

Repression by Proxy: How Military Purges and Insurgency Impact the Delegation of Coercion

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Abstract

Why do regimes delegate authority over a territory to nonstate militias, in effect voluntarily sacrificing their monopoly over the use of violence? This article argues that two factors increase the probability of states delegating control to a proxy militia, namely, military purges and armed conflict. Military purges disrupt intelligence-gathering structures and the organizational capacity of the military. To counteract this disruption, military leaders subcontract the task of control and repression to allied militias that have the local intelligence skills necessary to manage the civilian population. This argument is conditioned by whether the state faces an armed insurgency in a given region since intelligence, control, and repression are needed most where the state is being challenged. This hypothesis is tested on unique data for all subnational regions within Myanmar during the period 1962 to 2010 and finds that proxy militias are more likely to be raised in conflict areas after military purges.

Keywords

civil wars, conflict, domestic politics, human rights, internal armed conflict, rebellion, war

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A key component of most conceptions of the state is that it claims a monopoly on the use of physical force (Weber [1919] 1946) and that by delegating power to a single Leviathan (Hobbes [1651] 2012), security is increased through the reduction of anarchic and decentralized coercive actors. But scholars of statebuilding and civil unrest note the empirical phenomenon that states often divest themselves of their monopoly on the use of force to empower other armed actors. Often labeled pro-government militias (PGM), these armed groups can take sole or partial responsibility for the use of state-authorized coercion in territorially delimited areas. A burgeoning literature has begun to address why states make this choice and what effect it has on the deployment of violence.

This article focuses on the former, that is, why do states delegate authority to militias that acts as proxy agents? Previous research has found that states which are consolidated autocracies or democracies are less likely to employ PGM (Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015). In unpacking this result, it is interesting to look at different types of regimes. Existing literature on autocratic regimes, and military regimes in particular, assumes that they will jealously maintain their monopoly on the use of force and act against those who challenge this monopoly (Linz 2000; Geddes 1999), making the use of proxy militias or paramilitaries¹ within military regimes counterintuitive. Why would the military allow or even encourage the formation of armed actors when their existence undermines the *raison d'être* of the military apparatus and when they may turn their weapons on the regime?

I argue that two factors will increase the probability of states delegating control to a proxy militia, namely, military purges and armed conflict. In countries where the state's authority rests on the use of repression and intimidation, purges within the military influence the state's ability to gather information at the local level and manage security. The apparatus is destabilized when military dictatorships remove portions of its staff through purges. Given the sudden shock to the apparatus—particularly its intelligence component—the military will have incentives to subcontract control, at least temporarily, to local armed actors in order to compensate for the stress on the organization. But the extent to which leaders will deem it useful to subcontract control in a given territory should be conditional on the level of threat. In parts of the country that experience armed resistance, decision makers will be more willing to delegate control to proxy militias and accept the risks that doing so entails. The driving hypothesis of this article is thus that conditional on the presence of armed conflict, a military purge will increase the likelihood of the state delegating power to a proxy militia.

To investigate this hypothesis, this article leverages unique subnational data on militia formation for one country, Myanmar, during the period 1962 to 2010.² To analyze the argument, this article also uses original data on purges of the military throughout the period. The results find support for the hypothesis, that is, conditional on conflict, military purges are correlated with a higher likelihood of the state engaging a proxy militia for local control of the populace. The findings underscore the importance of military organization in understanding substitution patterns between

direct and indirect state coercion. The scope conditions of the argument speak to authoritarian regimes with patrimonial military systems, but analogous arguments can be made within the context of other institutional arrangements. Unlike previous work on militia formation, this article contributes not only to understanding the structural conditions that impact on the risk for militia formation but also to the *timing* of militia formation.

Regime Coercion and Militias

The departure point for this study is the question of how states organize the means of coercion. Weber's (1919 [1946]) classic formulation of the state defines it in relation to the means used to achieve its ends, namely, that it claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. Taking Weber or Hobbes' Leviathan as the starting point, we should not expect the state to delegate power to nonstate actors over whom it has limited control. Yet the profusion of militias that are sanctioned by, but remain independent of, regimes indicates a dissonance between these assumptions and empirical reality. Indeed, over 300 paramilitaries are recorded in the PGM data set for the period 1981 to 2007 (Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe 2013), suggesting that the delegation of coercive authority to nonstate groups is a widespread phenomenon. As Staniland (2015) argues, creating a monopoly of violence may not always be in the state's interest.³ Obviously, governments sometime find it advantageous to empower militias; the question is when and why they do so.

In understanding the decision to sanction and support militias, it is important to underscore the costs involved in such a strategy. The empirical record suggests that these PGM often act beyond the purview of the regime and indeed, often turn on the regime using the very arms and training with which the government provided them. Several studies have also found that militias are likely to abuse human rights (cf. Adar and Munyae 2001; Kalyvas 2006; Kowalewski 1990; Mitchell 2012; Mitchell, Carey, and Butler 2012; Robinson 2010; Stanley 1996), increasing the risk that non-violent opposition movements become radicalized and/or have greater ease in recruiting supporters (Mason and Krane 1989). Tasking local elites to mobilize forces means that the militia may activate latent social networks such as kin or ethnic ties that may prove the basis for new challenges to state authority down the road (Wood 2008). The reliance on these militias may also prove destabilizing whether these forces can be convinced to join the rebel side when support from the regime is suspended. Examples such as the Janjaweed in Sudan, the Kamajors in Sierra Leone, and the *rondas campesinas* in Peru all illustrate how the formation of militias led to new contentious issues that served to escalate and prolong fighting.

