.

While these proposals were in themselves catastrophic for the rural elites that Castaño rep-

resented, an even clearer illustration for the paramilitaries of the need to reshape the political landscape if their interests were to be protected came after the collapse of negotiations with the FARC. After it became clear that the dialogue with the FARC would collapse, Pastrana tried to negotiate a similar peace accord with the other major guerrilla group in the country, the ELN. While the botched process with the FARC had undermined his presidency, he could wager his political legacy on the fact that a successful demobilization of a guerrilla group would completely sway urban majorities in his favor. It is at this point that the confluence of interests between electorally driven national politicians and insurgent groups becomes patently clear for Castaño and the paramilitary elite. In the two years before this rapprochement between the ELN and the government, Castaño's forces had expelled the ELN from the southern part of the department of Bolivar, a crucially strategic region that gave access to both oceans, multiple drug-shipping lanes, and the Panamanian border. And yet, as a precondition for starting a negotiation, the ELN was asking for a "clearing" of precisely the towns that it had lost to the paramilitary. The measure, it appeared, was popular enough with urban voters and was quite nearly signed into law. At this point, however, the AUC used its substantial national structure and territorial control to induce mass protests in the countryside, completely paralyzing highway traffic and public services in multiple departments for several weeks. In the towns under their control, the paramilitaries would send out mandatory summons for a town hall meeting. They proceeded to take a complete census of the town, and dictated that only one person per household, save for those with disabilities, could stay indoors on the day of the protest.<sup>46</sup>

These demonstrations were successful in preventing the *despeje* and ceding of government sovereignty in the South of Bolivar. They were so severe and simultaneously disrupted so many parts of the country that Pastrana genuinely feared that they would topple his government (Aranguren, 2002). More importantly, they coincided with, and in a way motivated, the last stage of political involvement of the paramilitary, which it sought to permanently transform the country's political equilibrium.

Following the example of the lessons learned by Puerto Boyacá's self-defense force, the AUC appears to have made a concerted decision to influence future elections, overwhelmingly in the same manner: by using their local dominance over the rural population to propel new

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<sup>46</sup>The speech given to the those gathered by the local paramilitary commander clearly reflects the coincidence of paramilitary and landowner interests. He had said, at this forced assembly, "Do you know what *depeje* means? . . . It is a new government where you will have to do whatever they say, we'll be totally adrift. For instance, your daughters will be forced to be the daughters of *guerrilleros*. Are you going to let the ELN regain its strength when we have nearly finished it? We are not asking for anything, we are only here to ask for the physical and moral collaboration to go out and march [against *despeje*]. We are here because the people have asked for our protection" (Romero, 2002, 113).

third parties that were not accountable to the same electoral incentives that underrepresented rural elites. The broader strategy for this electoral effort appears to have been worked out at a historic meeting in Santa Fé de Ralito in 2001 where members of the *estado mayor* (the governing body) of the AUC along with politicians and members of Congress signed a secret document calling for the ‘refounding of the country’. There is extensive econometric and case study evidence that following the meeting in Santa Fé de Ralito, paramilitary groups actively tried and succeeded in influencing votes in the 2002 and 2006 national elections (for econometric evidence, see Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos, 2009). Many of the paramilitary leaders have explicitly described these political manipulations. Salvatore Mancuso has been the most outspoken in this regard; he has claimed that

“35% of the Congress was elected in areas where there were states of the Self-Defense groups, in those states we were the ones collecting taxes, we delivered justice, and we had the military and territorial control of the region and all the people who wanted to go into politics had to come and deal with the political representatives we had there.”<sup>47</sup>

Mancuso’s numbers have been broadly confirmed by subsequent criminal investigations into the connections of members of congress with paramilitary groups: as of May 2009, over 1/3 of congress was either under investigation, indicted, or convicted for collaborating with these armed groups (see Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos, 2009, 19, citing <http://www.indepaz.org.co>.)

Moreover, investigations into the 2002 and 2006 election results and the testimony of demobilized paramilitaries have also revealed a large number of different ‘pacts’ between paramilitary leaders and politicians in the provinces (detailed in López and Sevillano, 2008). The great majority of these pacts involved the formation of third parties that whose support was very regionally concentrated. These movements became exceptionally successful starting in 2002, and in a number of departments completely eclipsed the traditional parties. An especially telling case of this is the party *Convergencia Ciudadana* in Santander, formed in alliance with paramilitary leader Ernesto Báez, which single-handedly won 28 parliamentary seats and practically eliminated the Liberal party in one of its historic strongholds (Valencia, 2007, 26-31; this essay also contains a detailed account of these third parties). Similarly, the results in Acemoglu et al (2009) show the strength of this third party bias among the paramilitary: of the 20 senators whose support most depended on areas under paramilitary control, 15 belonged to third parties of recent formation.

