

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:

THE HUMAN RESOURCES OF NON-STATE
ARMED GROUPS; FROM DEMOCRACY TO JIHAD IN
SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

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To be able to affect fighters behavior in Civil Wars one should understand their decision-making step by step. In this dissertation I show that after the initial decision to take up arms, which is based on individual grievances, fighters look at armed groups as institutions and make the decision to join or switch groups by comparing them based on their organizational capabilities. At the same time, when a group becomes popular (meaning its supply of fighters exceeds group demand), it is in danger of decreasing the quality of its manpower and conversion capability. In this case, adopting strict rules grounded in ideology helps the group ensure that only the most dedicated people are in its ranks. Individuals who are considering joining for reasons other than dedication to the goal of the war will think twice before joining such a group because it requires a great deal of individual sacrifices.

THE HUMAN RESOURCES OF NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS;

FROM DEMOCRACY TO JIHAD IN SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

By

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Introduction

The Syrian Civil War is the bloodiest ongoing conflict in the world, and many attempts to bring an end to the struggle have been ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst. One reason this war has been so protracted is the number of armed factions involved. As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, commented in 2013: “Syria is not about choosing between two sides but rather about choosing one among many sides.”

Over 75 percent of militarized disputes since 1945 have been civil conflicts. Two-thirds of all civil wars between 1989 and 2003 included more than one rebel group fighting the government¹ and the number of armed groups involved in civil wars is constantly increasing. Moreover, while proxy wars were still mostly waged along a frontline in the late 20th century, now foreign countries support different groups fighting for the same side – making it a more complex and essentially two-level proxy war.

Although all groups participating in civil wars are fighting to maximize their share of power², they differ in their ideologies. The ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine are all multi-faction, involving groups of different ideologies ranging from pro-democracy units to Islamists groups (such as in the Middle East) and from pro-West units to WWII-style Fascist groups (such as in Ukraine). And with few exceptions, radical groups become some of the strongest. Why those particular groups were able to rapidly increase in power and size while others simply disappeared is a puzzle that requires an explanation.

This additional layer of complexity makes managing such conflicts especially challenging for foreign governments and international organizations. Previously, it was sufficient to choose one side of the conflict to support, but it is now equally if not more so important to determine which group will take control once the enemy is defeated.

In their efforts to resolve conflicts, foreign governments and international community have to simultaneously work on two dimensions: managing both relative powers between enemies, and the power dynamics inside the rebel bloc. On one hand, they are trying to aid the fight against the enemy, and on the other they are supporting moderate rebel groups while weakening more radical ones.

¹ Source: UCDP/PRIO dataset

² Nagl, John A., et al. The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Although academics and policy-makers have accumulated a substantial body of knowledge about the interaction between groups fighting on opposite sides of the front line, the internal dynamics between different rebel factions fighting on the same side and more specifically the role ideology plays in these dynamics is less well understood, which makes choosing a group to support a dangerous guessing game.

Although virtually all ongoing conflicts have more than one group fighting on the rebel side, the confusion about such multi-factional wars is so apparent that there is no consensus on how to even approach this problem- on the level of groups (that already have different ideologies) or on the level of individual fighters (who self-select into those groups).

In 2015, for example, the Obama administration was vetting individual fighters who wanted to join U.S.-backed rebel groups in Syria to screen out people who were likely to switch to radical groups after receiving training and weapons. At the same time, the U.S. officially blacklisted a particular group in Ukraine, which was accused of being ultra-nationalist or even neofascist, from receiving training, equipment, or any other support. So while the U.S. was trying to work with individual fighters to prevent them from joining radical armed groups in Syria, in Ukraine, the U.S. was supporting anti-Russian fighting on the group level by refusing support to a particular group, not looking at its current and potential members.

This inconsistent approach is not surprising since a group's ideology and membership is an interdependent and complex system that is difficult to untangle. While previous research looked at this problem from military and religious points of view, my goal is to contribute to understanding how internal competition between different rebel factions works and what makes a rebel group successful by employing labor market theory.

It is impossible to design effective policies to either defeat or empower a particular group without understanding the internal dynamics of the groups inside the opposition camp, which in turn is hard to do without looking at a group's human resources. That is the case because armed groups could not be successful without qualified manpower. Groups fighting for the same goal within one rebel bloc are competing among themselves for the same potential members, and ideology plays a major role in winning new adherents.

To be able to affect fighters behavior one should understand their decision-making step by step. In this dissertation I show that after the initial decision to take up arms, which is based on individual grievances, fighters look at armed groups as institutions and make the

decision to join or switch groups by comparing them based on their organizational capabilities. At the same time, when a group becomes popular (meaning its supply of fighters exceeds group demand), it is in danger of decreasing the quality of its manpower and conversion capability. In this case, adopting strict rules grounded in ideology helps the group ensure that only the most dedicated people are in its ranks. Individuals who are considering joining for reasons other than dedication to the goal of the war will think twice before joining such a group because it requires a great deal of individual sacrifices.

Increasing fractionalization

Why are post WWII civil wars so fractionalized with so many groups on the same side challenging the government? In addition to groups being more likely to split as the conflict progresses due to repressions, accommodations, changes in demands (Seymour et al 2016), factional leaders' ideology and personality (Stedman, 1997), and internal competition over representation within movements (Pearlman, 2008/09, 2011). The increasing availability of the new communication technologies, especially the Internet, makes it much easier and cheaper for prospective leaders to organize their own groups from the very onset of the conflict. Previously, in order to organize an armed rebellion with the ambitious goal of winning a civil war, assistance from foreign governments or any other major international actor was almost a prerequisite from the very beginning of the group's development. To get enough funding, information, training, and weapons, prospective leaders had to have powerful foreign patrons who would sponsor them with weapons, cash and military advisers. Even if a group managed to acquire natural resources and used those revenues to fund its activities, it still had to have support from those outside contacts in order to grow from being a small, marginal gang to achieving its final non-material goal of overthrowing its government and being recognized internationally. Their natural resource funds alone were not often enough to buy them expertise, information, and foreign public support; and even if they could, it was very expensive. Groups required significant start up capital and networks from the very onset of the conflict. In industrial organization language, barriers to entry into such "rebel markets" were very high, making it an oligopoly if not a monopoly for non-governmental armed groups where one or a small number of rebel groups were challenging the government and no other group could easily start up. With this set up, the small number

of groups that were able to start did not encounter significant competition and received all of the funding and support that governments and international actors who were interested in the same goal had to offer. Internally, they also had less membership problems because there was such a small number of these groups (often just one) that every prospective fighter who wanted to join the rebellion had no option but to join one of the few. A prospective fighter who wanted to fight the enemy had little choice even if he did not like a particular group or its leadership.

As late as the 1990s during the wars in former Yugoslavia, umbrella organizations, such as political parties, managed several semiautonomous groups on their respective sides (Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian).³ All Serbian militias depended on Belgrade for money, supplies, and political connections; Croatian groups went to Zagreb for everything they needed; and all Bosnian groups were in constant contact with Sarajevo.⁴ Only the leadership of their respected political parties was going to foreign countries to make contacts with international actors, and even their own diasporas, to get money for groups fighting on their sides. The existence of such an umbrella organization on each side had several consequences for the civil war industry. First, new groups could not easily organize without direct connections to the organization and its leadership. They would simply not have enough funding. Second, an existing group could not easily break its ties with leadership because it would be extremely difficult to find another source of funding and it would take a long time to do so. Potential leaders do not have that kind of time, especially when the war is already ongoing. As a result rebel groups did not have any options to bypass their umbrella organization. They did not have the ability or time to travel outside their country, and forging independent connections with someone who could support them was extremely challenging. On the other hand, potential foreign supporters understood the market and were reluctant to support independent armed groups, calculating chances of their success as being too low. Therefore, there was little chance for any serious independent group to develop because they would have had a major problem getting enough resources to sustain themselves for a long

³ Examples of such paramilitary units operated during the Bosnian War include: the Serb "White Eagles" (*Beli Orlovi*), Arkan's "Tigers", "Serbian Volunteer Guard" (*Srpska Dobrovoljačka Garda*), Bosnians "Patriotic League" (*Patriotska Liga*) and "Green Berets" (*Zelene Beretke*), and Croatian "Croatian Defence Forces" (*Hrvatske Obrambene Snage*)

⁴ Since Bosnia does not have any significant natural resources, groups could not support themselves for a long time without outside support.

time.

In the twenty-first century, however, the situation has changed dramatically. With the increase in availability of communications technologies, particularly the Internet, connection between like-minded people has become much easier and a potential leader can now organize an armed group from anywhere using only his laptop, and it is almost free. Theoretically, anyone can connect with anyone anywhere else in the world in a matter of seconds, so nothing stops potential leaders from connecting to outside support directly rather than working with umbrella organizations. There is no need anymore to spend several years touring diasporas in foreign countries and foreign capitals to understand who is willing to support a particular goal and ensure material support from them. Suddenly, potential leaders can find like-minded individuals interested in joining their new groups through social media, get information on weapons technology by watching YouTube videos, exchange intelligence through encrypted messengers, organize fundraising and collect money from interested private individuals (like members of the relevant diasporas) on Internet forums, get in contact with foreign military advisers who have experience in fighting through secure online chats, organize weapons shipments via special “dark” websites, and even lobby through foreign media by sending op-eds directly to the newspaper editor. There is no longer a crucial need for large start up capital and for a powerful third party to organize all of this from the very beginning of a group’s existence; it is now much easier, far less expensive, and even a potential leader with no civil war experience can do it. In the world of an increasingly controlled internet where a potential group leader could face arrest for such activities, this is far less likely in lawless countries that are descending into civil war, and where the central government already has little to no control. The 2008 U.S. Army counterinsurgency manual warns, “Interconnectedness and information technology are new aspects of this contemporary wave of insurgencies. Using the Internet, insurgents can now link virtually with allied groups throughout a state, a region, and even the entire world.”⁵ This situation could be viewed through the lens of industrial organization theory, which is used mostly in economics and used to analyze the behavior of firms in a particular industry. Because of reducing

⁵ Nagl, John A., et al. The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

communication costs and developing communication technology, the cost of entry⁶ to such “rebel markets” has fallen significantly, making many more people want to start a group and try to compete for a share of power. As a result, multiple similar groups fighting on one side against the government appear which leads to a significant increase in competition between those groups. All fighting groups offer a near-identical product (they are fighting for the same goal); all of them, at least at the beginning, have a relatively small market share (there is no dominant group and all groups are of similar size and have equal power); there is complete information about what groups are fighting for and how they are different; and the industry is characterized by freedom of entry and exit - groups can organize and disband freely. As a consequence of this nearly free entry into the market and the concordant significant competition among groups, it became increasingly hard for individual militias to become powerful enough to have any effect on the course of the war.

Iraq is an example of just such a situation with multiple factions on one side. Hafez (2007) identifies up to fifty-six Sunni groups that were involved in insurgent attacks between 2003 and 2006, for example. In 2016, at some point during the Battle for Mosul, there were at least 38 independent Shia armed groups and at least 4 Arab Sunni groups fighting against ISIS from inside the ISIS controlled town of Mosul alone. Due to the sheer number of rebel factions involved in the conflict Syria also looks like total chaos with everyone fighting everyone from the outside. According to Pentagon estimates, there were as many as 1,200 different groups opposing the government four years into the conflict.⁷ And those are just the most “successful” groups, which still exist after years of war: many more did not survive past the initial phases of their development. They announced their initiation and formation (often on YouTube), but did not last long and their fighters were soon absorbed by other groups.

Similar to civilian start-up firms, each group had some money to start operating, so at the beginning outside support was not crucial for them. They had enough money to buy weapons that were easily available, and anyone interested could have purchased them and all other necessities. Leaders of the groups used the Internet to recruit potential members and to get in contact with rich private individuals inside and outside the country who were interested

⁶ Von Weizsacker’s definition (1980a, p 400) that “a barrier to entry is a cost of production that must be borne by a firm which seeks to enter an industry but is not borne by firms already in the industry and that implies a distortion in the allocation of resources from the social point of view”

⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/05/john-kerry-syrian-rebels_n_3870782.html

in the goals of the revolution and were willing to sponsor their group. Groups advertised internationally with semi-professional announcement videos that were uploaded on YouTube, and one brigade even went so far as directly writing an op-ed to the *Washington Post* and *Daily Telegraph* stating their position.⁸

This new development in insurgencies adds additional problems that did not exist when only one or a small number of groups were challenging the government. This market competition often becomes so intense that it leads to infighting between groups that are on the same side vis-à-vis the enemy and have similar goals. For example, Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour (2012) show that rebel fragmentation “is associated with higher instances of violence against the state and the out-group, as well as more factional fighting and attacks on co-ethnic civilians,” and that the more groups there are, the more incentives groups have to use violence to eliminate rivals.

To make the following situation even more dangerous, such conflicts are not only more violent, but also harder to terminate. On one hand, it is harder for a small group to defeat an enemy militarily, but on the other side Cunningham (2006) shows that civil wars that include multiple important actors who are essential for achieving the settlement tend to last longer than those that feature fewer “veto players.”⁹ In addition, it is not only in numbers per se, but about its consequences- the stronger the rebels are vis-à-vis the government, the more likely that the conflict terminates in a negotiated settlement (Cunningham et al., 2009; Gent, 2008).

Why study groups’ human resources?

According to military literature, military effectiveness is the outcome of resources provided to the military group and its ability to transform these resources into effective combat capability. In other words, “What does the group have, and how successfully can they use it in combat?”

⁸https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-deadly-consequences-of-mislabeling-syrias-revolutionaries/2015/07/10/6dec139e-266e-11e5-aae2-6c4f59b050aa_story.html

⁹ Alternatively, in case of long and protracted wars, Findley and Rudloff (2012) say that fragmented conflicts are not harder to settle because “when actors fragment, the result is that it becomes difficult for any one party to defeat all of the other parties. Under these circumstances, otherwise uncooperative factions realize that negotiating an agreement might be the only way out of a long and protracted war.”

According to a RAND report (2005), military capability depends on the following resources: 1) funding; 2) manpower; 3) military infrastructure (training ranges, medical facilities, military construction projects, and the like); 4) combat research institutions; and 5) the defense-industrial base.

Since groups engaged in civil wars are usually fighting in fragile and undeveloped countries like Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, it could be assumed that they have similar, and often rather minimal, technological resources, especially at the beginning of their existence. Since they do not have any “combat research” or “defense-industrial base,” and even their military infrastructure, usually limited to camps, is rather basic, groups are left to rely mostly on (and compete with each other for) money and manpower.

Groups fighting on one side in a particular conflict often compete for the same funding, such as sponsorship from people and organizations who are interested in the goal of the war or natural resources that exist in the country; and the same manpower pool of prospective fighters who are interested in participating in the conflict on the rebel side. For combatants fighting in low-tech civil wars, which currently make up the majority of civil wars around the globe, groups strive for funding and manpower, which are the primary assets they can potentially convert into military prowess and thereby maximize their power.

In addition to simply acquiring those fighters and money, effective military organizations should be able to convert these resources into operational capabilities. In order for that to happen, military organization must develop their 1) strategy; 2) civil-military relations; 3) military-to-military relations; 4) doctrine and organization; and 5) capacity for innovation (RAND 2005). Most of those policies are developed by a group's executive leadership, making the quality of those policies a function of the leadership qualification and experience (manpower on the executive level).

If the source of manpower is clear, where does funding for the armed groups come from? Unlike an official country's armed forces, groups have no military budget allocated each year, but instead must work hard to acquire the money necessary for their survival. This also makes money a function of manpower, further confirming that human resources is the

single most important asset for any armed group participating in a civil war.

If rank-and-file quantity and quality is a crucial resource that groups compete for, leadership quality is what is can transform this resource into combat capability. The more popular the group is among prospective fighters, the larger and more effective the group will be, and the more power it will accrue. Large groups with better and more dedicated fighters are more successful on the battlefield and will get more money from either foreign patrons whose main interest is supporting groups with the highest chance of winning the war (and the number of fighters sends them a good signal in a noisy environment such as civil war) and on the other hand, they also have a higher chance of securing control of natural resources, if they exist in the country. The correlation between money and human resources is often well understood on the ground on the front line. A new brigade, Mahgerin al-Allah, was started in Deir ez Zor (Syria) in 2011. In order to raise funds, they decided to increase the group's visibility. "The first thing I did when I took this job," explained a person who worked on this effort, "was make a YouTube video about the brigade. I asked group leaders to gather as many people as they could, regardless of whether they were actually part of the group or not (to show how popular the group was among fighters), bring all the weapons and cars they had—it did not matter whether they worked or not (to show that they are well equipped), put on uniforms and stand in military formation (just to show that they are professional)." A leader of the group also had to read a short script clarifying their goal. This promotional video was successful, and the group received outside funding from a wealthy Syrian who lives in the Gulf. According to their communication officer, three things about the video caught the donors' attention – the fact that leader was literate, because he was able to read the speech (which signals leadership qualification), the number of people in the group (which signals manpower quantity), and that they looked professional (which signals manpower quality).