Another drawback to establishing militias is that these forces are often loyal to only one or a few agents of the state who then can use them for launching a coup. Thus, civil militia may be a useful short-term tactic to increase security for a regime, but doing so empowers actors that may become future security threats, from either

within or outside the regime. Rulers that want to ensure control over the monopoly of force have incentives to build a reliable security apparatus rather than rely on the loyalty of forces exogenous to the state (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). Given the risks to a regime—and to the state itself—of empowering militia forces, why then do governments choose to do so?

Some existing scholarship on the use of state militias has viewed them as a means for actors in the central government to incorporate local strongmen into their patronage network or state apparatus. Chabal and Daloz (1999) argue that the use of violence is viewed as a “good” that can be distributed to clients if need arises. There are two ways through which this “good” can be offered. The first relates to providing protection against other competitors in society—including the police—and the second relates to protecting against possible repercussions from the judiciary if one uses violence. Becoming a patron of violence means wielding power that is “both overt, since they can count on the local police or military commander; and covert, since they can unleash unseen militias to enforce compliance” (Chabal and Daloz 1999, 80). An additional advantage for a ruler in setting up loyal forces outside the military hierarchy is that these can be used as a counterweight against eventual coup plotters from within the regime. In Iraq, for example, Saddam Hussein established military bureaus in the Ba’ath party that appointed “political” staff as decision makers in all levels of the military apparatus (Sassoon 2012).

States have used civil militias for ideological or practical reasons to provide local security or project power against possible external challengers for centuries. For example, the use of militias in the United States started in the 1500s when English emigrants raised them to patrol the borders with various Native American nations. The idea is that these can be expanded or disbanded depending on the level of threat, and that the costs of rudimentary training and equipment are less than that for regular military, particularly since the costs of maintaining militias are often covered by the local communities rather than by state resources. A prime advantage of maintaining a system of militias is that it can be used to assemble auxiliary forces in times of increased threat or after the outbreak of war.

Indeed, militias are often considered useful when the state faces counterinsurgency imperatives. In particular, a good deal of previous research focuses on the opportunities for shirking accountability that militias engender. These outsourcing arguments posit that mixed regimes and weak democracies are most likely to delegate control to militias because this provides them with a means to repress opposition while maintaining plausible deniability. Militias are less restricted and accountable with regard to the means at their disposal and can therefore be employed for waging dirty wars (Butler and Mitchell 2007; Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015); the lack of institutionalized constraints on unofficial state militias makes them useful for repressing domestic opposition (Colaresi and Carey 2008). In this story, strong autocracies are less responsive to this incentive because they pay little concern to domestic and international accountability. At the other end of the spectrum, strong democracies are also less likely to adopt militias because they are

accountable to their constituents and to an international audience (Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015).⁴ Recent research finds, however, that militias are more likely to engage in violence against civilians when governments do so as well, suggesting that plausible deniability may not be the mechanism driving government-sponsored militia formation (Stanton 2015; Cohen and Nordås 2015).

At the same time, militias staffed by locals may also have informational advantages given their access to local knowledge about the terrain and individuals supporting the insurgents (Kalyvas 2006; Lyall 2010; Jones 2012). One of the key challenges for counterinsurgency campaigns is the difficulty in obtaining good intelligence about the opposition. Thus, local militia forces may be better at accessing subnational knowledge that can, in theory, allow the government to better target individuals that are sympathetic to the opposition (Kalyvas 2006).

Purges and Proxies: The Logic of Subcontracting Control

The approach taken here to explaining the delegation of authority to proxy militias resides in the same utilitarian argumentation, with a particular emphasis on the practical imperatives that drive this decision and the intelligence advantages that can accrue. The argument diverges from previous research by stressing internal dynamics within the regime itself and by modeling the timing of delegation. The next section presents the argument, which explains the timing of proxy militias as being the result of internal military purges and explains the geography of proxy militias as being driven by the extent to which an area is inhabited by armed challengers to the state. In suggesting that militias are created by necessity and are intended as a short-term measure, this article acknowledges that policy makers do so with the knowledge that they are likely to constitute future challenges for state consolidation but argues that policy makers weigh this long-term problem as less acute than the short-term necessity of retaining control.

The argument posits that two factors will increase the probability of the state delegating control to a proxy militia, namely, military purges and armed conflict. When authoritarian states remove key members of their military staff through purges, the entire apparatus is destabilized. In countries where the state's authority rests on repression and intimidation, purges within the military influence the state's ability to gather information at the local level and manage security concerns.

Militaries in many authoritarian states are characterized by patrimonialism in which favoritism and patronage determine career advancement (Bellin 2004).⁵ In lieu of meritocratic systems of promotion, staffing is decided by cronyism, making networks essential. Patrimonial systems are advantageous because they confer several benefits that make them durable, namely, the ability to build loyal clients through discretionary patronage and an increased resistance to democratic reform (Bellin 2004). The trade-off, however, is their vulnerability to shocks, such as

military purges. When a senior military officer is removed, it impacts on his network; his clients lose their influence (at best) or their jobs/freedom (at worst). As such, military purges hinder the day-to-day work of controlling local areas through intelligence gathering and repressing opposition elements. Given the sudden shock to the military apparatus, and particularly the intelligence component of the apparatus, military commanders will have incentives to find other means to compensate for the stress on the organization. They often do so by subcontracting control—at least temporarily—to local armed actors who can be co-opted.