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<sup>47</sup>Translation of the authors from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tsaMNqoa\\_k&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tsaMNqoa_k&feature=related)



Even though the majority of paramilitary groups have disbanded since 2006, the political transformations they brought about seem to be long lasting. For instance, neither traditional party was a significant contender in the last presidential election, even though before 2002, Liberal and Conservative party candidates had occupied the presidency for more than 150 years. This new electoral landscape is especially, considering the remarkable resilience that Colombia's traditional parties had shown before 2002; in fact, they are the oldest political parties in the Americas. While it is hard to establish a direct link between this political transformation and policy shifts, it seems clear that the net effect of these electoral changes has been to shift the equilibrium policy decidedly in favor of rural interests. This is clear not just from the marked intensification of counterinsurgency under the Uribe administration, but more recently, in a number of policies and programs all designed to subsidize agro-export businesses. In light of the rural elites' opposition to the *despejes* arranged by Pastrana for insurgent groups, it is telling that congress is currently considering a constitutional amendment banning them.

#### 4.5 Comparison and Interpretation

Having shown the divergent trajectories of the two paramilitary phenomena, we can now explain the roots of this divergence; this, in turn, will help explain the very different political consequences that civil war had for these countries. As described in Proposition 1, political change follows from civil war only when the implicit contract between specialists in violence and the social class that arms and creates them is incentive compatible. In that case, the solution to the collective action problem achieved by this social class will grant it significant de facto power in politics after the war and allow it to reshape equilibrium policies.

Recall that Norman and the rural Mende elites had clashed largely over was over how to pursue counterinsurgency. As we discussed earlier, Norman and his allies wanted to implement a no-holds barred, scorched earth campaign against the RUF, and they were not concerned about the massacres and destruction that would inevitable follow from this strategy; the elites in the War Council, on the other hand, wanted the CDF to avoid civilian casualties and minimize confiscations and collateral damage on property. This division, and the distrust it engendered, ultimately doomed the CDF and mooted any long term political implications it could have had.

One finds no such disagreement between the Colombian paramilitaries and the corresponding rural elites. On the contrary, often the Colombian counterparts to those who wanted to

restrain Norman were orchestrating paramilitary massacres and political cleansing of towns. Compare, for instance, the role of provincial SLPP politicians in the CDF's War Council to that played by rural Liberal bosses in Colombia's main paramilitary regions. We have discussed already Fidel Castaño's massacre in the town of Segovia and the role allegedly played by Liberal bosses who saw the UP as endangering their traditional bases of support. A 1992 report by Human Rights Watch also implicated the mayor who was unseated by the UP candidate in 1988, Sigifredo García, and alleged that he had toured the town with Castaño's men and helped them identify UP supporters days before the massacre (Mendez, 1992, 14). Along similar lines, Castaño, as his interaction with "the Group of Six" shows, was willing to adapt his use of violence in response to the elite's concern; moreover, he saw his heeding of their advice as essential for his long term political project. In the meantime, SLPP grandees from Bo and Kenema tried to stop Norman from even seizing goods coming from regions under RUF control.

What, then, drove these differences in the strategic calculus of rural elites in the two countries? In our view, the crucial difference lies in the relationship between rural elites and the poor rural majorities. In particular, all the main foci of paramilitarism were in areas of internal colonization with long histories of land conflict and peasant unrest. In contrast to the Paramount Chiefs who helped form the CDF, Colombian rural elites had little power and virtually no bonds of authority over the local population, and they were in a much more precarious situation vis-a-vis the rural majority that surrounded them. That is to say, the structure of social relations in the countryside before the war drove the divergence in political outcomes after the war.

Puerto Boyacá and the Magdalena Medio, where the first cohesive self-defense group arose in the early eighties, was a region of extremely recent settlement, where local elites had not managed to establish a minimal measure of control, whether through patronage or coercion, over the population. The municipality itself had only been incorporated in 1950. And as most frontier regions in the country, it had significant conflict over public lands. The population, though mainly Liberal, had started supporting splinter groups that threatened the electoral hegemony of the two traditional parties. Hence, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, who in the 1970s had tried to form a Peronist-inspired political party, had made huge inroads in the municipality. After this movement disintegrated, the town began to vote in increasing numbers for more left-wing candidates and communist parties. These radical political tendencies, as we have seen, provided fertile for the FARC and threatened the electoral survival of traditional Liberal

patrons.

Similarly, the departments of Córdoba and Sucre, where the Castaño's and the ACCU forged such deep roots among the elite, had witnessed land conflicts between cattle ranchers and settlers since at least the late 1920s. There were a number of violent land invasions in the Sinú region (modern day Córdoba) in those years, and these conflicts resulted in 69 deaths during the elections of 1931 (see Legrand, 1988, 156-158). Sucre and Córdoba were also the places most heavily targeted by land reform initiatives in the 1960s. In the early 1970s, when a Conservative, pro-landlord administration sought to roll back land reform, these departments became the "epicenters of resistance" to counter-reform (Romero, 2002, 129). Between 1970 and 1973, peasant unions in the region organized massive land invasions, marches, and strikes in an attempt to defend land reform. The largest of these degenerated into violent riots trashing the houses of important landowning families, government offices, police stations, and the headquarters of the regional cattle-ranchers association (Romero, 2002, 131).