This makes the manpower of both lower and upper-leadership levels a cornerstone of any armed group. Because of that, to advance on this market and increase their share of power, brigades must be able to compete with each other for prospective fighters, which becomes a crucial problem that brigades fighting on one side face. Some brigades are appealing and are able to maintain a lot of dedicated prospective members, grow in size and are successful on the battlefield while others lose their members to competing groups, do not

perform well in combat and finally have to disband.

Contribution to the literature

In this project, my goal is to contribute to the understanding of how internal competition between different rebel factions works, what makes a rebel group successful through the lens of labor market theory, and what makes some groups more powerful inside the rebel block than others.

First, I am speaking to the literature on internal organization of armed groups. Despite institutional organization being an important reason for the failure of some groups and success of others, there is still not enough academic work on rebel groups as institutions beyond individual case studies. Recent research, however, has started paying more attention to the internal organization of rebel movements through comparative analyses (Weinstein 2007, Shapiro 2013, Berman 2009). For example, in his book, Weinstein (2007) took very important steps toward understanding the internal organization and human resources of violent non-state actors. Comparing main insurgency groups in different countries, he looks at why some rebellions are ideologically motivated while others are more oriented toward immediate profit and how it affects their recruitment. According to his argument, a group either enjoys resources and is *consumption oriented* or is ideologically motivated with limited resources, and a groups' recruitment strategy depends on this classification. This is an important initial insight, but it does not illustrate the full picture, especially with multi-faction civil wars. For example, it does not answer the question of why, in the same civil war environment with the same potential access to funding like natural resources, groups fighting on the same side still differ in terms of ideology and access to resources. Especially in the Middle East, where rebel factions fighting in oil-rich areas should logically be mostly consumption-oriented, they actually range from short-term profit-oriented gangs to pro-democracy moderate groups to groups of the most extreme ideologies in world history. In order to shed light on this question, I look at the human resources policies of different armed groups fighting on the same side in the same conflict against the same enemy.

Secondly, I contribute to the growing literature exploring what factors contribute to individuals' decisions to take up arms in civil wars. Since increasing fractionalization is a

relatively new phenomenon, few studies look at how it changed civil conflict and, in particular, individual decision-making on whether to join the war or not.

There is already a body of extant research on individual decision-making in civil wars examines the first step of individuals take in making their decision to join wars - what makes individuals take up weapons. Rebellions have three principal ways to recruit soldiers: forced recruitment (Beber and Blattman, n.d.; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008a); offering material incentives immediately or promising such benefits in the future (Olson, 1965); or appealing to the fighters' sense of grievance (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). It has also been shown that relative deprivation (Gurr 1970), in-group ties and bonds (Horowitz 2000), and out-group aversions (Peterson 2001, 2002), the desire to improve ones social status (Abrahms 2008), the relative danger of remaining a civilian (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007), social networks (Peterson 2001; Staniland 2014), and even simple boredom (Young 1997; Nussio and Ugarriza 2013) drive people to mobilize for violence.

Conversely, there also exists a significant body of the literature looking at the final step in fighters' civil war participation decision-making - what makes people quit and leave the armed group (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007, Gilligan et al 2010; Oppenheim et al. 2015).

Missing, however, is research into the intermediate level – how individuals choose which group to fight with. Although this problem did not exist in the previous generation of civil wars, this decision has quite possibly become the hardest for fighters to make today given the increasing number of rebel factions fighting for the same goal. First, this is because there are usually multiple groups to chose from; and second, this is because this decision is very important and could potentially cost him life¹⁰. Scholars of the previous generation's wars (conflicts with a monopoly on rebellion) looked at how fighters choose which side to fight with (Arjona and Kalyvas 2011, Ugarriza and Craig 2013) and why some fighters switched sides - defecting to the (formally) opposing group (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007, Kaldor 1999; Collier et al. 2003; Mueller 2000, Oppenheim et al 2005; Staniland 2012), but there is still little research that has been done on switching between groups fighting on the

¹⁰ A prospective fighter, for example, could join a group that is fighting on the most active front line, or a group whose main objective is to control checkpoints where risks are less substantial.

same side. Gates (2002) mentioned how geography and ideology affects individual decisions in multiparty rebellions, but the mechanisms that govern it are still not fully understood. And without a clear understanding of this crucial step in fighters' decision-making, it is impossible to understand what empowers some groups inside the rebel bloc at the expense of others.

Argument

Success in enticing and retaining the best possible members is an important victory for a group that effects an increase in its share of power. Although the dynamics of the conflict are important, the internal organization of the armed groups themselves plays a major role in the rebels' labor market. After the initial decision to take up arms, which is rooted in his personal grievances, a fighter looks at armed groups as institutions and makes his decision to join a group or switch to another group by comparing groups' based on their organizational capabilities. In essence, they are asking themselves which group will help them realize their goals and what group will make the best use of their skills.

For a rebel group to become the most popular group among prospective fighters, it should be able to provide its members with everything necessary (such as food, weapons and medical care), and also be able to make the best use of them.

However, not all fighters are equal from the group's point of view. For the group to be the most successful, their fighters have to be highly committed. Rebels interested in immediate monetary rewards will not risk their lives on the frontlines and will try to optimize their cost-benefit ratios. They will try to reduce the danger they expose themselves to while increasing the immediate profit they expect to get. As a result, they will be more interested in looting than in actually fighting the enemy, and will not want to participate in the dangerous battles. Such rebels not only drain groups' resources, fight poorly, and are more likely to disobey orders, but they also destroy group cohesion in general, which in turn reduces group combat readiness and turns away prospective dedicated fighters. When a group increases its funding and resources and becomes popular (meaning that the group's supply of prospective fighters exceeds its demand), it is in danger of decreasing the quality of its manpower and

“conversion capability”; so the richer and better organized the group is, the more problematic finding suitable manpower becomes. It is crucial for a rich and effective group to ensure that they do not have a high proportion of fighters who are mostly interested in money, and that the majority of their members are dedicated to their goal. Adopting strict rules rationalized by ideology helps the group ensure that its ranks are filled with only the most dedicated people.

As previously shown by works of Iannacone (2012), Iannacone and Berman (2006), and Berman (2011) radical ideology and the concordant strict set of internal rules that groups adopt allow groups not only to screen prospective members, but also assure that only the most dedicated fighters stay in the group. Individuals who are considering joining for reasons other than dedication to the goal of the war will think twice before joining such a radical group, because it requires a lot of individual sacrifices. On the other hand, it will not turn away dedicated fighters, because for them those additional sacrifices are a small price to pay for the possibility of achieving their goal by fighting in the groups that will help them realize their potential the most.

Group leadership is responsible for developing and enforcing such internal group policies that either make a group successful or destroy it. First, qualified top leadership is needed to develop a successful strategy for their group's development. This knowledge about effective armed group organization is available to leaders with previous civil war experience, while newly formed groups have to learn it the hard way. Many are not able to survive through this learning period, to say nothing of becoming competitive.

Second, dedicated mid-level officer corps are needed to execute those strategies. To be able to develop and follow effective internal policies, a group should be willing and able to select and promote the most competent people, who are dedicated not only to the goal of the war but also to the group, something that was not important in the previous generation of civil conflicts. Someone seeking promotion could also voluntarily follow an even stricter set of rules than required by the official ideology of a particular group, thereby using ideology to signal group loyalty. That makes adopting a radical ideology (and most importantly, the associated restrictions) even more crucial for organizationally successful groups in the current generation of civil wars and multi-fractional conflicts where signaling dedication to the group

is important for promotion.

If being effectively organized allows radical groups to win the competition inside the rebel block for human resources, the most important resource for the group, ideology, ensures the quality of the group's human resources. As a result, well-organized groups are more likely to be the most ideological with the strictest set of internal rules. Such groups usually not only become one of the strongest in the rebel block - because they are able to entice the largest number of the most qualified fighters and promote the most dedicated of them to leadership positions - but they also have a real chance of defeating the enemy, because the crucible of war forced them to become effectively organized and competent.

Case Study

The theoretical substance of the project is informed by extensive fieldwork I conducted over seven years on frontlines in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. I developed the theory of this project based on studying civil wars in Bosnia, Croatia, Yemen, and Lebanon, and tested it on case studies in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine. Although all cases are important and provide similar insights, for the illustration of my theory I mostly rely on the current civil war in Syria for several reasons:

In this project, I am firstly interested in the internal conflict processes in the fragmented conflict, and following Cunningham's (2013) definition, the Syrian rebellion is one of the most fragmented in world history, with multiple organizations all pursuing the same basic goal yet with independent leadership. The Syrian civil war includes the entire ideological spectrum of groups, ranging from the most moderate, such as the FSA, to the most radical, such as Jabhat al-Nusra, fighting for the same goal of overthrowing the Assad government.

Second, between 2011 and 2015, there was no major international presence on the ground in Syria: even humanitarian intervention was limited at best, so the context affords observers with a most clear illustration of the unfiltered behavior of armed groups and individuals in a civil war. While conducting research under the security protection of peacekeeping forces or any other third party would have been much safer and easier, I would

no longer have been studying behavior in active conflict, but rather conduct under the influence of a third-party presence, which is known to significantly alter individual and group-level decision-making and behavior (Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Fortna 2004).

Within the complex map of armed groups fighting in the Syrian civil war, I focus on armed groups whose main self-proclaimed goal is fighting the Assad regime. The main interest of this project is different fractions of the rebel groups, and an essential part of the conceptualization of fragmented opposition is that factions within an opposition are pursuing similar goals on behalf of the same population, so several groups are excluded from my primary analyses and are mentioned only for context.

For example, I treat ISIS as a separate rebellion instead of one of the opposition rebel fractions. ISIS is not seen by the local population as an armed group with the same goal as others. If opposition factions are fighting to overthrow Assad, ISIS was seen as fighting to establish a caliphate not only in Syria, but also beyond its borders. As a consequence, local fighters interested in fighting against Assad did not consider joining ISIS and vice versa. ISIS also was not recruiting from the same pool of individuals as major groups in the rebel block, considering fighters interesting in fighting Assad not reliable¹¹.

Additionally, Kurdish armed groups are excluded because although they regularly cooperate with anti-Assad rebel groups on the field, they are considered to be fighting for a different goal and also representing a different population. As a result, they are not drawing their members from the same pool of potential fighters as other (Arab) rebel groups fighting against Assad.

Finally, since the main focus of this project is on the decision making of people who are faced with war on their territory, I excluded foreign fighters from much of the analyses. Although they too voluntarily self-selected into the war and become members of particular groups, their process was different from the local fighter's decision-making process. First, despite some of them fighting with the rebel groups whose main goal is to defeat Assad,

¹¹ According to one of the ISIS fighters "They are suspicious of fighters switching from other rebel brigades, as the fact they once fought for other groups calls into question their determination to build a truly "Islamic" state". <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/10/the-jihadi-who-came-in-from-the-cold-islamic-state/>

interviews with foreign fighters showed that their personal goals for participating in the war in Syria are different from those of their Syrian brothers-in-arms; and second, not all armed groups recruit foreign fighters, and even if they do, the screening process for them is different. As a result, except for foreign leadership that cannot be ignored in the analyses of groups' internal policies, ground level foreign fighters are largely outside of the scope of this research.

Gathering Evidence

The majority of studies looking at armed groups inadvertently select dependent variables: they analyze groups that were relatively big, enjoyed at least some success on the battlefield, and were operational for a significant amount of time. This is understandable because rebel groups get media attention only after they acquire some share of power and become major players on the battlefield, so logistically it is very hard to study groups that were less successful and as a result were not as important. This is especially true for retrospective studies, because after major civil wars people tend to forget less important details and groups that did not accomplish anything significant or existed only briefly. To avoid falling into this trap, similar to Lewis (2016) I have tracked groups and fighters from the very beginning of the conflict and followed it as it unfolded. This allowed me to look at not only groups that were successful, had a lot of members, and were powerful, but also at groups that operated for only a short time and did not accumulate any substantial power. Such a continuous approach, as opposed to a snapshot study, allows me to track group development, looking at how they were organized from the beginning to the end (if the group disbanded and does not exist anymore) to see why that happened; or in the case of still existing groups, up until the major foreign intervention in 2015. This approach allows me to detect the precise moment when some groups gained momentum and started rapidly growing more powerful while others went bankrupt - the tipping point when almost perfect market competition started moving towards oligopoly - and why this happened. I developed relationships with some groups, which made it possible to interview them over time to observe changes in their internal dynamics.

Throughout over five years of conflict, the continuous information I received from groups and the trust that developed between us provided me with an opportunity to conduct surveys on the individual level at different times with different population subgroups, which enabled me to see when and why people made particular decisions. Individual fighter data drawn from surveys and interviews with fighters and civilians on the frontlines of the conflict allowed me to get information as close as possible to the time of the decision-making.

Most evidence in the insurgency violence literature is *post hoc*, relying on retrospective interviews. Although retrospective studies conducted over an extended period of time could possibly allow erstwhile civil war participants to consider their motivations more thoroughly, especially since during the war they would have been in an environment where people are afraid to talk to researchers (Kalyvas 2006), research on the psychology of memory suggests that retrospective studies may also be prone to “moral rationalizations” where conflict outcomes alter one’s perceptions of prior motives and beliefs (Tsang 2002). Furthermore, studies have shown that information and experiences that occur after an event can influence how people recall the event and color emotional memories (Bartlett, 1932; Loftus 1992; Levine 1997; Safer et al. 2002). And phenomena such as collective memory, i.e., “the representation of the past embodied in both historical evidence and commemorative symbolism” (Schwartz 2000, p.8) could also bias people’s recollections of critical decisions (Harris et al. 2008). In addition, retrospective studies have another negative aspect for individual-level research. When these studies are conducted in the aftermath of an especially protracted, brutal civil war, there is an obvious selection bias for survivors, and it is not clear how people who survive differ from those who do not. For example, fighters who chose to fight in the most active combat zones are killed in disproportionate numbers, and are therefore minimally represented in such studies. Conducting surveys during different time periods over five years of conflict on frontlines of varying intensity allowed me to reach as many respondents as possible who will no longer be available to talk to researchers after the conflict is over. It is very likely that at least some fighters and civilians who were surveyed and interviewed in the first wave of my study three years ago are no longer alive.

I attempt to capture a broader range of subgroups of active and former rebel fighters, fighters from different groups, civilians in combat zones, and refugees in refugee camps.

Such a multi-group approach allows me to compare marginal differences between those people at a time when they were still determining their respective roles in the conflict. As part of the broader “Voices of Syria” project (with Sam Whitt and Loubna Mrie) in 2013, when the conflict was just starting, some people began leaving the conflict zone as refugees and the majority of fighters were still under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), approximately 300 refugees, civilians, and fighters were surveyed on how they self-selected into those roles. In 2014, when the FSA started falling apart and Islamist groups began appearing and gaining power by winning over fighters from FSA, about 150 fighters were surveyed on why they switched groups and how were they chose which groups to switch to; then, in 2015, when fighters started quitting and leaving the conflict zone en masse, 150 ex-fighters were tracked and asked about how they made the decision to leave and what their future plans were.

As with any survey and interview, there is a possibility that respondents were not honest with their answers. I do not think, however, that this problem was any more substantial in this project than in any other study in conflict zones. First, participants knew that the enumerators had permission to conduct the survey from the group that was in control of the territory at that moment. Second, the majority of the survey questions were behavioral in nature, touching on issues that people could openly discuss in public, and there were almost no questions that could be considered intelligence gathering. If there were any questions that initially made participants uncomfortable, they were immediately removed to ensure the safety of the enumerators.

Because I am interested in difficult-to-reach sub-populations in dangerous environments with unknown population parameters, cluster-sampling methods were utilized to better target sub-populations of interest. All subgroups are similar in terms of demographics. In recruiting civilians, random route and door-to-door samplings were avoided due to inherent uncertainties and the dangers of moving from street to street. Instead, areas of the city where civilians congregate in public were identified based on local ethnographic knowledge. These clusters became the initial sampling points. Interviews were conducted with no more than five respondents per cluster and no more than two clusters for a given street or neighborhood. To gather information on refugees’ motivations to flee the civil war,

refugees from a UNHCR-run camp in Kilis, Turkey, were surveyed. This camp is just across the border with Syria, and it was a primary destination for refugees fleeing the Aleppo and Idlib regions. For interviews with rebel fighters, two predominant subgroups were surveyed: rebels fighting for the FSA and Islamist groups¹², including the Islamic Front/Ahrar al-Sham and the al-Nusra Front. For more information on the survey methodology, see appendix.