At the same time, military purges should not be expected to have a uniform effect throughout a country. The extent to which military leaders will deem it useful to subcontract local control to militias should be conditional on the level of threat present in a particular area.⁶ Within a country, military units deployed in peaceful areas will be better able to manage the disruptions engendered by the purge because the apparatus will not be stressed by external threats. In parts of the country that experience armed resistance, however, the intelligence-gathering and repressive capacity of the state will be taxed by the shock of a purge. When facing violent insurrection, decision makers will be more willing to delegate control—and accept the risks that doing so entails—to proxy militias. One might object to this claim and instead argue that military leaders would prefer to deal with local shocks in conflict areas by transferring regular military personnel from peaceful areas. The one tactic need not exclude the other. Indeed, many times this is one of the first steps that military leaders take to address the damage caused by purges. There are two problems, however. The first is that there is a limit to how many troops can be transferred away from peaceful areas, given that military bases in these areas are often strategically placed to control the general population or strategic resources. Second, even with the transfer of some troops from peaceful areas, the influx of bodies does not compensate for the loss of local knowledge. A transfer of regular troops therefore offers an incomplete solution to the problem of local control and coercion, at least in the short term. Thus, the main hypothesis is that conditional on the presence of armed conflict, a military purge will increase the likelihood of the state delegating power to a proxy militia.

The scope conditions for this argument are circumscribed by the nature of the state. I expect this argument to be applicable primarily in countries that experience major nonelectoral contestations of power, be it through armed resistance (i.e., civil war) or through other forms of enduring opposition (i.e., extensive protests). Because the argument is subnational, the variation I am interested in occurs within countries and over time: when faced with contestation at a certain place at a certain time, the government response will differ from when not faced with contestation. This problem should be acute in civil war settings, given the entrenched nature of armed resistance and the risks to both individuals and the state as an entity engendered by the use of organized violence.

Further, the argument as it is formulated is circumscribed to states in which local control is exerted not through bureaucracies, but primarily through militaries. In mixed systems and weak democracies, leaders may also rely on the provision of

patronage to establish co-optation through graft in concert with tools of coercion; if the military is built on such patrimonial practices, these countries may also be at risk. It is also possible that one could conceptualize the more general intuition of the argument in broader terms. In nonmilitary regimes, shocks may take a different form than military purges due to the importance of other types of coalitions and the diminished centrality of the military within the ruling coalition. But if the shocks impact the government's intelligence apparatus and ability to combat its opponents, then the same dynamics may kick in. Conceived this way, the argument may have traction across a broader spectrum of regime types once the shock mechanism is modified.

Statebuilding and Violence in Myanmar

The central argument is tested using subnational data on Myanmar for the period 1962 to 2010 (see Figure 1). Myanmar is an interesting case to examine since existing work on PGM indicates that consolidated regimes—both democracies and autocracies—are *less* likely to delegate authority to militias than are “weak” states with unconsolidated institutions (Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015).⁷ Previous research would thus consider Myanmar to be a least likely case for PGM. This section provides a brief narrative of the patterns of conflict, statebuilding, and militia delegation in order to provide context to the empirical analysis.

The territory of present-day Myanmar became part of British India in the late nineteenth century. Although there were several local uprisings against the British presence and longstanding discontent, it was not until the 1930s that a strong nationalist movement developed. Following demands from students and the Buddhist clergy, British Burma became administered separately from India and limited self-rule was introduced in 1937 (Charney 2009; Steinberg 1982). At the same time, the student-led nationalist movement became increasingly radicalized, drawing inspiration from Communism and a Japanese-promoted brand of right-wing Asian nationalism. During the Second World War, many Burmese nationalists initially supported the Japanese invasion. After withdrawing into India, the British Army, aided by the United States, helped form and support local militias among ethnic minorities who harassed the Japanese forces with guerrilla attacks.

When it became clear that the Japanese occupiers were unwilling to transfer power to the Burmese, the nationalists offered their services to the Allies. Thus, by 1945, virtually all local forces rallied behind the British counteroffensive, though the ethnic minorities viewed the Burman troops with suspicion and fighting was accompanied by intercommunal revenge attacks for atrocities that had taken place under Japanese rule. The British thereafter resumed control over a territory rife with local militia leaders, all of whom expected to be rewarded for their wartime effort. This led to intense political competition within and between these groups. When expectations were not met, violence broke out in 1946; this became characterized as civil war upon the country's independence in 1948.



Figure 1. Map of Burma, first-level administrative areas.

Initially, the strongest opposition to the state came from communist insurgents and the government survived largely thanks to ethnic Karen, Kachin, and Chin battalions within the Burmese Army. But Burman nationalist leaders remained suspicious of the colonial background of the ethnic minority military leaders and so Burman communists and mutineers were invited back into the military as a means of increasing the proportion of ethnic Burman soldiers. This coincided with increased communal tension and in early 1949, the Karen nationalist movement rebelled.