But perhaps the clearest instances of the shattered authority and local control of the elites were the riots disrupting the yearly bull-fighting festivals known as the *corralejás*. As shown by Romero, this festival, where the leading landowning families in a town would treat the locals to food and alcohol donate prized cattle for bullfighting, was for many years the main way in which elites would display their status and cement their ties of patronage. During the struggles for land reform, however, these elites were horrified to find that the peasants and farm workers desecrating the *corralejás*: mobs brutally killed, quartered, and ate the prized bulls, and they pelted the landowners organizing the event (Romero, 2002, 130-131).

The rural Mende elites in Sierra Leone did not have to face this same "internal" threat from the local populace. In fact, traditional leaders—even during the war—seem to have enjoyed a good deal of legitimacy and exercised considerable authority. It is not hard to see why recruiting was never an issue for Castaño's AUC, since his organization offered high wages and even widows' pensions; the recruiting success of the Kamajors, in particular during the phase when they were tightly controlled and vetted by the chiefs, suggests, in contrast, that the traditional authority of Mende ruling families was alive and well in many areas, even at the height of the war.

While some analysts of Sierra Leone's civil war have framed it as a revolt of sorts from disenfranchised youth against a corrupt chiefly class (see especially Richards, 1996), more recent research has broadly refuted this view.<sup>48</sup> Richard Fanthorpe, in particular, has argued

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<sup>48</sup>Fanthorpe notes, for instance, that further studies in rural Sierra Leone have found no support for what Richards proposed as a central grievance fueling the rebellion—namely, that chiefs were monopolizing the sexual

convincingly that the anti-chieftaincy discourse found by NGOs and Western anthropologists in Sierra Leone was in large part induced by the presence of these same organizations; subjects seem to have adapted their discourse to fit the preconceived skepticism of foreign donors and aid organizations towards the chieftaincy in order to curry their favor. Quite far from the generalized seething hostility toward the Mende ruling families that one would expect to find, Fanthorpe's research on popular opinions of the chiefs reveal that

“For the poor, securing political leaders that remain downwardly accountable is an absolute priority. Many continue to find chiefs preferable to elected politicians and bureaucrats [in this regard] because, according to their calculation, chiefs are predisposed to defend the customary property and citizenship regimes that establish their own authority. It is precisely in this context that rural people may continue to answer their chiefs' calls for 'community labour,' however grudgingly, because it sets the right moral example.” (Fanthorpe, 2005, 45).

This contrast— between the besieged, illegitimate Córdoba agrarian elites, and Sierra Leone's chiefly class— explains, in our view, the very different tolerance that these groups had for a scorched-earth counterinsurgency campaign. Both the Sierra Leonean and Colombian rural upper class had an interest in containing social conflict and the havoc it would wreak on local economies and institutions. In Colombia however, the seething social conflict in the countryside made rural elites were much less squeamish about a scorched earth counterinsurgency policy than their Sierra Leonean counterparts because in the long run, paramilitary massacres, however disruptive they might be, helped transform the local political equilibrium they would have to face after the war. Cementing this local power, moreover, had become especially crucial for these elites in light of the rapid decentralization of political power and revenue authority that took place under the 1991 constitution. Before mayors were popularly elected, the Colombian rural elites could, by influencing the national parties, ensure that only local administrations to their liking were appointed. After elections, however, they were at the mercy of left-leaning majorities who would elect “guerrilla sympathizers” for mayor. Therefore, rural elites in Colombia could credibly commit to supporting the paramilitary in the long run, since, bluntly put, by killing off enough radicals, the paramilitaries could help create a new rural median voter more amenable to the interests of landowners.

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services of young women (Fanthorpe, 2005, 38). Fanthorpe also shows, remarkably, that a number of other analyses along those lines rely on the spurious claim that a colonial era ordinance mandating forced labor is still in effect, when in fact it was repealed in the 1950s (36).

Restated in terms of the model we present, we have the following: In Colombia, the elite could have reneged on the deal after the paramilitary helped take care of the insurgents, which would have guaranteed that the state would not be overthrown by Castaño, and that he would expropriate their lands, or run the same sort of urban-oriented regime that existed before the war. However, unless the elite stood by the paramilitary long enough to transform social relations in the countryside, they would have been left with whatever distribution of preferences there were in Córdoba before the paramilitaries were formed.

## 5 Conclusion

There is a sharp contrast between the story of paramilitarism in Sierra Leone and in Colombia is the relationship between the military entrepreneurs, the interest or social base they emerge from, and the elites with the human capital indispensable for governing. Norman, much like Castaño, arose as an agent of the rural, Mende elite: a military specialist who could wage for this elite the counterinsurgency campaign that the central state would not (or could not) wage. Like Castaño, his rise to power depended in large part on gaining the support of national politicians— the rural, regional elites on their own would not have sufficed. However, Norman developed a political project that put him in a collision course with the national elite. Ultimately, the paramilitary coalition failed to have political effects in Sierra Leone because at some point the military entrepreneurs became unmoored from the social class on whose behalf they were supposed to be acting— the same social class that had armed and empowered them in the first place. Whatever implicit contract existed between the traditional rural elite and Norman, wherein they gave him powers of extraordinary powers of coercion in exchange for security, was not incentive compatible.

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