For the information on groups' human resources policies, I employed snowballing methodologies. First, based on the ethnographic information, I built a list of groups I was interested in. Then, through a trusted network of people in Syria, particularly former fighters, contacts were made with people from those brigades. The majority of interviews with groups' leaders and officer-level fighters were conducted in hospitals and refugee camps in Turkey. Although I did not cover the entire country and two areas (Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo) are over-represented in the sample, this is not crucial for the purposes of researching the labor market because fighters are more likely to move in between groups that are in the same geographic area. Therefore, comparing different brigades in one town serves the purpose of this study better than comparing brigades in different remote parts of the country.

From the security and logistics point of view, doing fieldwork for this project in an active war zone in Syria was a complex task. Not only was it a very dangerous enterprise, but also many permissions to work on the ground were necessary, starting from the chain of command of the moderate FSA, which in some cases could be granted over coffee, to permission from the Islamic Court to interview ISIS fighters via Skype after a long explanation of why a researcher wanted to talk to fighters and proving that there was no intelligence gathering involved—only “boring” question about fighter's lives. Surprisingly, the majority of respondents, especially members of Islamist groups, were not concerned about anonymity. Foreign fighters already know that they are on the terrorist watch list and will never be able to go back to their home country, and Syrian members of Islamist groups were not sure they would survive to see the end of the war.

¹² I classified groups into “moderate” and “Islamist” categories based on the assessment of local civilians and also in consultation with official U.S. definitions, particularly terrorist group list.

The dissertation plan

Following the introduction I precede with the general theory about how some groups are increasing their relative power inside the rebel block, through the lens of the job market for rebel fighters.

Then I turn to the case of the Syrian civil war. I describe the picture of groups organization backwards, starting with the results - human resource successes and failures of different groups and then going into reasons underlying such differences in group performance.

To understand how the labor market for rebel fighters works, I conduct analyses on two levels: 1) on the level of the individual fighter, based on surveys and interviews with low-level ground troops, and 2) on an organizational level, relying on the data set of the group's policies, constructed based on interviews with group leaders and officers.

In the first part of the project, I explore the issue through the eyes of fighters. I analyze their decision-making to understand why they join, how they chose a particular group to join, whether they switch groups and why, and why they cease fighting and leave (Chapter I).

In the second part, I discuss the personnel management policies of the different groups ranging from moderate to radical groups: brigades' recruitment strategies, salary policies, non-monetary benefits, and retention difficulties to understand how they compete for fighters. To have a better understanding of how the labor market works I look at how groups start and enlist prospective fighters (recruitment), their personnel management policies (retention) and when fighters leave and groups disband (turnover). In Chapter II, I show why moderate groups were not successful in attracting and retaining group members, while at the same time radical groups became very popular among prospective fighters.

Groups are not "blessed" with good or bad policies at the beginning of the conflict: instead, its leadership makes conscious decisions about their ideological orientations, financial planning, and human resource policies throughout the duration of the conflict. The quality of those decisions, among other things, depend on the qualification and experience of an armed group's leadership. In Chapter IV I look at the leadership labor market. Here, I try

to show why leaders make the strategic policy decisions they do, how leadership is chosen in different groups, and what long-term consequences it has on group development and success. I conclude with policy implications not only for the current conflict in Syria, but also with lessons for other ongoing conflicts in urgent need of termination.

Chapter 1 Theory

For the rebel movement to become less fragmented, by definition, the number of groups involved in the war on one side has to decrease. Naturally, every armed group in a fractionalized rebellion wishes for that to happen and aspires to become the only or at least one of the leading groups in the rebel block, because when there are multiple groups claiming to represent the same constituency, interaction is likely to take on a zero-sum character (D. Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009). How can groups achieve leadership of their rebellion? There are several ways a group could go about it.

First, the group could try to physically attack other rebel groups one by one in order to destroy them (Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour 2012). Even if this strategy is successful – the defeated group ceases to exist – such a scenario could be a very costly move for the attacker. First, it will consume group resources such as weapons and ammunition, and second, it will increase casualties among fighters. In addition to qualified members of other rebel groups and its own, its best fighters could possibly die during the operation. That would result in the reduction of the size and quality of the attacking group and even the overall size and quality of the rebellion. Third, such behavior will lead to additional civilian casualties, and will not be appreciated by the local population and potential supporters. As a result, it would tremendously decrease the group's reputation. Finally it will draw resources and attention away from fighting the enemy, giving it a potential window of opportunity to defeat the whole rebellion.

Generally speaking, such aggressive actions may not only decrease the power of the

group, even if it wins (by decreasing its quality, reputation and size), but also significantly decrease the overall strength of the rebel movement. As a result, this will put the group in an even more dangerous position, because when the rebellion is crushed, being the main group fighting against the government is dangerous, particularly for group leadership. In fact, in this case it is much safer to be just one of many rebel groups without any significant power.

Second, a non-violent and more covert strategy could be used. A group aspiring to be a leading group in the rebel camp could employ market economics insights and increase its own power at the expense of other groups by taking their main resource – manpower. Since by definition different factions fighting on the same side are fighting for the same goal, they draw their members from the same pool of individuals who are interested in fighting for this particular goal (both on the level of ground troops and on the level of group leadership). Because manpower is a finite resource, groups are competing amongst themselves for the highest number of the most qualified members. Over time, this competition becomes even more acute because unavoidable casualties shrink the pool of people potentially interested in combat participation, while the number of positions that need filling does not change or even increases with the opening of new fronts¹³.

To increase its power, a group could recruit members from other groups - increasing its own human resources at the expense of others, given the finite supply of manpower. A group could win this market competition by making itself the most attractive to potential first-time recruits and those switching from other groups. This is a more preferable option to groups trying to take the leading position in the rebel camp, because firstly, the group does not have to endanger its own members. Its members will not undergo any additional combat dangers while the group struggles for a dominant position because there will be no additional open fronts. Secondly, it does not waste time and resources fighting anyone other than the actual enemy. Taking into account a group's limited resources and that every bullet counts, not opening another front will allow them to use funds elsewhere. Finally, the group does not give the enemy a window of opportunity by preoccupying the rebel block with infighting.

¹³ In addition, in many cases the most dedicated fighters volunteer for the most dangerous missions and as a result are killed disproportionately faster. That leads to an even greater competition between armed groups for quality recruits.

If successful, this strategy could starve other groups of members and potentially cause them to disband, all while significantly increasing in the overall power of the recruiting group. In low-technology civil wars, at least, power is a function of human resources, and the group that wins the internal competition would have a significant advantage; additionally, the very process of competing will force the group to improve its internal processes and become stronger overall. Consequently, this is a preferable scenario in a fractionalized conflict for a group that aspires to be a dominant force and eventually establish a monopoly on the rebellion or even win the war.

Winning over talent happens on two levels – with ground fighters and then with group leadership. Both are equally important, highly interconnected, and cannot be separated. Leaders cannot execute even their most brilliant strategies without low-level fighters; and without professional leadership, armed groups cannot function as organizations and be successful in combat. Thus, I will be looking at the labor market for low-level ground troops to understand how groups can increase their numbers, and I will then turn to look at the executive leadership job market, which has its own rules for evaluating and attracting talent.

Where Do Fighters Come From?

To understand how groups can attract prospective ground fighters into their ranks, it is first crucial to know what the pool of prospective members looks like, and how individuals self-select into it in the first place. Without this knowledge, a group's leadership would not be able to develop the best and most cost-effective policies attracting those fighters and thus win the competition with other groups for this crucial resource.

When violence breaks out and people are trying to decide what they are going to do, they have two main options - look for a refuge camp outside of the war zone, or stay on the frontlines despite the dangers involved.

Although previous research has examined the targeting of civilians during civil wars (Valentino, Huth and Balch- Lindsay 2004, Kalyvas 2002; Lyall et. al. 2013) and government and insurgent efforts at winning over civilian hearts and minds (Beath, Christia and

Enikolopov 2016), little is known about who these civilians are and their reasons for staying in a combat zone in the first place. Adhikari (2013), using the case of Nepal, has made important steps on a very small scale toward trying to understand why some people stay while others leave, and his results reinforce evidence from prior large-N studies (Schmeidl 1997; Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004, 2006, 2007). Adhikari's (2013) empirical analysis confirms how exposure to violence and the threat of further violence motivates civilian flight. He also finds that economic means and opportunity costs are important predictors of which civilians leave and which stay behind.

Next, I rely heavily on established literature on conflict participation. Previous research has emphasized how cost-benefit calculations (Olson 1965), relative deprivation (Gurr 1970), in-group ties and bonds (Horowitz 2000; Wood 2003), and out-group aversions (Peterson 2002) drive people to mobilize for violence. Much of the survey literature examines various motives rooted in grievance and relative deprivation. Humphreys and Weinstein (2008), studying fractions in Sierra Leone's civil war, show that grievance and frustration lead to greater susceptibility to engage in violence and greater vulnerability to political manipulation. Examining non-traditional fighters, including Hezbollah fighters and suicide bombers, Krueger and Maleckova (2003) also found that their decision to mobilize was in response to long-standing grievances and frustrations. Arjona and Kalyvas (2008), also using survey data, find that political grievances and economic deprivation were the driving force of mobilization for violence in Colombia. However, recent survey research from Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Philippines by Berman et. al (2011) finds a negative correlation between unemployment and political violence. Also, in Pakistan, Blair et al. (2012) show that poor people like militant groups less than the middle class, casting some doubt about relative deprivation on the individual level. Moving beyond grievances, Guichaoua (2007) finds that uncertainty about the future, desire for protection, and social proximity to rebel groups also explain success in rebel recruitment. My research is greatly influenced by these studies, especially Humphreys and Weinstein (2008).

I also draw from both quantitative macro-historical and qualitative anthropological research which emphasizes the blurring of lines between civilians and combatants, and what it means to mobilize and participate in civil war. Wood (2003) has posited a "pleasure in

agency” model, which involves complex in-group ties between rebels and civilians in conflict in El Salvador. Parkinson (2013) has also signaled important roles that women affiliated with fighters played during the civil war in Lebanon, challenging conventional notions of what it means to be a combatant during wartime, and how combatants rely on active civilian affiliates to make what they do on the frontlines possible. Looking at Greek Civil War, Kalyvas (2006) illustrates how the challenges of discerning combatants from non-combatants and friend from foe heighten fears and uncertainty that precipitate brutal mass violence. My research will attempt to address ambiguities between civilians and combatants by using comparative sub-samples of rebel groups, civilians, and refugees in multiple active conflict areas.

I identify a range of hypotheses that have been posited in the aforementioned literature and grouped these hypotheses into five broad categories: Selective Incentives, Social Sanctioning, Social Identity, Risk Tolerance, and Grievance.

Selective Incentive Hypotheses: We begin with the selective incentive hypotheses for fighting. I consider the possibility that fighters are motivated to join by either selective economic incentives or the enhanced safety and security offered by rebel groups and limited opportunity costs associated with joining them (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Adhikari 2013). This presumes that by fighting, people are able to extract economic resources and security benefits that they would not receive if they did not fight. It also assumes fighters have limited viable alternatives to fighting, so selective benefits have a great deal of appeal to them. Hence, rebel groups use selective incentives to overcome free-rider problems in combatant recruitment. I test the following hypotheses:

H1.1: (*Selective initiatives*) People are more likely to join if they receive selective incentives in the form of economic benefits from fighting with a rebel group.

Social Sanctioning Hypotheses: Next I examine whether individuals are compelled to join combatant groups, stay in the conflict, or leave conflict based on social pressures and attachments to their communities (Wood 2003; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). I hypothesize that individuals who are attached to their communities and who are more actively engaged in community social life would face greater pressure either to join combatant groups

to protect their communities, or at least to stay behind to help out than those who are more socially distant and less engaged. By contrast, people who feel more socially distant from others and are less engaged in their immediate surroundings would be less susceptible to sanctioning pressures. I consider the following hypotheses:

H1.2: (*Ties to the Community*). People who feel closer to their communities are more likely to remain in place and join rebel groups than people who are more socially distant, who are more likely to flee.

H1.3: (*Social Engagement*) People who are more socially engaged are more likely to join rebel groups and remain in a conflict zone than people who are less socially engaged, who are more likely to flee.

H1.4: (*Security*) People are more likely to join a rebel group if they feel safer/more protected inside a rebel group than outside it.

H1.5: (*Opportunity Costs*): People with other viable opportunities will be less willing to join rebel groups and have greater means and incentives to flee abroad.

Social Identity Hypotheses: Next, I examine whether individuals who stay in Syria and join rebel groups are in search of a meaningful social identity (Wickham-Crowley 1992; Gould 1995; Horowitz 2000, 2001). I hypothesize that if social identity motivates civilians and combatants to stay inside Syria, they should feel closer to rebel fighters than refugees. I also consider the hypothesis that individuals who fight take “pleasure in agency” and that individuals who stay in combat zones are doing so voluntarily in order to assist those who fight (Wood 2003).

H1.6 (*Group Bonding*) People who feel close to one another and to rebel groups are more likely to remain in a conflict zone and join rebel groups. People with little group attachments are likely to flee.

H1.7 (*Pleasure in Agency*) People are more likely to remain in a conflict zone and join rebel groups if they feel more empowered from participating in a cause.

Risk Tolerance: Next, I consider whether the decision to stay in a combat zone

or flee abroad is a basic function of risk tolerance. Theoretically, risk taking could be a function of other driving motivations, such as pleasure in agency, group bonding, or grievances. People with stronger group ties, deeper political grievances, and so on are willing to assume greater risks to achieve their goals. There may also be psychologically predisposed to take risks: whereas more risk-averse people are naturally compelled to seek safety, risk-tolerant people will remain close to the action. Heightened risk tolerance could also be a psychological product of “pleasure in agency” (Wood 2003). I ask whether people who join rebel groups and stay inside combat zones are big risk-takers. They are either attracted to the dangers of combat or are simply willing to incur risks to obtain specific goals that others are not willing to undertake. I examine the following hypotheses about risk.

H1.8 (*Risk Tolerance*) People who join rebel groups have higher risk tolerance than non-combatants. People who flee conflict have the lowest risk tolerance.

H1.9 (*Risk and Conflict*) Risk averse people are more likely to flee conflict for safer areas.

Grievance Hypotheses: Next, I examine whether people who mobilize for violence are driven by personal or collective grievances against their adversaries (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Arjona and Kalyvas 2008). Relative deprivation theory informs us that people are more likely to mobilize for violence when they are marginalized by political decision-making, are economically disempowered, and have an inferior social status within their societies (Gurr 1970; Tilly and Tarrow 2006). Common perceptions of the Syrian conflict tell us that members of the Sunni majority are revolting against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, who is also from the Alawite religious minority, but this may be a gross oversimplification (see Seale 1986 and Heydemann 1999 for historical background and Pierret 2013; Hashemi and Postel 2013 for alternate perspectives on the current conflict). However, relative deprivation at the group-level does not explain why some members of the group rebel while others do not. It is presently unclear the extent to which the revolt against the Assad regime is fueled by collective grievances against the Alawites, political grievances against Assad’s regime, and/or grievances resulting from personal experiences of brutality at the hands of the regime. I attempt to unpack grievances to understand why some Sunni

Muslims stay and fight the Assad regime while others do not.

I begin with personal grievances brought on by victimization at the hands of the regime. If personal grievances are driving mobilization, then I should expect victims of violence to be more likely to join rebel groups to fight against the regime. Another possibility is that mobilization depends on the type of victimization. People who are personally injured would be unable to fight if the injury is severe. People whose houses are destroyed may have to deal with relocating their families. I evaluate the following hypotheses on grievance from personal victimization.

H1.10 (*Personal Grievance*) Victimization by violence increases the likelihood of joining rebel groups and/or fleeing violence. Non-victims are most likely to remain in place, but not join rebel groups.

Next, I turn to sources of collective grievances. I begin by examining sectarian group-level grievances between Sunni Muslims and Alawites. I note that the sample is almost entirely Sunni Muslim and sectarian divisions are often presumed in the conflict between rebel forces and Bashar al-Assad's regime, because Assad is a member of the Alawite minority (though the aforementioned case literature shows how this is an oversimplification of complex divisions in Syrian society). If deep-seated sectarian grievances are fueling the conflict, then Assad merely represents a proxy for the relative deprivation Sunnis experience compared to the Alawites. If the Syrian conflict can be accurately characterized as sectarian, then I would anticipate that Sunni Muslims who are more parochial would be driven to fight while those with less attachment to Sunni Islam or less aversion to Alawites would flee.

H1.11 (*In-group Ties*) People with stronger attachments to their in-group are more likely to stay and fight. People with more limited in-group ties are more likely to flee.

H1.12 (*Out-group Aversion*) People with stronger aversions to their sectarian out-group are more likely to stay and fight. People with lesser out-group aversions are more likely to flee.