In February 1949, the ethnic Karen Smith Dun was replaced as Commander-in-Chief by General Ne Win, who had a background in the Burman nationalist movement during the 1930s and the pro-Japanese Burma Independence Army during Second World War. One of his first decisions was to limit civilian politicians' control over military decisions, particularly relating to promotions and appointments (Callahan 2003). As rebel groups retreated into forested and mountainous areas, a new source of instability arrived in the form of Kuomintang (KMT) remnants that settled in northern Burma after their defeat in the Chinese civil war. The government ordered the US-backed KMT to surrender their arms or leave the country in 1950, providing the motivation for a concerted buildup of the armed forces. Although government forces barely controlled the territory of Yangon in 1949, by the mid-1950s, the Burmese government controlled all major towns and roads in the country.

In 1952, Ne Win reorganized and expanded the resources dedicated to officer training, including setting up the West Point-style Defense Services Academy (DSA). At the same time, the armed forces ventured into business by setting up the Defense Services Institute (DSI) which, by 1960, was running banks, shipping lines, and the largest import–export operation in the country. While this organization was established to ensure that armed units were supplied, the DSI was tax-exempt and therefore made substantial profits that provided military leaders with a source of revenue outside the purview of civilian legislators (Callahan 2003).

Splits within the government led to the establishment of an emergency “military caretaker administration” in 1958. Power was transferred back to the civilian leaders in 1960, but this was reversed again when a Ne Win-led military regime took power in a coup d'état in 1962. The period of 1962 to 2010 saw uninterrupted military rule and the centralization of political power. In the words of Smith (2002, 278), “for 26 years, Burma was to disappear behind a bamboo curtain as the country became one of the most isolated in the world.” Myanmar's rulers shunned the provision of patrimonial graft outside of the military apparatus and sought to undermine potential elites outside the regime.

Within the army, there are two type of network ties. The first (horizontal) consists of loyalty to other members of the same cohort from the DSA, and the second (vertical) consists of loyalty to the local commander of an officer's first deployment. Of these two types, the vertical is the most important. This is largely because none of the configurations of the Burmese political administration have included a formal institutional arrangement for promotion, ensuring that junior officers have incentives to remain loyal to their Chief of Staff (Myoe 1998). Thus, the most important relationship for a young officer is the *saya* (“teacher,” patron)–*tapyit* (“pupil”) relationship which often is established between battalion commanders and their staff. Since these groups form after junior officers have received their first deployment, they tend to follow military structures (infantry, military intelligence [MI]) rather than center/regional divisions since Yangon has been concerned that strong field commanders will challenge the center and therefore rotates its officers (Min 2008). As a consequence, a purge of regional commanders affects a limited number

of individuals, while the purge of a general will have repercussions throughout the entire army structure. This system has been amplified by internal competition over how power and access to resources should be distributed between the infantry (combat forces) and the MI, as well as by the Center's near-constant suspicions of flagging loyalty in the regional outposts.⁸

Purges of civilian authorities occurred as early as the 1962 coup, the first round of military purges took place in 1976 when the government announced that it had uncovered a coup plot, which resulted in the arrest of three army captains and eleven other officers (Charney 2009, 140). The most recent purge took place in 2004 to 2005, which brought down the powerful head of the MI, Khin Nyunt. Reportedly the result of his rivalry with a senior General, Maung Aye, it was publicly characterized as a move to eliminate corruption. In order to eradicate Khin Nyunt's base of support, a massive overhaul of the security forces was undertaken and MIS units across the country were dissolved within the span of a week (Charney 2009, 181-82). The purge continued until mid-2005, as individual trials and confessions yielded more information.

The government has a long history of subcontracting authority to militias, though it often struggles to contain and circumscribe the actions of these groups. Shortly after the 1962 military takeover, Rangoon introduced the Ka Kwe Ye (KKY) militia system as part of a plan to bring order to Shan state without needing to deploy excessive Tatmadaw troops.⁹ In total, about two dozen or so small groups under the KKY umbrella were authorized to keep order in their territories in exchange for an informal acceptance of their involvement in illegal trade. In the end, most of the KKY avoided combat with insurgents, with whom they often instead established trade (e.g., arms or caravan protection; Gibson and Chen 2011). A decade later, Rangoon ordered the KKY militias disbanded. While many of the smaller forces did so voluntarily, the larger ones rebelled by starting or joining rebel groups in the area, both to protect continued control over their territory and as means to continued involvement in the illegal economy.

In August and September 1988, widespread protests in Yangon resulted in a military coup and the formation of a new junta headed by army Chief General Saw Maung (Charney 2009, 160). This move saw the ethnic rebels go on the offensive (Lintner 1999, 355). In the disarray of demonstrations, state military forces were diverted to repress democracy activists in towns, further accentuating the problems wrought by the purge on local-level counterinsurgency efforts. Hard-pressed by fighting and disorder within the ranks,¹⁰ the regime revived the old KKY accords (Lintner 1999, 367), which allowed it to co-opt existing warlords and use them in the fight against regime opponents. An agreement was signed with United Wa State Army (UWSA) in May 1989 which provided the group with *de facto* control over most the Wa hills on the border to China, valuable narcotrafficking property (Keenan 2012). Reportedly aided by government ammunition and air support, the UWSA immediately fought pitched battles with the insurgent Mong Tai Army (Lintner 1999, 380).