Collectively, these hypotheses are drawn from a wide range of theoretical and empirical research on conflict. In testing each individual hypothesis, I am not trying to pick a

winner, but instead understand how competing perspectives in the literature explain the nuances of decision-making during conflict using novel data from an important, albeit violent, case-study at a critical moment while the conflict is still ongoing, and people are still actively deciding what to do.

Choosing a group

The most important questions an armed group must concern itself with is how prospective fighters choose a particular group to join. While the decision to take up arms is made emotionally based on a person's individual grievances, the decision to join a particular group is made rationally while comparing different groups based on their internal organizational qualities. Although individual will is crucial, it alone is not enough; a person should have the ability to realize their goal and carry out their mission. Each individual fighter needs funding and a team of people with similar goals that he can rely on. This is something that an institution, in this case an armed group, helps him with. Because no fighter could successfully fight on his own and needs an organization to facilitate it, potential fighters look at armed groups as a tool that would enable them to better act on their grievance (be more successful in combat) and evaluate them accordingly.

Organizational Qualities

H2.1: Fighters prefer groups that are more effectively organized (less internal corruption).

H2.2: In choosing a group to join, fighters prefer groups with the most qualified leadership.

H2.3: Fighters prefer groups that provide long term medical care for their members.

Alternatively, fighters “blinded” by their grievance join a particular group because of convenience, be it ideological or geographical (Gates 2002).

Convenience

H2.4: Fighters choose groups to fight with based on their social networks (friend and family).

H2.5: Fighters choose armed groups that are located in the geographic areas that they feel more connected to.

H2.8: Fighters join groups that are the most ideologically allied with their own opinions.

In addition, fighters may join a particular group based on the individual material or ideological benefits it offers (Weinstein 2006).

Individual Benefits

H2.6: Fighters choose groups to fight with based on the individual material benefits they offer to their members.

H2.7: In choosing a group to join, a fighter looks at where he is the most likely to raise in rank and increase his personal power.

Ideology

H2.9: Fighters join radical groups because of the religious and ideological benefits such groups promise to their members

As shown by the civilian human resources literature, prospective job applicants also consider non-material benefits, such as the image of an organization and its reputation in the industry, to be an important factor in evaluating employers. Recent evidence from economics literature has shown that a strong employer brand positively affects the pride that individuals expect from organizational membership (Cable and Turban, 2003), applicant pool quantity and quality (Collins and Han, 2004), and firm performance advantages over the broader market (Fulmer et al., 2003). Thus, I am testing a similar logic applied to the rebel groups' labor market.

Prestige

H2.11: The more prestigious the group the more likely it will be able to attract fighters.

H2.12: The stronger the group the more likely it will be able to attract fighters.

The group that was able to become a successful organization is winning the competition for fighters who want to join and makes the fighters they enlist more effective. Success in this context means that they have more potential members who want to join than the number they are willing to take (supply exceeds demand). But quantity does not mean quality, and getting more potential recruits still does not automatically mean that they are getting the best ones.

The good organization and benefits that armed groups offer to their members entices not only dedicated fighters. As pointed out by Wienstein (2006), some armed group members are not interested in anything beyond immediate monetary benefits, and as a result their war participation decisions are different. They enter the civil war labor market as for-profit fighters, and are fighting solely for the immediate monetary reward.

Due to the nature of their interest in the conflict, they appeared only if and when money became part of the war (through foreign financing, looting, or the extraction of natural resources). Prior to that, the conflict was simply not of interest to such individuals because it did not generate any immediate material benefit. But with the civil war progressing, people became disillusioned with the war's goals and outside income opportunities disappeared, which turned more and more people towards prioritizing immediate monetary benefit.

These mercenaries ranged from people who were never interested in the non-material goal of the war in the first place to fighters who became disappointed with the goal during the course of the conflict. In both cases, as for-profit fighters, they were not interested in the overall goals of the conflict. They simply took advantage of the lawless situation in the country.

On the other hand, while some fighters indeed initially joined for immediate material benefit, through membership in the group and being in combat some of them began

accumulating grievances and sharing the goals of the fight. Although such fighters joined for material reasons such as salary or looting opportunities, during the conflict they witnessed much destruction, torture, and death wrought by the enemy (including the deaths of fellow fighters or family members who stayed in the conflict zone). Based on these grievances that accumulated during the fighting itself, they sometimes decide that they need to avenge those deaths.

Choosing fighters

Being the most popular group that fighters strive to switch to is a double-edged sword. On one hand it is a benefit, because now the winner can increase its ranks and have the pick of the best fighters among an increasing number of applicants, but on the other hand it is dangerous because, as a consequence, the leading group now has to ensure that such an influx of applicants does not decrease the overall quality of its labor force. Material incentives, such as wages or other goods, may attract a disproportionately large number of undesirable types of volunteers and encourage them to lie about their motivations and skills (Weinstein 2005, 605). Also, membership in an armed organization presents unemployed young men and others on the lower rungs of society with unique opportunities for empowerment and advancement (Hoffman 2011). As a result, the group now needs to carefully develop its selection policies - otherwise its overall quality and eventually its relative power could decrease. As Hegghammer (2013) has noted, sorting out recruits requires armed organizations to consider strategies and tactics that recruiters employ in order to manage influxes of volunteers.

When information about a group's organizational qualities and how it treats members spreads, and an armed group is perceived to be the best organized in the rebel block, it experiences an increase in the number of people who want to join or switch from other groups. However, not only the best, most dedicated fighters want to do so, but also ones more interested in material rewards and the private benefits the group offers its fighters. For an armed group in this position, it is crucial to be able to filter out those people and not let them

in, since such potential members engender several problems:

First, individuals who are motivated by something other than the goal of the fight are not going to take maximum risks in combat and as a result would be less effective. Those people would not want to put their life in danger in order to complete a dangerous combat mission making them less reliable and effective.

Second, those members could be more expensive for the group to have. They would not only cost more in direct expenses by demanding their benefits at every opportunity, but also require more supervision, further increasing costs. Therefore, accepting this category into the group would mean wasting resources on people who will not produce the best returns on investment.

Third, because fighters will change groups or even sides as soon as someone else offers more money, they are the least trustworthy. They will not only readily move between brigades, but they will also leave the war zone altogether as soon as they found a way to make a better profit outside of the civil war market, or if risks increased (for example, as a result of a sudden increase in enemy military capabilities).

Finally, such people could also destroy cohesion in the group, defined as "the bonding together of soldiers in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, the unit, and mission accomplishment, despite combat or mission stress" by the U.S. military (van Epps (2008-12-31), "Relooking Unit Cohesion: A sense making approach", *Military Review*). In particular, military studies on the performance of group units in combat and in training show that cohesive units: (1) fight better (Stewart, 1991; Oliver, 1988); (2) suffer fewer battle casualties (Krepinevich, 1988); (3) suffer fewer non-battle casualties (Stewart 1991); (4) train to higher standards (Canby, Gudmundsson, and Shay, 2000); (5) disintegrate less under stress (Wong 1985), (6) require less administrative support (Stewart, 1988); and (7) provide a higher quality of life (Canby, Gudmundsson, and Shay, 2000). Based on military studies, it has been shown that while individuals join for various reasons, they are fighting primarily for their friends when lives are at risk. The primary group is the major factor in explaining behavior in combat (Henderson, 1985), and soldiers advance and

fight well only when organized as cohesive units.

Fighters in this “for profit” category are the least preferable to the not-for-profit brigades, which fight for non-material goals of the war. Since having those undedicated members will decrease the overall readiness of an armed group, and because it is one of the things that prospective fighters evaluate before joining or switching, in the end it will decrease the groups’ organizational competitiveness and eventually harm recruitment and retention.

How can an armed group that is considered the most desirable use their financial resources wisely to solve this problem and screen such people out? There are several ways by which armed groups can try to achieve this. First, they could rely on recommendations in the admission process. These could be acquired from people who know the applicant well and who are trusted by the group (Forney 2015). In a recommendation, groups are interested in a prospective fighter’s behavior at the very beginning of the conflict or even before the violence started. This information is crucial in understanding the level of an individual’s motivation. It is telling if a person was active in the civil war before any material resources became available, and when it was particularly dangerous to participate in the rebellion. Another way armed groups can see if a fighter is devoted to the goal is to send him, from time to time, to the most active frontline to fight. Here the group can monitor his behavior—whether he is willing to risk his life and die on the battlefield.

Although the “entrance exam” is a good way to understand an individual's history, it can only predict future behavior to a small degree, there are several major problems with testing fighters on the battlefield. There may be no enemy activity the day a fighter is sent to the front line to be monitored. Even if active combat is underway, someone has to take the less risky combat support roles, so he will have less chance to prove how willing he is to risk his life for the group without acting recklessly. In addition, even if all prospective candidates are fighting, it is hard for a leader to constantly monitor everyone’s behavior. Therefore, on the occasion the battlefield test is performed, one could perform well but “free-ride” the rest of the time. Finally, it is simply unclear what the standard is for being willing to risk one’s life “enough.”

Armed groups that want to have only the most dedicated fighters must find other, more reliable ways to filter applicants - ways that would allow leadership to constantly and uninterruptedly monitor members (that is, going beyond checking their previous history) and that are more efficient than endangering their own fighters without a serious reason. For this armed groups could rely on “additional unproductive costs” they could impose on fighters for membership in the group. Similar to the economic “club model,” and the theory of religious groups and sects developed by Iannaccone (1994) which was later applied by Berman (2009) to religious sects, it has been shown that to ensure that armed groups get only the most trustworthy, dedicated, and loyal prospective fighters, leaders of the most organized, successful, and well-funded groups have an incentive to not only screen prospective fighters, but also add a cost to membership. They are presenting their members with a condition – if one wants to be a member and be able to fight with the group he has to follow a strict set of rules that do not have a direct effect on fighting. Only the most dedicated fighters who value membership in the group the most will agree to this condition and will follow such a set of rules, while others who are not sure about the membership in the first place would be further discouraged. There are several requirements this set of rules and internal norms (unproductive costs) should satisfy to make them effective:

First, they should be costly for an individual. The main point of these additional requirements is that complying with them should be costly for members, and they need to make a significant effort to follow them. If the costs are not high enough, they are not a good screening mechanism because they would be too easy to fake for someone who is not dedicated.

Second, following those rules should not be time- and energy- consuming, since they are by definition unproductive and should not take much time away from the main activities such as fighting. Otherwise, such rules would be a liability for the group more than for the members.

Finally, such costs should be very visible, because their main role is to indicate when someone is slacking. The more visible those signals are, the more noticeable their absence is. See Appendix I for a formal model explaining in more detail how unproductive costs work.

In the civilian world, a much milder version of this mechanism is called corporate or organizational culture. According to any basic human resources textbook, the objective of HR is to ensure that organizational systems, processes, and activities are integrated and synergized through a strong organizational culture. Organizational culture is made up of values, attitudes, norms, myths, and practices signifying “how things are done.” Organizational symbols, songs, artifacts, etc. are used to foster a culture of uniqueness, which makes employees feel proud of their jobs and the organization.

Because such unproductive costs and strict rules usually look irrational and strange at best, groups need to at least try to explain the rationale behind them to their members and outsiders. Ideology, which by definition is a certain ethical set of ideals, principles, doctrines, myths, or symbols of a social movement, institution, class, or large group that explains how society should work, often comes in handy for that purpose. But ideology for this purpose should satisfy several conditions. First it should be related to a known philosophy so that it is considered credible. Second, it should be ambiguous enough so that varying interpretations of such ideologies could potentially provide different rulings on several issues, and as a result almost anything can be explained and rationalized with the help of the right “experts.” Third, ideas proposed by this ideology should extend an individual's “time horizon” to further encourage him to take risks in combat. It could be done either directly through statements like “good life will be waiting for you after death,” or indirectly thorough appealing to their children - “you are building a successful future for your children.” Finally, it should be a relatively new or at least an unpopular deviation from a known philosophy so that there are no people who enjoy or at least are used to restrictions that are based on this ideology. As a result, any radical deviation from mainstream religions like Islam, Catholicism, or Orthodox Christianity, or state ideology such as communism, democracy, or monarchy could be successfully employed for that purpose.

H3 (*Ideology*) Armed groups with more radical ideology have more dedicated members.

Although such a signaling method has proven to be somewhat reliable, it is not without problems. The main one is quite unexpected. When a group becomes popular, everyone including civilians and even children want to emulate members of it, and the most

visible way to do so is to adopt the same set of visible signals that are mandatory for members of the group. Consequently, over time such internal restrictions and signals become popular and enter mass culture. As a result, those signals become less costly¹⁴. If many people are doing something, it is less costly for others to do it compared to when a single person was the only one doing it. To remedy this problem, groups have to either find a signal that is costly for a person regardless of how others behave or constantly invent other costly signals vaguely related to the group's proposed ideology. If they take the latter route, as time progresses such groups appear to be becoming more and more ideologically radical from the outside.

By harassing ideology as a tool in to win the competition for manpower, well-organized groups in the rebel block are better able to ensure at all times that they have better quality people in their ranks. In the long run, such groups may not only win the competition for the best fighters, but also have a greater chance of winning the war. For those groups, ideology is just an instrument of internal control, and it is very weakly, if at all, correlated with the goal of the war.

Leadership

As shown before, the most important issue that allows a group to win the organizational competition for ground-level fighters between different factions, ensure effective selection criteria, and consequently increase its relative power in the rebel block is the groups' internal human resources policies. Such policies are developed and implemented by the groups' leadership, making it another human resources layer crucially important for armed groups.

As in any civilian industry, the quality of the internal policies of an organization depends on the quality and experience of its CEOs (Hambrick and Mason 1984). Although the usual picture of a CEO is that of a person in an expensive suit on Wall Street, his job in fact is not that different from that of a person in a military uniform who is a leader of an armed group. It is not even clear if he must wear a uniform at all because his main job is

¹⁴ A similar situation happened with prison or gang tattoos in the United States that started as a signal of belonging to a gang, but subsequently entered a mass culture. Because they are popular among non-gang members, they do not serve a signaling purpose for gangs anymore.

actually very bureaucratic in nature — organizing the group's day-to-day activities — running its financial operations, budgets, human resources policies, public relations, infrastructure projects, and logistics. The job leaders are the most known for, overseeing military operations, is just one of their many responsibilities.

Without qualified leadership, armed groups can not monopolize the rebel movement or at least become a leading group in the rebel block. First off, they have to be able to develop effective internal policies that would make their armed group appealing to prospective members; and they should also be in the position to fund those policies. To participate in such institutional competition, let alone to win it, the group should have enough material resources and be able to spend them wisely. Many group characteristics that are considered attractive by prospective members, such as salaries and medical care, are not only expensive, but are also long-term in nature: long-term investment is required to build a hospital, for example, or run a social security system. In effect, one of the main jobs of the leadership becomes balancing the budget, maximizing income, and optimizing spending.

In contrast to regular state armies, rebel armed groups do not have a budget assigned to them every year: instead, it is the leadership's responsibility to find money for the group, making the group's financial resources a function of its leadership quality. Sources of funding are neither endowments that groups “are blessed with,” nor are they even permanent, but quite the opposite: different groups strategically choose and secure different funding sources at different periods of time. Thus, there are several money-related issues that leadership must take care of to keep their organization functioning, fund human resources policies, and have a chance of winning the competition. The most important of these is to be able to choose and secure a source of money.

There are different ways a group could obtain financial resources. As shown by previous research, revenue for armed groups can be obtained by securing financial support from diaspora groups (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Sambanis, 2004), building relationships with foreign patron states (Byman et al., 2001), exploiting natural resource wealth (Ross, 2003, 2004b; Humphreys, 2005), or extracting rents from civilians, either forcibly or in exchange for the provision of public goods. Because those sources of money have different characteristics, group leadership needs to strategically choose and

secure particular sources of financing at a particular time. Each source is different in the potential amount they can provide, the duration of the funding, how much time and effort it would take to raise, and how ethical they are for the group to pursue – that is, whether they would contradict the main goal of the group. Based on this information, group leadership needs to construct a portfolio of funding sources.

Some group leadership is able to develop a portfolio of funding that allows them to have enough resources to not only run day-to-day operations, but also to fund long-term projects such as medical care and social security benefits for their fighters. Other groups' leaders take their groups on completely different economic paths that could lead to a lack of financial resources and inevitable bankruptcy. There are several reasons for such differences in budget planning, among them lack of experience, emotions, and shortsightedness - making it also a function of quality and experience of group's leadership.

H4.1 (*Leadership qualification*) Groups with more experienced leadership are more likely to be desirable for potential recruits.

This shows that no organization could have a successful long-term strategy if it does not have someone with the right qualifications to plan it, and no good plan will work if there is no one capable of executing it. This means that the group should aspire to have the most effective top- and mid-level leadership.