The Myanmar armed forces have almost tripled in troop size since 1962 while the insurgents have largely been on the defensive since the 1950s, suggesting that it is not the threat posed by the insurgents per se that explains the occasional use of proxy militias. Furthermore, there has not been any serious attempt by the government to integrate militia forces into the police or army structures, though the government has tried (unsuccessfully) to insert Burman commanders over existing militias by reorganizing them into Border Guard Forces.¹¹ Burman military bases have been established on the borders to the territory held by proxy forces, creating unofficial internal borders that delineate the areas of government and proxy control. This situation is most visible in the Shan State which is controlled by local Wa forces where government representatives need approval to even enter the territory. All told, there is little suggestion that the Myanmar military has established militias solely as a response to counterinsurgency or that these militias are meant to become part of the formal military apparatus.

Empirical Strategy

To assess the effect of military purges on the delegation of local control to proxy militias, I examine Myanmar's fourteen first-order administrative units (states or divisions) for the time period 1962 to 2010. The analysis is restricted to the post-1962 period because there was no indication in the data that military purges took place in the earlier democracy period. Because the argument posits that such behavior is contingent upon the government's perceived need to maintain coercive control in a given area, I dichotomize the sample by exposure to conflict. This strategy allows the slope coefficients for the treatment to vary across the two populations (conflict and nonconflict areas); further, using group comparisons makes fewer assumptions about the variance of the standard error than would an interaction term in a pooled model. Conflict is determined by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program Armed Conflict data set (Pettersson and Themnér 2011), which specifies at least twenty-five battle-related deaths for inclusion.¹²

The dependent variable is the onset of a government-aligned proxy militia in a given administrative region. As Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger (2015) discuss, this can mean that a group is created as a proxy militia or that an existing group is co-opted by the government to become a proxy, as the UWSA example illustrates. For inclusion, the group must be government-aligned, organized (e.g., a name or clear leadership hierarchy), active in the territory of Myanmar, armed for violence, and not formally part of the Myanmar armed forces. Data for this variable come from Kreutz (2011), who collected them using a multitude of sources, including monographs, region-specific periodicals, extracts from archives, internal rebel group documents, and interviews.

Because the dependent variable is binary, I estimate a logit model at the first-order administrative unit-year level i :

$$\text{logit}[p(y = 1)] = \alpha + \beta \times \text{Military Purge}_{t-1} + \beta_i \times X_i,$$

where the main variable of interest, Military Purge, is measured at time $t - 1$. I define a military purge as the removal (from a position or from the government) or substantive demotion of one or more individuals within the military apparatus on the basis of a power struggle with an opposing faction. I further specify that the purge must have either been sweeping or have affected the top levels of the military leadership. The latter criterion is motivated by the widespread impact the removal of high-ranking officials has on clientelistic networks further down the chain of command. In a military dictatorship, the currency of power is the number of guns that are under one's control; for that reason, I consider transfers from military command to civilian desk jobs to be demotions. For example, in 2005, five Brigadier Generals were transferred to ambassadorships while ten Lieutenant Commanders were transferred to the foreign ministry. Commenting on this, Burmese military analyst U Htay Aung observed that "... if the military does not want to give any military positions and feel they can no longer trust them, then traditionally the military transfers them to the civilian side. If the military transfers and appoints them as ambassadors and military attachés it seems [to those inside Myanmar that] they have been transferred to distant places out of the country" (British Broadcasting Corporation/Democratic Voice of Burma May 21, 2005). This variable is a dummy. While it would be optimal to create a count measure of the number of officials purged in order to capture the purge's severity, such data are not available. There are nine years of military purges during the time period. These data are measured at the national level; while subnational data on where the purged officers are located would increase precision, data availability precludes such efforts.

X_i are a set of controls. While these factors are not expected to influence the probability of a purge, they may influence the probability of armed fighting in an area and/or the choice to delegate responsibility to a militia.¹³ Other controls include a dummy for whether emeralds, rubies, sapphires, or jadeite were mined in that administrative region; data come from Chronicle of National Development (2009).¹⁴ Mineral wealth may increase the probability for armed conflict (Lujala 2010) and decrease the propensity of governments to accede military control to a proxy force that might compete for a monopoly over the trade or taxation of these resources. I also include a variable which measures the total size of the administrative region, with the logic that larger states are more difficult to police. Both of these measures are time-invariant. I include a measure of the natural log of population, both in reference to the cross-national correlation between population size and conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hegre and Sambanis 2006) and with the idea that governments will be more hard-pressed to control large populations and therefore more likely to subcontract proxy militias. Due to data availability, I use a static measure of population taken from 2009 and reported in the Chronicle of National Development (2009) and interpret it as a proxy for cross-regional differences in population size across the administrative divisions.¹⁵ Finally, I consider whether the decision to delegate to militias is driven by the costliness of moving troops to peripheral regions by including a measure of distance in kilometers from Yangon to the farthest border of the region.

Table 1. Summary Statistics.

	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Pooled					
Proxy onset	686	0.248	0.156	0	1
Military purge	686	0.184	0.388	0	1
Gems	686	0.364	0.482	0	1
Area (000 km ²)	686	19.644	14.82	3.927	60.155
Ln(Pop)	686	14.915	0.976	12.767	15.936
Distance to capital (km)	686	642.84	344.964	112	1318
Conflict	684	0.332	0.471	0	1
Conflict areas					
Proxy onset	227	0.044	0.206	0	1
Military purge	227	0.128	0.335	0	1
Gems	227	0.45	0.498	0	1
Area	227	28.064	18.156	4.53	60.155
Ln(Pop)	227	14.878	0.647	12.767	15.889
Distance to capital (km)	227	752.604	343.768	225	1318
Ethnic conflict	227	0.63	0.484	0	1
Ideological conflict	227	0.643	0.48	0	1
Nonconflict areas					
Proxy onset	459	0.015	0.123	0	1
Military purge	459	0.211	0.409	0	1
Gems	459	0.325	0.469	0	1
Area	459	15.48	10.645	3.927	60.155
Ln(Pop)	459	14.934	1.103	12.767	15.936
Distance to capital (km)	459	588.556	332.778	112	1318

Findings

Table 1 provides summary statistics, first pooled and then across the two subsets. There are ten onsets of proxy militias in conflict areas ($n = 227$), while there are seven in nonconflict areas ($n = 459$).

Table 2 shows output from regressing proxy militia onset on military purges and X_i . Robust standard errors are clustered on administrative region.

Table 2 finds no effect of military purges on the probability of proxy militias in the pooled analysis (models 1 to 3) while models 4 to 9 demonstrate the distinct and conditional effect of armed conflict on the relationship. In models 4 to 6, the Military Purge variable is positive and significant at conventional levels, while in models 7 to 9 the relationship is negative and not statistically significant. Post-estimation analysis (Table 3) shows that the predicted probability of a proxy militia given a military purge is 10.3 percent for conflict areas and 1 percent for nonconflict areas, using the

Table 2. Logistic Regression for Proxy Militias.

	Pooled			Conflict areas			Nonconflict areas		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Military purge	0.318 (0.452)	0.358 (0.49)	0.367 (0.503)	1.147*** (0.245)	1.061*** (0.2)	0.957*** (0.249)	-0.487 (0.976)	-0.655 (0.788)	-0.685 (0.829)
Gems	-1.459 (0.892)	0.094*** (0.027)	0.156 (1.134)	-3.722* (2.026)	0.134** (0.06)	0.051 (1.215)	-0.377 (0.915)	-0.377 (0.915)	0.954 (1.239)
Area		-0.728* (0.422)	0.104*** (0.02)			0.118*** (0.031)		0.098** (0.039)	0.12*** (0.023)
Ln(Population)			-1.119*** (0.328)		-0.917 (0.759)	-1.218* (0.628)		-0.952* (0.491)	-1.341*** (0.452)
Distance to capital (km)			-0.004*** (0.001)			-0.006*** (0.002)			-0.003*** (0.001)
Intercept	-3.736*** (0.483)	5.132 (5.566)	12.469*** (4.263)	-3.306*** (0.572)	7.75 (10.465)	15.302 (9.333)	-4.078*** (0.47)	7.972 (6.466)	14.855** (5.748)
N	684	684	684	227	227	227	457	457	457
Log pseudo likelihood	-79.455	-69.443	-65.301	-39.917	-36.017	-33.387	-36.085	-30.894	-28.909

Note: Robust standard errors clustered on administrative region in parentheses. Estimated in Stata 13.

* $p \leq .10$.

** $p \leq .05$.

*** $p \leq .01$.

Table 3. Predicted Probabilities for Proxy Militias.

	Models 4 and 7 (Table 2)		Models 5 and 8 (Table 2)		
	Military purges		Military purges		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Conflict areas	0.0354	0.1034	Conflict areas	0.0219	0.0608
Nonconflict areas	0.0167	0.0103	Nonconflict areas	0.0079	0.0041

bivariate models. With the full models, these percentages are 6 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively.¹⁶ The predicted probabilities speak to the conditionality of the argument; the purges impact on the timing while the presence of armed conflict impacts on the location. The bivariate results show that probability of the onset of a proxy militia in a conflict area increases from 3.5 percent from nonpurge years to 10.3 percent in purge years, a threefold increase in the substantive effect. These results are consistent with the main argument.

The distance-to-Yangon measure was included to consider the possibility that delegation to militias may be driven by instrumental concerns regarding the costliness of moving troops to peripheral regions, an alternative causal mechanism to the intelligence and control story posited here. Surprisingly, the results find an inverse relationship, suggesting that militia delegation is more likely in areas closer to the capital, though the effect is fairly weak. The purge variable remains substantively unaffected by its inclusion.

In unreported robustness checks (available in the online appendix), I also run models 1 and 2 from Table 2 with an interaction term for military purges and conflict. As expected, the results are again positive and significant. An alternative measure for population density (instead of population size) also does not change the substantive interpretation of the findings. I also explore several measures that serve as proxies for the level of threat posed by the conflict to the government. Running these on the conflict-only subset, the findings show that both a count of conflict duration in years and a dummy for whether the conflict reached the intensity of war were positive but not significant at standard levels.¹⁷ The military purge variable remained positive and significant even with the inclusion of these measures. The coefficients also remain positive and statistically significant with comparable marginal effects when including a lagged dependent variable to control for state dependence.

Finally, two dummy variables were created which distinguish between rebel groups which based their demands on ethnic claims and those which based their demands on ideological claims.¹⁸ Each first-level administrative division was then coded for whether either of these groups were active, and could take the value of one for both of the dummies if both ethnic and ideologically oriented groups were based there. The argument suggests that the need to delegate control when the military

Table 4. Ethnic versus Ideological Conflicts.