However, getting the best possible people for the leadership positions in the group is far from easy. In the civilian world, a qualified CEO is very hard to get, and the best demand very high salaries for their time and have many offers to choose from. The same situation takes place in the civil war labor market. To get stellar on-the-job performance, the prospective leader's qualifications and experience should be taken into account. While an experienced and qualified leader could build a sustainable organization from scratch, a non-qualified person could even derail an already successfully functioning one. Some groups are more professionally run than others, are more successful on the battlefield and are more appealing to potential recruits. They are able to find or internally promote the most qualified people, learn from their own mistakes and mistakes of others, and build a functioning organization; while other groups do not adapt to the environment or learn, and as a result fail the competition and eventually disappear.

This is where the gap between successful and unsuccessful groups emerges. Some groups simply think that criteria other than merit is more important in choosing leadership, while other groups, while realizing the importance of choosing the most qualified candidates, cannot always find or recognize people with the right qualifications.

Consider top-level leadership. It plays a major role in how organizations function and, as a result, should be approached accordingly. Ideally, a CEO is chosen based on experience and knowledge. In the civilian world, he/she could be either chosen from inside the firm or, if there are no qualified candidates in house, brought from the outside, usually from the same industry. There are two main problems with leadership selection that any organization faces, and those problems are even more challenging in civil war settings. First, groups should be able to choose the best candidate from as good a pool of candidates as possible, meaning that there should be qualified people to choose from. Second, an optimal and non-corrupt way should be used to choose from them to ensure that an organization has the best leadership they can get in a particular environment and from a particular pool of candidates. In a civil war setting, there are several problems related to this process.

First, in the very beginning of a civil war, the main problem is the pool of potential leaders that groups can choose from. This pool, in general, is small and weak. Because there were no resources involved, there were no additional incentives for a fighter to take extra organizational responsibilities or a leadership position because virtually everyone at that point had joined to fight instead of performing managerial tasks, which would have been similar to what they were doing during peacetime. Because individuals joined to satisfy their grievance and follow their emotions and desire for revenge, they preferred to take part in actual fighting - to personally inflict cost and damage on the enemy instead of doing it indirectly through taking a managerial position and empowering others to fight. For them, such indirect fighting through leading brings less emotional satisfaction of their grievance.

Second, the pool of potential candidates is weak, at least for the majority of groups, because experience running a rebel group is not a common skill.

In addition, at that stage of the conflict, it is very hard to choose the right leader since fighters simply do not have enough information to evaluate a candidate and enough experience to know what qualities they should be looking for in the prospective leader.

Fighters do not have time to accumulate knowledge about a potential leader's managerial and fighting skills, so they have to rely on very noisy signals, such as interpersonal relations or the general level of intelligence of an individual. Since almost no-one has any previous war experience, potential has to be assessed, and this is always a hard task, especially in an area completely new to the candidate. Understandably, in those circumstances the selection process in the majority of groups is often less than optimal.

Later in the course of the war, the problem of a weak pool becomes less crucial as individuals gain experience in fighting and running an armed group, while the second problem, choosing the best candidate, increases in its importance. Since now there are valuable resources involved, corruption and nepotism become a common problem that some groups are unable to solve. Due to the increase in the availability of resources and accumulated power, more people, motivated by nothing beyond personal greed, become interested in taking leadership positions, and it becomes crucial for groups to be able to screen and choose the best possible candidates. In many cases, experience and knowledge are not used as the main criteria for selecting a leader or his advisers. As a result, the whole process becomes increasingly corrupt and inefficient, leading to poor outcomes for the whole group.

However, electing top leadership is only part of the problem because even the best policies coming from up the chain of command must be successfully executed down the line. Thus, it is also important to get people with the best knowledge and experience for the mid-level leadership positions - either from inside the group or by attracting talent from outside. The main role of executive leadership is not just running organizations' day-to-day activities, but building a sustainable institution (internal bureaucracy) that will continue functioning even after the founding leaders themselves are gone. And being able to build a sustainable institutional mechanism for the group could be even more important than simply having a good leader, especially in the civil war settings. There are several reasons for this.

First, without qualified mid-level leadership, even the best ideas from top leadership cannot be executed properly and, as a result, would be wasted. In addition, some problems are simply too minor to occupy top leadership and should be solved at the lower levels.

Second, clear structure is needed to make sure that an organization can grow without losing effectiveness. By definition, a successful group will grow in number and controlled territory as time goes, so being able to smoothly do so is essential for groups that are trying to increase their share of power. When a group grows, additional low-level leadership should be installed immediately to allow for power decentralization.

Third, there is a huge probability in war zones that groups leaders will be killed, and one never knows when that could happen. In a civilian organization, one could approximate how long a director will be in his position, and even if he got sick or wanted to retire, he would have time to choose and train a successor. This is not the case on the front line. Here, one could be killed in a matter of seconds before being able to choose a substitute and transfer knowledge, or even worse, several people from top leadership could be killed at the same time.

With the increase in the number of mid-level leadership positions opening up, more low-level fighters should get promoted. There should be a procedure to choose people for promotion, but what should the criteria be? The two most important things that a fighter needs to show to get promoted are:

1) qualification. A person should be qualified for the position he is planning to assume mainly by having a good reputation and being proven in combat.

2) dedication to the war. If a person is not fully dedicated to the goal, not only will he not work to the best of his abilities, but he could even defect to the enemy. And because even mid-level leadership has important information about the group and its operations, defections among the leadership could seriously harm the group. To reduce the chances of this happening, priority for promotion is given to people who lost friends or family members in combat. It is assumed that the more grievance they have, the more they will want revenge, and as a consequence, the more dedicated they will be to the goal of the war, working harder to advance the group's goals and being less likely to defect.

These factors held true in the previous generation of civil wars, but in today's multi-faction rebellions, there is one more problem brigades face.

Not only do groups not want their leaders to defect to the enemy, they also do not want their leaders to switch to another group. In the best case scenario, a person who switched would be merely a loss of investment (training and mentorship), but in the worst case, because groups are in competition for power, such a move by a leader could cost his old group its competitive advantage. If he is a popular leader, low-level fighters may follow him, and in addition, because groups cannot enforce non-disclosure agreements (NDA) like companies working in developed countries do, they have to value loyalty very highly for promotions. In the civilian world, non-disclosure or non-compete agreements prevent an employee from taking a similar job in a competing company in the same industry or geographic location for some time. Rebel groups do not have the luxury of having an enforceable job contract; thus, loyalty is crucially important.

To ensure that a person is dedicated to his particular group, the principle of restriction and costly signaling of loyalty also applies. According to any university HR textbook, although there are many strategic variables of human resource management that have to be embodied in the practices in order to guide employees to higher-level performance, managers have to focus on the most valuable aspects, depending on the organizational strategy. For example, if an organization in the civilian world emphasizes creativity and innovation, they should choose and reward employee behavior that demonstrates careful risk-taking. In the case of an armed group, this presents itself as ideology. Similar to the required unproductive costs that a popular group employs for screening individuals, fighters who aspire to be promoted to mid-level leadership positions could voluntarily send a signal, using the same ideological reasoning – by following an even stricter set of rules, they show that they are ready to go the extra mile for the group. For example, if in the civilian company the internal rule is that everyone starts their work day at 8 a.m., employees who aspire to be promoted will try to arrive earlier and make sure that their boss sees “their hard work and dedication” when he arrives at 8 a.m. It is a similar situation in ideologically-minded armed groups - a fighter who wants to get promoted will try to show off by exceeding minimal requirements on behavior imposed by a group's ideology.

H4.2 (*Merit based promotion*): Groups that are able to develop unbiased promotion mechanisms are more likely to have better leaders

As in any civilian organization, leadership is always important, but it is even more important at the very beginning of an organization's development. As shown by organizational behavior research (Greiner 1972), leadership crisis is the first crisis that a company needs to overcome in the process of its development (it comes before crises of autonomy, crises of control and crises of red tape that could also destroy the organization). Armed groups are not different in this sense. As shown by research of Shapiro (2003) well developed armed groups experience such problems as problems of control and red tape in their day-to-day operations, but only later in their development, after armed groups successfully overcame the very first organization crises- crises of leadership.

Conclusion

Every group in the rebel block aspires to be, if not the only rebel group, then at least a leading one, and for that to happen they need to maximize their power. To achieve this, the group should be able to attract all possible financial and human resources available in the rebel block. Because there is no official budget assigned to rebel groups, they have to compete for money, and getting it is also a function of human resources on both of those levels. Ground troops and upper-level leaders are the most important source of contention within the same rebel block. For example, if the group is large, they have a greater chance of establishing control over natural resources available in the country, and if leadership is experienced and has connections, they are more likely to develop relations with interested foreign actors for potential sponsorship.

Therefore, a group that aspires to the leading position must be attractive to potential group members. Conversely, since people who self-selected to be fighters are evaluating armed groups as a tool to help them avenge their losses through fighting they would be looking for the group that will help them the most in this regard – the one that is the most organized. In particular they value the group's organization of combat aspects such as logistics, weapons, and ammunition supply, and personal benefits that would allow them to concentrate on fighting and not think about other things. As a consequence, groups that have leadership that is able to develop and execute such human resources policies and secure resources to fund them become the most popular among fighters. However, since quantity does not imply quality, in order to ensure that only the most dedicated fighters are accepted,

the group has to make membership in the group costly by asking members to follow a set of rules rationalized by the ideology of the group.

As a result, a group whose leadership follows this strategy not only wins the competition within the rebel block, but also has a chance to win the war. First, they become big and cohesive, with members dedicated to the goal and more effective. Second, most likely by the time they win the internal competition in the rebel block they also control substantial financial resources (which allows them to spend money on outside projects, such as winning the hearts and minds of civilians). These groups have effective internal policies and qualified leadership, which further increases their chances on the battlefield.

On the other hand, this leading group will most likely portray itself as ultra-radical. And the longer the group spends in war, the more strict its internal policies for members becomes to catch up with the constantly depreciating additional costs they use to signal loyalty, and the more radical the group will look like from the outside.

Chapter 2 Labor Supply of Fighters in Civil War

In the Syrian Civil war, as in any other modern civil war, armed groups are competing for the most valuable asset: human resources¹⁵. Therefore, it is first important to understand the labor market for regular rebel fighters (those not on the leadership level)—when and why individual fighters decide to take up arms (enter the market), and when and why they quit and leave (exit the market). And second, with the highly fragmented insurgencies often present in contemporary warfare, it is even more important to know how matching between groups and individual fighters happens. Whether to join an armed rebellion is not the only decision a prospective fighter has to make. He also has to decide which particular group to join; with many groups to choose from, this decision could be even harder than the first one. In the previous generation's single-rebellion-group civil wars, if a fighter was not satisfied with the group he was fighting for, his only choice was to leave the group

¹⁵ Even the United States through the Train and Equip program participated in this competition and tried to recruit members into its armed group.

and return to civilian life. In contemporary insurgencies, if a fighter is not satisfied with his group, he can simply switch groups. This option still leaves the fighter “on the market”, but he is faced with the tough problem of evaluating different groups and choosing which group to switch to. This is a problem that rebels in previous generation civil wars did not face.

Each step in this individual fighters’ decision-making process should be studied separately and different hypotheses should be tested. In this chapter, I study different decisions that civilians and fighters faced in the Syrian civil war environment step by step in the same order as they faced them. In particular, I look at the relative importance of previously identified factors like selective incentives, social sanctioning, social identity, risk tolerance, social networks, and grievance in individuals’ decisions at each of those steps.

First, in trying to understand the pool of potential fighters in the conflict zone, I look at why some people leave the war zone as refugees while others chose to stay. Next, I examine why some people among those who stayed take up weapons and become fighters, while others prefer to remain civilians and not take an active part in combat. Then I look at people who quit the rebel fighters’ labor market, analyzing when and why fighters decide to stop participating in an armed struggle and return to civilian life.

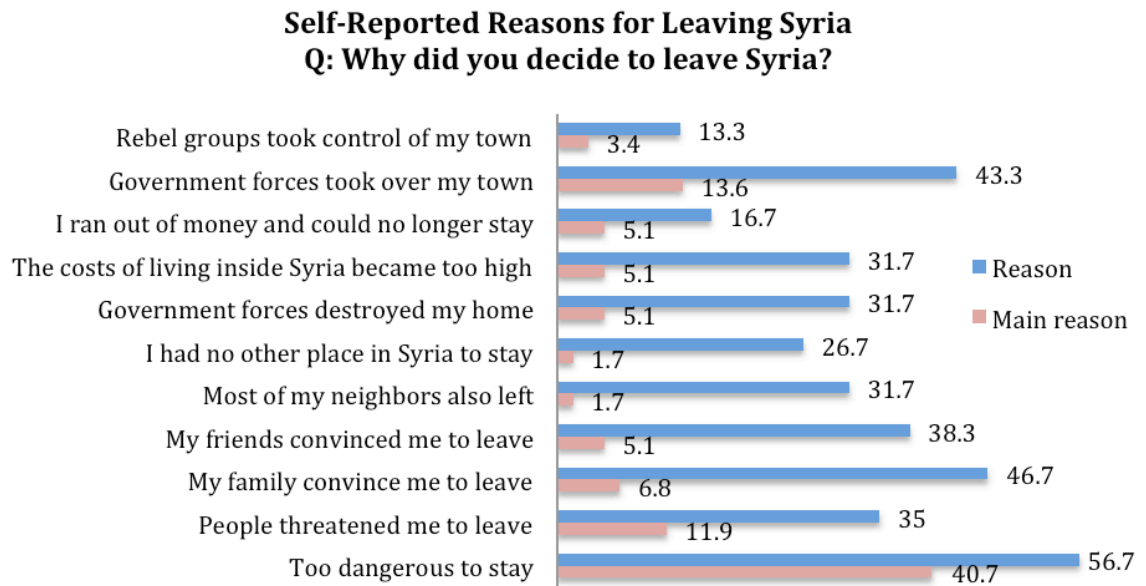
In the new era of increasingly fragmented rebellions, the decision-making of a prospective fighter is more complicated than just mobilizing for violence. The reasons for taking up arms are not the same as the ones for joining a particular group, and the decision to participate in a conflict should also be divided into two separate decisions: 1. to continue fighting or leave, then, 2. if to continue fighting, to stay with a particular group or not. Thus, after looking at mobilization I analyze the next decision a fighter is faced with – choosing a particular group to fight with and if (and when) to switch between groups. I am going to test my hypothesis first using a qualitative methodology, followed by statistical analyses.

Should I stay or should I go?

In Syria, people were confronted by the dilemma to leave as refugees, stay as civilians, or join an armed rebellion in the Spring of 2011, after the first clashes between peaceful protesters and regime forces. This is when people first started leaving the country as

refugees.¹⁶

Figure 1 Self-Reported Reasons For Leaving Syria.



Similar to what was observed in other conflicts (Adhikari 2013), refugees applied cost-benefit analysis and either did not have the desire to fight for any non-material goal such as democracy or, even if they had such a desire, it was low enough that their safety, family, and possible employment opportunities outside outweighed it. Almost a quarter of surveyed refugees said that they do not agree with the goals of the fighters. A majority of surveyed refugees who left Syria for Turkey say they left either because it was simply too dangerous to stay (41 percent) or because their towns/homes had already fallen under enemy control (18 percent). Social pressure also appears to have played a role in their decision. Some say they were threatened/warned by others to leave (12 percent of civilians), or that their friends and

¹⁶ In the first year of the war alone as many as 200,000 Syrians left the country.
<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/09/04/uk-syria-europe-refugees-idUKBRE8820NP20120904>

family pressured them to leave (12 percent of refugees). As one refugee explained: “Although my sons were fighting, and I supported the goals of the revolution, I had to leave for the sake of my daughters. Schools were closed, but I did not want them to stop their education. Because I am a schoolteacher myself, very soon we ran out of money, so we had to leave Syria. There was no option for a normal life inside Syria anymore—staying on the regime's side was dangerous because the government was questioning me about my sons, and moving to the FSA territory was even more dangerous because of constant shelling by the regime.”

This decision to leave the active war zone seems absolutely understandable, and many people put in a similar position would do the same, so it is more puzzling why, if it were so dangerous, some people remained on the frontline. By making this decision, they not only exposed themselves, but also their family and children, to the risk of a serious injury or death.

In the survey of civilians who preferred to stay in Syria despite the increasing danger, many said they were there to assist rebel forces in the fight (63 percent), but the majority also claimed to have no other options (66 percent). For example, they did not have family and friends (48 percent) or money (42 percent) to travel to a safer location. Some (35 percent) also thought that traveling may be more dangerous than staying in place. About half also claimed they were staying to protect their homes (59 percent) and other family members (51 percent).

Table 1. Reasons Given for Staying in Syria (Civilians in Syria only)

<i>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</i>	% agree	N
I have no other option but to stay here	66.3	80
I would go somewhere safer if I had family, friends to help me	47.6	84
I would go somewhere safer if I had money to do so	42.2	83
I would go somewhere safer if travel were less dangerous	34.9	76
I am staying to protect my family	51.3	80
I am staying to protect my home/property	59.0	83
I am staying to fight	56.5	85
I am staying to help those who are fighting	62.4	85

Although possible, leaving as a refugee even at the beginning of the war was not easy or cheap. Someone who was not affiliated with demonstrations was allowed to pass through regime border checkpoints, but if a person's name was on the list, he had to rely on smugglers who charged \$25 for their services or to bribe a regime army officer who charged up to \$3,000 per person for crossing. After the FSA took control of some checkpoints it became easier to exit Syria, but with the increase of refugees it became harder to enter Turkey, so people still relied on smugglers who increased the amount of money they charged to, for example, \$400 in 2014. Since this activity is illegal the results were unpredictable. While some were lucky and made it through on the first try, others were caught by Turkish security, deported back to Syria, and as a result had to pay the smuggler multiple times. Names and contacts of those smugglers were passed by the networks of friends and neighbors.

If a person was successful in crossing, they had to find housing in Turkey, which even before the war was more expensive than in Syria. After the beginning of the war, real estate prices in Turkish border towns increased even further. Before crossing, people would usually look through their contacts to see who they knew in the particular Turkish town they wanted to go to, made initial contact, and asked to stay with them at least for the first several days.

These insights show that, in addition to the absence of opportunity to leave (economic limitations, lack of necessary social networks, and danger associated with such travel), dedication to the non-material goals of the rebellion played an important role in people's decision to stay despite the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation. Such initial self-selection benefits future mobilization efforts and makes armed group recruitment easier because the choice to stay already signals individuals' non-indifference towards goals of the war.

Mobilization

Soon after the Assad army started targeting peaceful protesters, the first militarized units, which later became the FSA, started to organize. When the creation of the FSA was

formally announced in Syria in July 2011, the FSA consisted of defectors from the regime's army—rank-and-file soldiers and mid-ranking officers who deserted the army after refusing to take part in the crackdown on anti-government protests—and local militias. After the Syrian regime's army was sent to Daraa Province to quell ongoing protests, some units refused to fire on protesters, split from the army, and defected.

In addition, civilians started increasingly mobilizing on the individual level. A growing number of people who had previously participated in peaceful protests, usually also in the areas where the regime army was attacking and violently suppressing such protests, civilians were mobilizing for armed resistance. Activists who met each other and built trust during peaceful demonstrations also started recruiting people who remained in Syria for the FSA. In neighborhoods that were still under regime control (with no freedom of movement), activists would post fliers encouraging recruitment along with a phone number along streets, and people who wanted to join contacted them and coordinated activities online.

In neighborhoods with no regime presence, activists recruited openly on the streets, shouting with megaphones and mosque amplifiers with slogans like, "You should come and protect your city from the government, because they will come and kill your children. Join the fight!"¹⁷ and singing the main revolution song "Ya Heif," with the following lyrics: "Young people heard that freedom was at the gates, they went to call out for it. They saw the guns; they said these are their brothers, they wouldn't shoot. But they did shoot...with real bullets. We are dead.... On our brothers' hands and in the name of national security." Fighters themselves would walk down the streets encouraging other to join in, yelling "whoever does not participate does not love Syria."

Others activists stood in the streets, even near the government buildings, with homemade banners that had a phone number for people who wanted to defect and join the rebellion.

To attract defectors, activists were looking for lists of phone numbers of people working for the regime government or security apparatus on army bases and government

¹⁷ Example of a slogan from Hama

offices, and contacting them one by one through the cellphone application, WhatsApp. If activists were lucky and they also found working radios connected to internal regime communications channels, they would make an announcement asking members of military to defect and walk over the frontline to the FSA positions. This tactic worked because in many cases regime army leadership had already deserted, so soldiers were able to simply walk across the frontline without consequences.

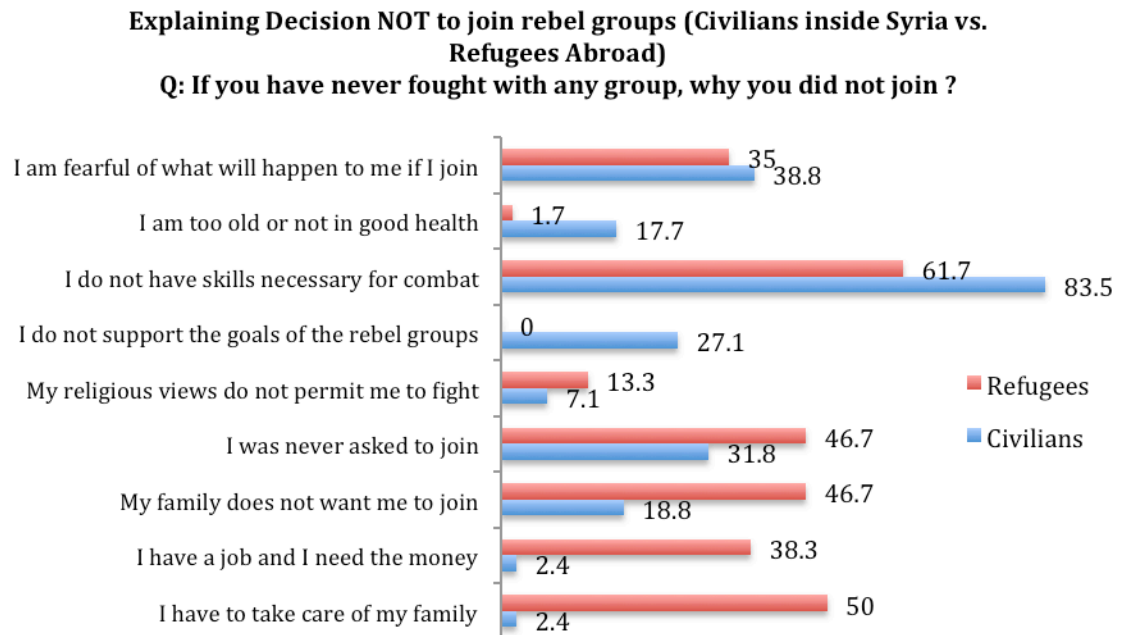
Thousands of similar small brigades were formed, mostly consisting of people who knew each other, with the main goal of protecting their neighborhoods and keeping non-violent protesters safe. Groups were mostly organized by neighborhoods, or in areas that were attacked by government forces. In Deir ez-Zor, for example, a brigade named “Mohamed” was first organized in the Al Jubely neighborhood, through which all protests were passing; this neighborhood was therefore crucially important for the regime and urgently needed protection. Initially, that protection came in the form of a group of 5–15 people armed with pistols. They were tight-knit: they had grown up in the same neighborhood and had participated in peaceful demonstrations together. Soon, other neighborhoods, especially those located on the route where protesters passed, started organizing their own similar small units. They set up checkpoints and did not allow the regime’s military vehicles to enter the town in order to conduct arrests and killings. The brigades coordinated their actions with other groups by phone.¹⁸ The last group of brigades (mostly in villages) finished mobilizing after the fighting had already started and the regime began committing large-scale crimes. For example, the Shohadaa Al-Jourah (Al-Jourah’s martyrs) brigade, was formed as a response to the massacre committed by the regime in the Al-Jourah neighborhood.¹⁹

Whom did activists successfully recruit, and whom were they not able to mobilize despite their best efforts? Even though some surveyed civilians wanted to help the fight for the revolution’s goals, they were not willing to take the risk of becoming active combatants, and instead chose to stay as civilians and not carry a weapon.

¹⁸ In order to avoid government surveillance they used documents of dead regime fighters to buy phone SIM cards.

¹⁹ Also, in addition to the geographic brigades, there were a small number of narrow specialized brigades like Almohajereen Ila Allah brigade that started as a group of assassins working in the regime controlled areas, but those brigades were minor and occupied a small niche.

Figure 2. Reasons for Not Joining Rebel Groups (Civilians, Refugees Only)



Most civilians explained that they did not join because they did not have the skills necessary for combat (83.5 percent). This is not “an answer of convenience”; some people rationally decide that by continuing to do the civilian job they did before the war, they will be more helpful to the cause. A baker, for example, may assume that instead of taking up weapons and becoming an inexperienced soldier, he could be more useful by continuing to bake bread for fighters because someone would have to do that job anyway. Some civilians indicated that they did not join for age- and health-related reasons (18 percent). Other civilians say they simply were never asked by any group to join (32 percent). A sizable minority fears what will happen to them if they join (39 percent), and some face family pressure not to join (19 percent). Only a minority of civilians refuse to join because they do not support the goals of the rebel groups (27 percent).

Moreover, there were many ways that civilians interested in the war's goal were helping fighters. Usually civilians would just approach the group and ask what they needed. They would volunteer to help with first aid, cook food, bring water and tea, and offer fighters

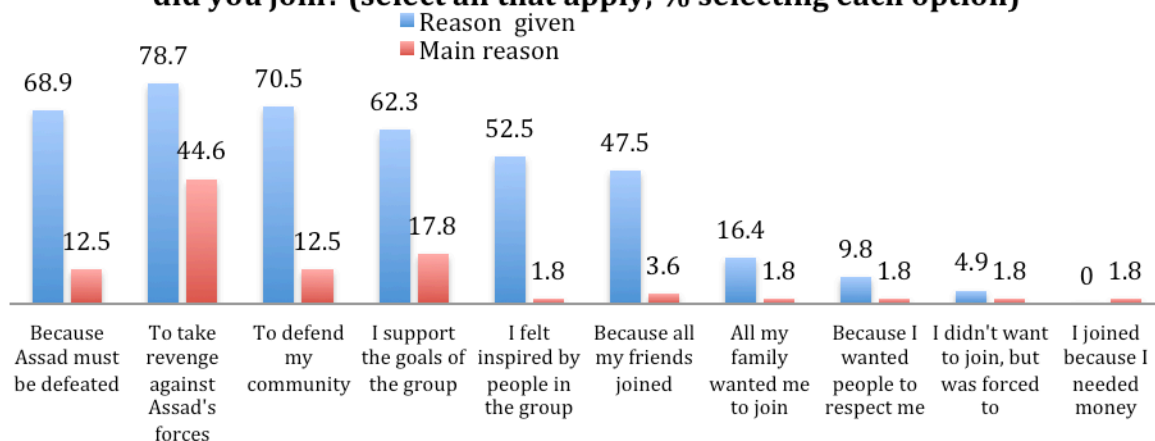
a place to sleep and a hot shower. Sometimes they would even volunteer to keep an eye on the road and take shifts during the relative peacetime so that fighters could get some sleep, and some even took up the most dangerous task - spying on the government troops. Most of the time, civilians would keep the doors of their houses open so that fighters could hide in their houses if needed.

This is in contrast to refugees, most of whom did not join the fighting because of pure rational-choice calculations. They reasoned that the danger they would be exposing themselves to was not worth the reward they would receive for it. Civilians (people who stayed in the war zone but did not take up a weapon and join an armed group) did not apply this type of logic, but instead were looking for other ways to help those fighting. Compared to 22 percent of refugees who said that their main reason for not joining was because they needed to take care of their family and 10 percent who could not join because they had jobs, 0 percent of civilians named those reasons. Apart from not having the necessary skills to fight, 19 percent of civilians said that they did not join because they did not support the goals of the group (compared to 0 percent of refugees), and 12 percent said that they were simply afraid of what would happen.

On the other hand, despite the obvious risks and the fact that the majority of the Syrian population lacked prior civil war experience, people started picking up weapons and joining the armed resistance in increasing numbers. Thus, what differentiated combatants from non-combatants at the beginning of the Syrian civil war?

Figure 3. Reasons for joining Rebel Groups (FSA)

Reasons Given for Joining Rebel Groups (FSA)
Q: If you are currently fighting or have fought with the FSA, why did you join? (select all that apply, % selecting each option)



In general, surveyed FSA fighters offered a range of reasons for joining, however their main reason was grievance. They joined to seek revenge against the Assad regime (78.7 percent), because Assad must be defeated (68.9 percent), and to defend the community (70.5 percent). Other reasons, such as community and peer pressure (because all my friends joined or my family wanted me to join) were only minor. Although, in general, 52.5 percent of fighters mentioned that one of the reasons for their decision to join was that they felt inspired by the people in the group, that was far from being their main reason for joining; only 1.8 percent mentioned it as such. When asked about the main reason for joining, to take revenge against Assad's forces was almost twice as common an answer than the second most popular reason. Even if fighters thought about other reasons when joining, they were clearly taking up weapons to fight for the very abstract goal of revenge and were less concerned about everything else. It manifested itself not only in the slogans on the flags such as "Prepare yourself with the tough might to defend" and simple graffiti on the wall such as "Fuck Assad" accompanied with the names and photos of fighters who died, but even the names of the group.

Members of Islamist groups joined the war for similar reasons: to take revenge against the Assad regime (79.6 percent), because Assad must be defeated (90 percent), and to defend the community (90 percent). Although they also claimed to want to build an Islamic

State (71 percent), to gain combat training and experience (71 percent), and to have joined in response to a religious instruction or *fatwa* (63 percent), it is not clear whether these were honest responses or these fighters were just saying what was expected from people with similar affiliations. Due to the concern that members of those groups might feel pressure to misrepresent their intentions, in the survey they were also asked to consider the motives of others in their groups for joining. When asked about these “abstract” others, many fighters agreed that the most popular reasons for joining were far from religiously motivated and were the same as those of the moderate fighters: to defeat the Assad regime (99 percent), to take revenge against Assad’s forces (90 percent), and to defend their communities (98 percent).

In addition, to clarify this important question even further and to understand how those fighters’ goals squared up with their counterparts in openly Islamist brigades, they were asked to explain the main goal of the group they were fighting with. Again, the most popular answer was not religious. Members of one Islamist group said that the main goals of their group were to defeat Assad and every group that is supporting him; to protect Muslims from criminals from Iran and Hezbollah; to liberate Syria; to stop killings, rapes, and free people from Assad’s jails; and to protect civilians. One of the members of an Islamist group even went into a more detailed explanation, saying, “If we are talking about now, the main and only goal of everyone is to defeat Assad. But after that we will have to decide what we want our country to be.” Essentially, therefore, both members of Islamist and moderate groups had the same opinion on why they took up arms: they joined and were fighting to defeat Assad and to take revenge against him.²⁰

Why did fighters want revenge against Assad personally? Although the majority of fighters, both moderates and Islamists, indicated that they wanted revenge on Assad for crimes against both them and their family and the Syrian people in general (47 percent), an almost equal number of people said that they wanted revenge only for crimes against Syrian

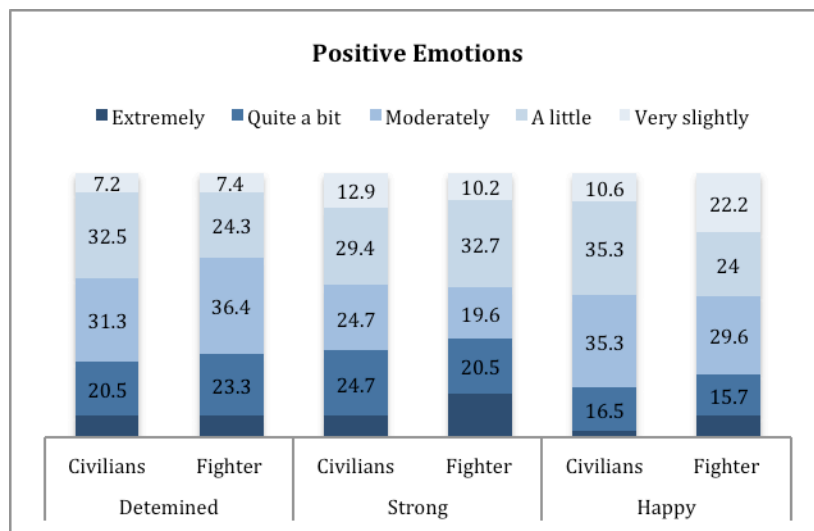
²⁰ To further confirm the motivations of fighters to take up arms, the people who were closest to the fighters—civilians who stayed on the front lines—were asked about their opinions on the reasons that both moderate and Islamist fighters joined brigades. The civilians generally confirmed the fighters’ own responses: 88 percent of civilians in Aleppo and Idlib said that fighters joined the FSA because they wanted get revenge on Assad. Civilians also noted that fighters supported the revolutionary goals of the group in general (76 percent) and also felt inspired by other people who were joining (58 percent). Civilians strongly disagreed that fighters joined for money (2 percent), respect (4 percent), or were forced to join (0 percent).

people (46 percent), and only a small minority (10 percent) said that they wanted revenge only for crimes against them and their family. So it was primarily the collective desire to defeat Assad, not personal grievance that drove people to pick up weapons and join the rebellion.