	Ethnic conflicts		Ideological conflicts	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Military purge	1.047*** (0.128)	1.136*** (0.063)	1.527* (0.86)	1.368* (0.829)
Gems				-4.121 (2.523)
Area		0.006 (0.031)		0.168** (0.08)
Ln(Population)		1.191 (1.188)		-1.483 (1.287)
Intercept	-2.944*** (0.544)	-20.964 (16.976)	-4.167*** (0.754)	14.407 (18.391)
N	143	143	146	146
Log pseudolikelihood	-32.728	-30.168	-14.023	-12.116

Note: Robust standard errors clustered on administrative region in parentheses. Estimated in Stata 13.

* $p \leq .10$.

** $p \leq .05$.

*** $p \leq .01$.

experiences purges should be equivalent regardless of the aims of the armed opponents the government faces, and indeed, Table 4 shows that the military purge variable is positive and statistically significant both for areas which see ethnic combatants and those which host combatants who have mobilized around ideology (be it communism or democracy).¹⁹ The size of the effect is somewhat decreased for ideological conflicts, that is, the predicted probability of proxy militias if a military purge occurs is 13 percent for areas with ethnically mobilized combatants and 7 percent for areas with ideologically mobilized combatants using the bivariate models. While the empirics offer no immediate explanation for the difference in the strength of the effect, one possibility is that delegation to proxy militias is easier in areas inhabited primarily by ethnic minorities, where latent ethnic networks can be activated by nascent militias for mobilization (Eck 2009).

The findings here indicate support for the hypothesis that military purges will be associated with the adoption of proxy militias in areas where the government faces armed opposition. The two components of the argument thus speak to both the geographic distribution of violence and its timing. These results complement Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell's (2015) cross-national findings that threats of disorder increase the likelihood of militias. There are, however, several key differences. First, Carey et al. employ a much broader measure of threats of disorder, although the findings hold for armed conflict as well. Second, I argue that the effect of threats of disorder/armed conflict is conditional on shocks to the military apparatus. Finally, Myanmar is a consolidated autocracy throughout the period, which Carey et al. find to be associated with a *decreased* risk for PGM. Myanmar may be an anomaly, or alternatively, the findings here may suggest that the dichotomization of consolidated versus nonconsolidated states may mask important variation and that leverage might be gained in cross-national studies by further disaggregating regime type.

This article investigates the particular relationship between military purges and militia delegation and does not consider the full range of options available for dealing with the dual problems of armed conflict and instability wrought by purges. Leaders could choose to deal with purges by reorganizing the military apparatus in a variety of ways. For example, they could reform the promotion system to prevent patrimonialism or rotate officers across regions to break up internal military networks. Doing so is likely to be fraught with difficulties as vested interests resist such efforts. Leaders could also address the problems posed by armed conflict in other ways. They could undertake to conscript additional troops who could be transferred to contentious areas during periods of instability, though this would involve considerable time and cost constraints. The government could also order a higher level of indiscriminate repression.²⁰

Although the results indicate that given armed conflict in an area, a purge increases the probability of militia delegation, the low predicted probabilities are indicative of the complexity of the phenomenon. One would expect a variety of factors besides conflict and purges to impact on the strategic decision to delegate to militias. Likewise, one would not expect purges to deterministically predict militia delegation; given a particular set of conditions and actors, they systematically increase the probability of doing so, but they may also result in an array of other outcomes. This underscores that the argument does not imply unicity; one would expect additional causes to explain militia delegation and for military purges to impact on a variety of outcomes.

It is also worth keeping in mind that it was not possible to measure the causal mechanism posited here, that is, that militia delegation is driven by intelligence gathering concerns that feed into the ability of the state to maintain a coercive apparatus. It is possible that other causal stories could be told which connect the practice of purges to militia delegation in conflict areas. One of these, the idea that troop transfers to the periphery may be prohibitively costly and therefore militias provide efficiency gains, was investigated empirically but the causal mechanism remains empirically black-boxed.

Conclusion

This article addressed the question of why regimes voluntarily sacrifice their monopoly on the use of violence by delegating authority to nonstate militia. The argument posited that when regimes engage in purges of the military, they are more likely to delegate local control to proxy militia forces in areas where they face armed resistance. The logic behind this argument suggested that since military purges disrupt intelligence-gathering structures and the overall organizational capacity of the military, leaders are likely to counteract disruptions by subcontracting the task of control and repression to militias that have the local intelligence skills. In testing this argument subnationally on data for Myanmar 1962 to 2010, this article finds that proxy militias are ten times more likely in conflict areas after

military purges than in nonconflict areas in years when there are no purges in the preceding year. This finding complements existing research by speaking to the timing of militia formation. Previous research has focused on the structural conditions that impact the probability of militias but military purges are dynamic; this article thus addresses the gap in our knowledge about *when* militias are likely to be engaged by the state.

The findings speak to several literatures. In part, they address the literature on statebuilding and authoritarian regimes, which, departing from Weber has largely assumed that the state will adopt a protectionist attitude toward maintaining its monopoly on the use of violence. That regimes, and indeed, even military dictatorships, should choose to delegate power to organizations which exist beyond their purview is rarely acknowledged in the literature. In raising this question, this article seeks to connect to a growing body of literature interested in when and why states take such actions. Myanmar is a rewarding case for study because it contradicts previous research; as a state with consolidated institutions, it is a least likely case to employ militias. One implication of the findings is that perhaps it is not the level of consolidation per se which is important, but rather the type of regime and the context in which it operates. As has often been observed, there is enormous diversity in authoritarian regimes (Geddes 1999; Linz 2000; Weeks 2014). Would sultanistic or competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way 2002) also demonstrate an increased probability to delegate coercive powers to militias, and would they do so under the same conditions as the military dictatorship studied here? Questions such as these warrant further research. While these findings may be circumscribed in their generalizability, their relevance for the broader field lies in suggesting that internal governance dynamics may drive the decision to delegate control to groups outside the state.