Among the crimes against Syrian people that Assad should be punished for were such issues as attacking peaceful demonstrations, arresting children in Daraa for writing anti-Assad graffiti²¹, the massacre in Homs in 2012, and even spending the majority of Syrian oil revenue on the regime army.

Such reasons for mobilization as grievance also led to a difference in the emotions that different sub-groups experienced during the conflict. For example, fighters feel happier overall compared to civilians. That could be attributed to their ability to act on their grievance. They also feel slightly stronger than non-fighters. On one hand, expectations of those emotions could also have contributed to a decision to become a member of an armed group instead of remaining a civilian in the first place, but on the other hand those emotions also help fighters do their jobs better.

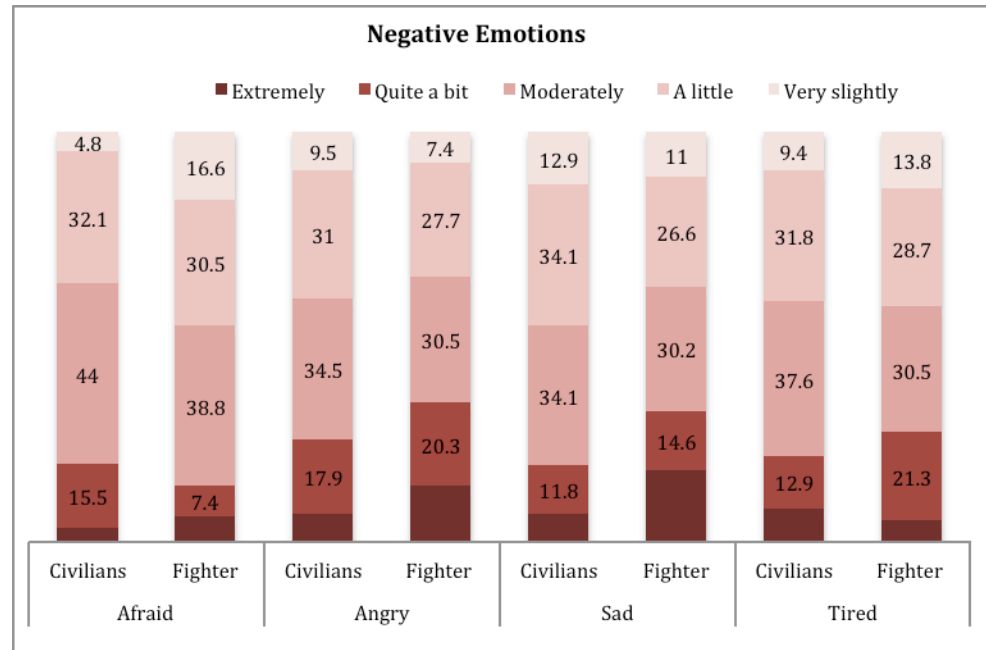
Figure 4. Positive Emotions



²¹ On 6 March 2011, children wrote “Doctor, you are next” on the school wall, clearly referring to Bashar Assar, an eye doctor by training. They were tortured and bitten before release.

As a downside of their decision, fighters feel much angrier, much more sad and more tired. In terms of overall dedication to the goal, both civilians and fighters in the war zone feel equally determined.

Figure 5. Negative emotions



Behaviorally, people who chose to take up weapons also differ from civilians who preferred to help by other means. First, fighters were more risk tolerant. They were almost twice as likely to strongly agree with the statement, “I am not afraid to take risks like civilians” (46 percent fighters vs. 21 percent civilians) and almost four times more likely than civilians to strongly disagree with the statement, “I avoid risks whenever possible” (40 percent fighter vs. 10 percent civilian).

They also had a significantly shorter time horizon. Fighters were much less concerned about the future, both short and long term. For 34 percent of fighters the question of what they would be doing after the war was not important (compared to 20 percent of civilians). Only 45 percent of fighters considered what they would be doing next week to be very important (compared to 45 percent among civilians) and only 70 percent considered what they would be doing tomorrow (compared to 87 percent among civilians). So even

behaviorally, fighters showed that the main thing they cared about was fighting and they were willing to take risks to be more effective at it.

When individuals made decisions about whether to discount risks of fighting and join an armed resistance, they evaluated whether or not the desire for revenge and the wish to defeat Assad were worth the sacrifices required. If the answer was yes, they joined. “Even if we will lose a lot of people, it will be worth it,” one of the FSA fighters explained, speaking about the brigade’s emotions during the first days of the revolution. Following the same reasoning, even family members were not against their relatives’ joining. Abu Hassan, who joined the war in the very first days, remembers, “My mom lost her brother in Hama in 1982. She thought that it was now time to get revenge and I encouraged her to join the fight.”²²

Even during her son's funeral, people comforted the mother of the killed fighter by not only confirming that the cause of her sons death was right, saying that she should be happy that her son died in such an honorable way, but also reassuring her that his death will be avenged.

As in the civilian world, the labor market for rebels is a two-way street. While some people are entering the job market, others are exiting. During the course of the war in Syria, new people joined, but some left - either voluntarily or not.

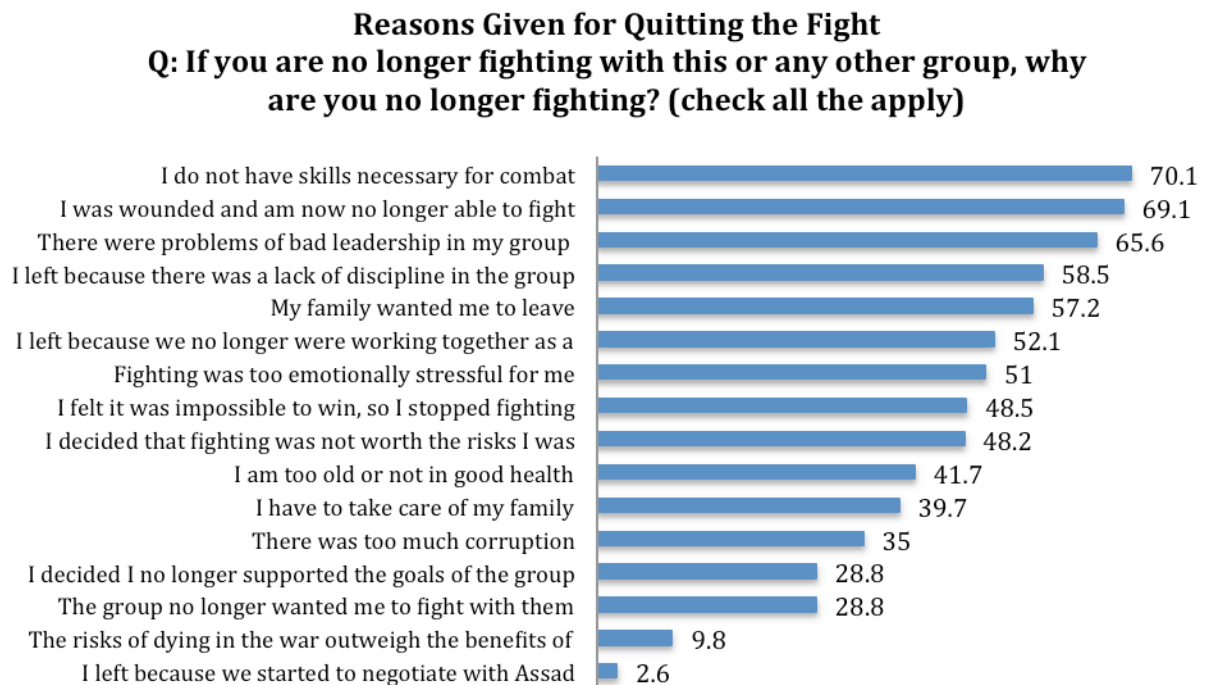
Some were getting killed or wounded and could not continue fighting. Opinions and attitudes of those ex-fighters were not much different from active fighters still fighting on the frontlines. For example, wounded ex-fighters are only slightly less likely to support fighting until victory, than active fighters (88 percent of wounded fighters compared to 90 percent of active ones). Wounded ex-fighters also have a strong desire to go back, although for many it will not be possible due to the nature of the injury²³.

²² Referring to the Hama massacre, when the Syrian Arab Army, under the orders of the country's then-dictator, Hafez al-Assad, besieged the town of Hama for 27 days in order to quell an uprising against the government.

²³ Although 17% of surveyed wounded ex-fighters said that they would definitely return back to Syria to fight, it is not possible to make any generalizations. It is unclear how many of the surveyed individuals could possibly go back to the frontline due to the severity of their injuries.

Others decided to quit voluntarily. They made the decision to stop fighting for reasons similar to those of the people who did not join the fighting at the beginning of the conflict (such as refugees): lack of interest in the non-material goals of the war. People who became disappointed in the war and thought that it was not worth fighting for any more, or at least that they personally could not make a difference in the course of the conflict, tend to quit voluntarily.

Figure 6. Reasons for Quitting the Fight



In the survey, ex-fighters who had previously been fighting with both moderate and Islamist groups were directly asked why they were no longer fighting. The main reasons for quitting were related to the general disappointment with the war and its goals. First, some fighters understood their own limitations: 70 percent of the respondents realized that they were not very good at fighting; 51 percent said that it was too emotionally stressful for them; and 49 percent decided that the risks associated with combat were just not worth it. A fighter from the Ja'far al-Tayyar group in Deir ez-Zor, who had been fighting for four years but left

in 2014, commented: “After my fourth injury, after I lost my brother and all my friends in the brigade, and there were no more Syrians left in my city, it became very emotionally hard for me and I decided that nothing is holding me back now and it is time to leave.” Another ex-fighter, who was fighting with an Islamist group "Fajr al-Islam" (now part of Al Nusra) in Yabroud and left in 2014, recalls: "After the end of the "Alsehel" battle with Shia militias, and after the regime took control of the villages around our positions, I thought- what is there left to fight for? I lost my right hand to a sniper shot, and when I was bleeding no one could help, because we simply did not have enough people. We were always very close to the enemy, but we only had Klashinkovs (AK47), while the enemy had tanks and planes. I felt that God's angels were helping us, but rationally I thought - what can a left handed man do, in front of those tanks! Nothing. So I found a way to get out of the city, and ended up opening a small restaurant to sell falafel. Now the only thing I am fighting for is the food for my kids.”

Second, people become frustrated with the organization of their brigades: 65 percent of respondents reported bad leadership as an important reason for leaving; 59 percent pointed to the lack of discipline in the brigade; and 52 percent thought that they were not working as a team anymore. Generally, if people were dissatisfied with the organization of their brigade, they simply switched groups, so ex-fighters also appear to have given up on the cause for fighting: 48 percent of respondents felt that it was impossible to win and no longer worth the risk.

Another 10 percent of respondents mentioned other reasons as the most important ones for them to leave the battlefield. Examples of such reasons include personal ones like the death of a mother, being upset with the international community; and a small minority (<3%) also mentioned they fled because they were not able to fight the war against Assad that they initially mobilized for²⁴.

Those separating from an armed group also paid a toll emotionally. In general, ex-fighters feel significantly more ashamed compared to active members of a group (36 percent of quitters feel a bit or extremely ashamed vs. 18 percent of active fighters), more sad (38 percent of ex-fighters compared to 32 percent of active fighters), weaker (24 percent of ex-

²⁴ Their reasons are related to the front that opened with ISIS and include “ISIS took control of the area”, “I was arrested by ISIS”, “We were forced to join ISIS” and “We had to run away from ISIS”.

fighters mentioned that they feel strong vs. 38 percent of active fighters), more tired (34 percent of ex-fighters vs. 27 percent of active group members), much more afraid (36 percent of ex-fighters vs. 13 percent of active fighters) and almost equally as angry (34 percent of ex-fighters and active fighters).

Ex-fighters who quit voluntarily were also asked if they would go back to fight if given the opportunity, and 42 percent agreed that they would under certain conditions. Their opinions about the possible scenarios of coming back to fight further confirmed that general disappointment in the goal and the fight were their main reasons for quitting. Prospects of victory (restoring belief in the goal) played an important role in determining whether they would return to the fight or stay on the sidelines: 43 percent said they would fight again if they thought they could actually win. Many, for example, saw Western intervention in the conflict as a potential game changer, which would tip the balance in their favor. A strong majority (76 percent) claimed that they would fight again if the West were to intervene militarily. In addition, many ex-fighters were still concerned about the institutional quality of the brigades they would return to in Syria: 56 percent would consider going back if the group had better leaders, if they were paid more for fighting (48 percent), and if there were less corruption (30 percent). Although these are secondary considerations, they are still important aspects of the decision on whether or not to return to the fighting.

Those results offer initial qualitative insights into why people fight. Next I will turn to statistical analyses to conduct more rigorous hypotheses testing.

Statistical Analyses

Due to the limitations and challenges associated with fieldwork in an active conflict zone the data had to be collected over time, is relatively small in size, and is non-random. As a result, the following statistical analyses and results should only be viewed as suggestive and do not allow rigorous claims of causal relationships.

Table 1, provides empirical tests of selective incentive hypotheses *Greed (H1.1)* and *Security (H1.4)* respectively. For *Greed (H1.1)*, evidence is considered for whether people

expected to receive selective economic benefits from joining a rebel group. Because soldiers in the Free Syrian Army and Islamist groups were unpaid volunteers at the time of the study, there is no salary information to consider. However, it may be that soldiers receive better access to food, water, housing, and other basic necessities that are unavailable to civilians. Of course, it may be possible that these benefits are not directly provided by the rebel organization, but commanders encourage or turn a blind eye to looting and pillaging as compensation for lack of salary. Table 2 and Table 3 show that in general access to resources was better among refugees and civilians. To test *Greed (H1.1)*, I asked all respondents in the sample “How would you describe your ability to gain access to the following - good, somewhat limited, very limited, or not at all?” Items included food, clean water, housing/shelter, medical supplies, fuel, electricity, and communication technology (radio, TV, phone, internet). I developed a 10-item alpha scale of access to resources (where 0 is the highest). The access to resources index scales very well (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.88) indicating that individual responses to each item were highly inter-correlated i.e. people with access to one item tended to have access to others. In an environment where labor markets are disrupted, this access to resource index serves as a proxy for income, available savings, and general ability to acquire essential goods and services.

Table 2. Access to Resources

Mean	Civilian	Fighter
0-2	48.5%	10.59%
2-4	51%	89.4%

Table 3. Access to Resources

Mean	Refugee	Non Refugee
0-2	91.38%	18.7%
2-4	8.7%	81.3 %

Table 7 indicates results from OLS regression on access to resources with fixed

effects by location (Aleppo, Idlib, Kilis Turkey, and Gaziantep Turkey) uses robust standard errors. The first model (1.a) indicates no difference in access to resources between rebel fighters and Syrian civilians inside Syria. The second model (1.b) shows that refugees have much better access to resources in their camp than either civilians or active combatants inside Syria. Unless otherwise noted, all regression inferences include locational fixed effects and extended demographic controls (gender, age, education, prior employment), with robust standard errors in parenthesis. This allows us to reject hypothesis H1.1, which asserts that people are more likely to join if they receive selective incentives in the form of economic benefits from fighting with a rebel group.

Next I evaluate *Security (H1.4)* whether people derive security benefits from joining rebel groups that are not provided to civilians. I employ three proxies for security. The first is perceptual. I ask subjects “how safe do you feel in your current location today – very safe, somewhat safe, not very safe, or not safe at all?” Table 4 indicates that civilians and refugees in general feel much safer than active combatants and are less exposed to violence (Table 5). Table 6 Model 2.a and 2.b indicate that rebel fighters feel less safe than civilians. Refugees and ex-Fighters in Turkey feel most safe. All subjects inside Syria were also asked to indicate whether they had recently witnessed violence and whether they had nearly avoided injury. Compared to civilians, rebel fighters are more likely to be exposed to violent events and subject to injury (Models 2.c-d) so hypothesis H1.4 can be rejected.

Table 4. Safety

Safety	Active Fighter	Non fighter
Very safe	8.33%	33.9%
Somewhat safe	33.33%	26.55%
Not very safe	47.22%	32.20%
Not safe at all	11.11%	7.34%

Table 5. Violence exposure

Saw Violence recently	Fighter	Civilian
Yes	76.4%	55.9%
No	23.6%	44.1%

Finally, I consider the possibility that rebel recruitment is affected by labor market *opportunity costs* (H1.5). Here I use education as a proxy for opportunity costs, with the assumption that more educated people are less likely to join rebel groups because of viable alternative opportunities for employment either inside Syria or abroad. However, as previously noted in the discussion on sampling, respondents are well-balanced by education (Table 6). In regression analysis, rebel fighters are not significantly less educated than civilians or refugees (Table 7 Model H3.a). Samples are also well-balanced on prior employment, indicating that FSA fighters, civilians, and refugees do not vary substantively in terms of prior employment histories. Those findings reject hypotheses H1.1, H1.4 and H1.5. Consistent with prior findings by Berman et. al. (2011), FSA rebel fighters, civilians, and refugees come from similar walks of life. Higher educated persons with marketable skills are apparently discounting opportunity costs when joining rebel forces.