The case of Myanmar also challenges conventional wisdom about militias because the military autocrats ruling the country never sought to conceal their delegation of power to militias, nor to disavow themselves of militia misdeeds as outsourcing theories would expect; the process was overt and there was no apparent interest in using militias to create plausible deniability. Perhaps this is unsurprising since Myanmar is a military dictatorship which employs its own troops with unabashed brutality against the civilian population. Other regimes—those which are more reliant on constituency groups—may be more reticent to acknowledge their relationships with abusive militias.

In recent years, Myanmar has initiated a transition from consolidated autocracy to a mixed system/anocracy, raising the question of what we should expect going forward. Some facets of the system have been reformed, for example, there have been improvements to the regulation and competitiveness of participation and increased constraints on the chief executive. At the same time, others have not; for example, there has been no change in the competitiveness or in the openness of executive recruitment. Which of these dimensions—if any—impact militia delegation is unknown. The findings from this article suggest that as long

as the military remains unconstrained by civilian politicians—which is currently still the case—it is likely that the dynamics described in this article will remain in play.

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Notes

1. These terms are used interchangeably throughout the article to indicate organized, armed nonstate actors who are organizationally outside of the state, though they act with the explicit or tacit support of the government. I prefer the term proxy militias to distinguish these groups from paramilitary units that are incorporated into the state apparatus and function under its direct control. Such organizations—like India's Assam Rifles, Morocco's Gendarmerie Royale, and China's Border Defense Guards—are excluded from the population of interest.
2. The terms Myanmar and Burma are used interchangeably.
3. Indeed, if we follow Arendt (1970) in decoupling power and violence, the Weberian puzzle of delegation of coercive authority largely vanishes. Further, in a military dictatorship where power is not derived through the consent of the governed, delegation of authority to nonstate groups can be used to signal a government's commitment to maintaining a coercive apparatus that compels obedience from the populace.
4. One explanation that has not been explored in the literature is whether this is due to outsourcing to private military and security companies.
5. There is variation across authoritarian states with regard to the degree to which their militaries are patrimonial (Bellin 2004). Consolidated democracies, on the other hand, have institutionalized militaries with predictable and transparent rules and largely meritocratic systems of promotion.
6. The logic is somewhat analogous to Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell (2015), who find in a country-year analysis that government–militia ties are more likely in situations of domestic disorder and threats to the regime.

7. Polity data indicate that throughout this period, Myanmar's score ranged from -6 to -8 on the Polity2 scale, making it a consolidated autocracy.
8. An extensive network of Military Intelligence (MI) agents operate throughout the country, gathering intelligence on both the populace and agents of the regime (Seekins 2002, 48), leading to extensive paranoia and intimidation. Perhaps the most extreme estimate is the rumor the author heard in 2005 that one-third of the population served as informants to the regime. This estimate is unverifiable and likely inaccurate but nicely illustrates the extent to which the populace feared the reach of MI.
9. A list of militias included in the data is available in the online appendix.
10. In addition to internal disruptions deriving from the coup itself, the demonstrations also saw some military units mutinying and joining the demonstrations, compounding the disorder within the military apparatus.
11. This program has been rejected by most of the powerful militia groups.
12. Most of the conflicts in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) data set are territorially delimited in line with first-order administrative boundaries with the exception of the conflict over government fought by various Communist factions (1948–1988) and democracy activists (1989–1994). Locations for the former were coded using Lintner (1990) and the latter with the UCDP online database (UCDP 2012).
13. While one may suspect that the outcomes on the battlefield (i.e., armed conflict) impacts on the probability of a military purge, the extant literature on Myanmar suggests otherwise. Charney (2009, 180) writes that “the chief internal factors in government purges are widely held to be personal political ambitions, disagreements over policy [i.e. to hold dialogue with democracy activists or not], or business rivalries Purges afforded the most powerful men in the Council the opportunity to replace rivals with less powerful clients.”
14. There are no diamonds in Myanmar and major gold deposits are found only in Sagaing Division, which is also home to jade deposits.
15. The data are likely to be of poor precision but adequate when interpreted as orders of magnitude between the various administrative divisions. And while large-scale population transfers have occurred during the period as part of the government's “four cuts” strategy to sever links between the populace and rebels, this has largely occurred within administrative divisions (i.e., villages forcibly moved closer to army bases). A lack of time-series data make this strategy the only viable option.
16. Estimated while holding the other variables in models 5 and 8 at their means.
17. Data come from the UCDP Armed Conflict data set (Pettersson and Themnér 2011).
18. Data coded by the author using UCDP (2012) and other secondary sources.
19. Model 2 excludes gems because its inclusion leads to nonconvergence of the maximum-likelihood estimator.
20. This is difficult to envision in Burma short of genocide, given the existing practices of systematic displacement, killings, sexual violence, forced labor, and general terrorization of the civilian population.

Supplemental Material

The online appendices are available at <http://jcr.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

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