Table 6. Education

Education	Fighter	Civilian
None	2.8%	10.4%
Primary	46.6%	41.3%
Secondary	47.6%	41.3%
Higher	2.8%	6.8%

Table 7. Selective Incentives

Hypotheses	FSA Fighters	Islamist Fighters	Civilians in Syria	Ex-FSA In Turkey	Refugees In Turkey	N
(1.a) Access to resources	-0.041 (0.155)	0.545*** (0.119)	2.499*** (0.0320)			175
(1.b) Access to resources	1.382*** (0.194)	0.807*** (0.051)	1.343*** (0.065)		3.767*** (0.065)	234

(2.a) Safety in current location	-0.055 (0.075)	0.590*** (0.221)	2.017*** (0.334)			173
(2.b) Safety in current location	1.142*** (0.0702)	0.479*** (0.0326)	1.082*** (0.141)	0.625*** (0.037)	3.184*** (0.126)	265
(2.c) Saw violence recently	1.021** (0.410)	1.417** (0.709)	1.744* (1.059)			175
(2.d) Nearly injured recently	0.885** (0.375)	1.564*** (0.445)	-0.497 (0.970)			175
(3.a) Education	0.170 (0.121)	-0.0504 (0.129)	0.233* (0.122)	-0.333** (0.148)	2.433*** (0.093)	296
(3.b) Prior employment	0.098 (0.071)	0.046 (0.079)	0.073 (0.078)	0.133** (0.065)	0.767*** (.055)	297

NOTE: models include locational fixed effects and extended controls for gender, age, education, prior employment, robust standard errors in parentheses. Refugees are the constant term in Models 1.b, 2.b, 3. Civilians in Syria are the constant term for other models. Models 2.c-d estimated with Logit. All other models are OLS.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Social Sanctioning Hypotheses

First, I consider the role of social sanctioning in driving individuals to become combatants, to stay and/or leave the country. As a proxy for social pressures, I use social distance to measure attachment to one's community. My reasoning here is that people who feel more socially distant from others in their immediate surroundings would be less susceptible to sanctioning pressures. To examine the impact of *ties to the community* and test hypothesis H1.2, I ask all respondents "In general, how close do you feel to other people in your community/home in Syria – very close, somewhat close, not very close, not close at all?" (Table 9). Table 10 Models 4.a-b provide OLS regression results on social distance responses and reveal some indirect evidence in support of social sanctioning pressure (H1.2). Compared to rebel fighters and civilian refugees (Model 4a), refugees feel less close to members of their community and appear to have voted with their feet. However, excluding refugees (Model 4b) rebel fighters are indistinguishable from civilians in their communities on social distance. Hence, social sanctioning may help understand motivations to stay vs. leave, but not necessarily whether to fight. This allows me to reject hypothesis H1.2, that says that people who feel closer to their communities are more likely to remain in place and join

rebel groups than people who are more socially distant, who are more likely to flee.

Table 8. Ties to Community

Feeling towards		Very Close	Somewhat Close	Not very close	Not close at all
Neighbors	Fighters	77%	19%	3%	1%
	Civilians	68%	25%	6%	1%
	Refugees	58%	27%	5%	10%
Town	Fighters	63%	18%	15%	5%
	Civilians	56%	25%	13%	6%
	Refugees	30%	30%	25%	15%
Province	Fighters	50%	21%	19%	9%
	Civilians	49%	24%	20%	7%
	Refugees	35%	30%	25%	10%
Country	Fighters	42%	20%	21%	17%
	Civilians	44%	18%	21%	18%
	Refugees	45%	23%	27%	5%

Next, I examine whether people with stronger social engagement in their communities are more likely to join rebel groups and stay in Syria than people who are less *socially engaged* (H1.3). Given that Syria was an authoritarian regime with limited opportunity for free political association, I consider the role of religious engagement. Hence, religious communities could be an important form of social sanctioning pressure, either at the community level or more broadly. I have noted that fighters do not have greater access to communication technology than civilians in the sample, so fighters are not necessarily more susceptible to pressures from afar. Also, because the war has greatly disrupted community life, mosque attendance is an effective proxy for religious engagement. In addition, fighters may be unable to formally attend mosque services due to their deployments.

Therefore, I rely on self-reported religiosity as a proxy for religious engagement. The rationale here is that individuals who purport stronger religious ties are more likely to have attended mosque services in the past and more likely to be in touch with those who could exert pressure on them to join combatant groups or to stay in Syria. I asked subjects “In general, how important are your religious beliefs to you in your daily life – very important,

somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?” and “Since the war started do you think you have become more religious, less religious, or are about the same?” Table 8 shows that fighters are slightly more religious than civilians and that both groups became more religious during the war (Table 10).

Models 5a-5b indicate that FSA rebel fighters are not self-reportedly more religious or have become more religious since the war began compared to Syrian civilians and refugees. In contrast, Islamists identify as strongly religious and their faith appears to have intensified since the start of the conflict.

Table 9. Importance of Religion

Religion	FSA Fighter	Civilian
Very important	44.2%	39.1%
Somewhat important	31.1%	30.4%
Somewhat unimportant	19.6%	21.1%
Not at all important	4.9%	9.2%

Table 10. Change in Religiosity

Religiosity	FSA Fighter	Civilian
More religious	37.7%	45.1%
Less religious	8.2%	9.2%
About the same	54.1%	45.6%

In summary, there is little evidence that social and religious sanctioning pressures are driving civilians to join the Free Syrian Army, but they could play a greater role for Islamists. Sanctioning pressures, however, may also help explain refugee flight. I find that refugees are the most socially distant from their home communities in Syria compared to the others who stay behind. Overall, there is stronger evidence for social sanctioning pressure (H1.3) than selective incentives to join rebel groups, stay behind, or flee abroad. This allows us to reject hypotheses H1.1

Table 11. Social Sanctioning Hypotheses

Hypotheses	FSA Fighters	Islamist Fighters	Civilians in Syria	Ex-FSA In Turkey	Refugees In Turkey	N
(4.a) Social distance in community	0.791*** (0.265)	0.817*** (0.027)	0.610*** (0.135)	0.424*** (0.032)	2.406*** (0.091)	282
(4.b) Social distance in community	-0.192 (0.183)	-0.168 (0.229)	1.670*** (0.320)			173
(5.a) Importance of Religion	-0.303 (0.188)	0.476*** (0.028)	0.799*** (0.226)	0.301*** (0.033)	3.617*** (0.121)	283
(5.b) More religious since war began?	-0.147 (0.094)	0.260*** (0.020)	-0.183 (0.174)	0.0680** (0.030)	1.801*** (0.201)	284

NOTE: models include locational fixed effects and extended controls for gender, age, education, prior employment, robust standard errors in parentheses. Refugees are the constant term in Models 4-5.

Civilians in Syria are the constant term for other models. All models are OLS.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Social Identity and “Pleasure in Agency”

First, I explore whether people who fight and people who stay in combat zones really represent one big community. Social identity theory tells us that people seek out meaningful group identities (Tajfel and Turner 1979). I examine *Group Bonding* (H1.6), which asserts that people who feel close to one another and to rebel groups are more likely to stay in Syria and join up with rebel groups. To test this hypothesis, I use attitudinal as well as experimental behavioral data to evaluate whether people in combat zones coalesce into a common community. My reasoning is that if a desire for social cohesion is driving people to stay, then people in combat zones (both rebel fighters and civilians) should have stronger bonds with one another than refugee communities abroad. In general, fighters feel more close to other moderate fighters and Islamists, but not to foreign fighters (Table 12, 13 and 14).

In Table 15 below I analyze a range of social distance instruments. I ask “How close do you feel to the following people [in your current location, FSA fighters, Islamist fighters, and foreign fighters]?”, where responses range from 1 = not close at all to 4 = very close. First, I compare how close refugees feel to people in their camp compared to civilians and

combatants in their current location (Model 6.a). FSA combatants are not any more close-knit than refugee communities of Syria, but Islamists and civilians appear to have stronger bonds with people in their immediate vicinity. Models 6.b-f reveal that civilians feel more distant toward both the Free Syrian Army and Islamist fighter groups, undermining the logic that they all hang together. For example, less than 10% of civilians regard extreme Islamist groups like ISIS favorably.

Table 12. Group Bonding

Close to FSA	Fighters	Civilians
Very Close	53.7%	46.8%
Somewhat Close	25.9%	28.1%
Not Very Close	19.4%	21.8%
Not Close at all	0.9%	3.1%

Table 13. Group Bonding

Close to Islamists	Fighters	Civilians
Very Close	48.3%	37.5%
Somewhat Close	30%	29.1%
Not Very Close	11.6%	19.7%
Not Close at all	10%	13.5%

Table 14. Group Bonding

Close to Foreign Fighters	Fighters	Civilians
Very Close	28%	28.6%
Somewhat Close	14%	11.8%
Not Very Close	16%	21.9%
Not Close at all	42%	37.6%

In Models 6.f-g, I examine group cohesion behaviorally using dictator games. When asked to allocate a sum of 0-500 Syrian Pounds (approximately \$5) between themselves and

another person in their current location, everyone was remarkably altruistic, transferring almost all their endowment to the other person (6.f). In contrast, Syrian civilians were less generous when they are informed that the recipient would be a soldier fighting for the FSA (6.g). In general, differences between what civilians give compared to fighters and refugees are extremely marginal in both experiments. I interpret these results to mean that if one were seeking to bond with others, group bonding inside a refugee camp may be as strong as group bonding within a combat zone. One does not necessarily give up a sense of community by going abroad, especially if communities are essentially recreated inside camps. Infighting between the FSA and Islamists with civilians caught in the crossfire is also not indicative of a strong, close-knit-rebel community. Those results allow me to reject hypothesis H1.6 (People who feel close to one another and to rebel groups are more likely to remain in a conflict zone and join rebel groups. People with little group attachments are likely to flee.)

Table 15. Social Identity and Group Cohesion

Hypotheses	FSA Fighters	Islamist Fighters	Civilians in Syria	Ex-FSA In Turkey	Refugees In Turkey	N
(6.a) Close to people in current location	0.425 (0.32)	0.511*** (0.145)	0.281** (0.109)		3.220*** (0.220)	241
(6.b) Close to FSA	0.106 (0.0799)	0.262*** (0.0458)	0.604*** (0.160)	0.0219 (0.0601)	3.181*** (0.323)	279
(6.c) Close to Islamist groups	0.190* (0.111)	1.019*** (0.0365)	0.378*** (0.0280)	0.346*** (0.0494)	3.012*** (0.115)	279

(6.d) Close to foreign fighters	0.153 (0.154)	0.237*** (0.0409)	0.287*** (0.00884)	2.713*** (0.288)	218
(6.e) Close to ISIS	0.468*** (0.00857)	0.301*** (0.00740)	0.305*** (0.0192)	1.133*** (0.230)	158
(6.f) Altruism toward locals	6.548 (21.47)	11.15** (4.683)		420.7*** (12.57)	187
(6.g) Altruism toward FSA	102.7 (98.90)	30.83* (16.86)	52.05*** (14.21)	306.8*** (60.35)	217

NOTE: models estimated by OLS regression with locational fixed effects, extended controls for gender, age, education, prior employment, robust standard errors in parentheses. Refugees are the constant term.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Next I consider the *Pleasure in Agency (H1.7)* hypothesis. To test this hypothesis, I first look to people's emotional states. I examine whether people in combat zones have elevated positive and/or negative affect as measured by a modified PANAS-X scale. I reason that if people either feel intense pleasure in agency or lack thereof, it could manifest through emotional responses to violence. At the beginning of the survey, subjects are read a list of emotions people sometimes feel, and then asked to indicate on a five point scale how often they have felt those emotions recently. (Please see appendix for descriptive statistics). The scale ranges from 1 = very slightly or not at all to 5 = extremely. Table 4 reports regression analysis on responses to the battery of emotional categories. On the negative affect side (Models 7.a-e), refugees appear most emotionally affected, while fighters the least. Refugees express stronger feelings of fear, guilt, sadness, and fatigue compared to rebel fighters and civilians inside Syria. Islamists, in contrast, report the least feelings of fear, guilt, and fatigue, but also the most anger and hostility of the subsamples. On the positive side (Models 7.f-h), Islamists again stand out as being most self-assured, but they do not report greater feelings of happiness (joviality) compared to others. Hence, judging by the emotional state of our respondents at the time of the interview, refugees appear to be most in despair, but rebel fighters and civilians could not be characterized as especially happy either. Islamists are apparently the most fearless, angry, and self-assured, but it is unclear that they feel genuine pleasure in what they are doing.

I consider the extent to which different respondents feel they have control over their lives. I reason that refugees should feel less empowered than rebel combatants and Syrian civilians if staying in a combat zone and fighting gives people a greater sense of control over

their lives. To evaluate loss of agency, subjects are asked whether they agree with a series of statements. Responses are scaled where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree. In Table 20 below, evidence of agency loss is mixed. On one hand, refugees feel the most trapped in their current location, with no other options (Model 8.a). However, rebel fighters and civilians are more likely to feel that they have no control over their lives (Model 8.b). Subjects are generally more worried than optimistic about their future (Models 8.c-d), with refugees being the most worried, and Islamists the least. Excluding refugees, rebel fighters seem to feel more empowered than civilians in the combat zone. Overall, I find that Wood's (2003) "pleasure in agency" theory (H1.7) seems more applicable to Islamists than to FSA rebels and civilians in the conflict.

Table 16. Emotions and Pleasure in Agency

Hypotheses	FSA Fighters	Islamist Fighters	Civilians in Syria	Ex-FSA In Turkey	Refugees In Turkey	N
(7.a) Fear	-0.314*	0.810***	0.310***	-0.215*	3.392***	282
	(0.172)	(0.109)	(0.115)	(0.118)	(0.500)	

(7.b) Hostility	-0.0811 (0.139)	0.695*** (0.121)	0.0276 (0.227)	-0.104 (0.121)	3.176*** (0.287)	282
(7.c) Sadness	1.000*** (0.0915)	0.535*** (0.0206)	1.059*** (0.192)	0.906*** (0.0258)	4.209*** (0.245)	284
(7.d) Guilt	0.128*** (0.0406)	1.052*** (0.0265)	-0.102 (0.0756)	0.407*** (0.0388)	3.218*** (0.261)	284
(7.e) Fatigue	-0.215* (0.111)	0.876*** (0.0733)	0.512*** (0.0467)	0.319*** (0.0636)	3.474*** (0.241)	283
Emotional Responses to Violence (Basic Positive Affect)						
(7.f) Self-Assurance	0.153 (0.209)	0.703*** (0.0380)	0.177 (0.141)	-0.0699 (0.0551)	2.848*** (0.127)	281
(7.g) Attentiveness	-0.101 (0.0770)	0.117*** (0.0261)	0.391*** (0.0373)	-0.0361 (0.0322)	2.129*** (0.158)	280
(7.h) Joviality	-0.0983 (0.238)	0.219*** (0.0674)	0.210** (0.0884)	-0.0773 (0.0792)	2.096*** (0.354)	283
Perceptions of Agency (agreement with following statements)						
(8.a) I feel I have no other option but to stay here	1.120*** (0.0110)		0.644*** (0.0149)	0.465*** (0.115)	3.885*** (0.478)	232
(8.b) I feel I have no influence over the direction of my life	0.657*** (0.126)	0.0672 (0.139)	0.480*** (0.127)	0.0770 (0.157)	3.476*** (0.338)	281
(8.c) I am very optimistic about my future	0.597*** (0.189)	0.459*** (0.0422)	0.375** (0.165)	0.208*** (0.0441)	1.748*** (0.312)	282
(8.d) I am very worried about my future	0.0735 (0.213)	0.890*** (0.0665)	0.103 (0.177)	0.222** (0.0960)	3.644*** (0.578)	283

NOTE: models estimated by OLS regression with locational fixed effects, extended controls for gender, age, education, prior employment, robust standard errors in parentheses. Refugees are the constant term.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Risk Tolerance

Next I consider risk tolerance and risk avoidance attitudes and behavior. In Table 17, subjects are asked to gauge their own *risk tolerance* (HI.8). I ask subjects the extent to which they agree with the statements “I am not afraid to take risks” and “I avoid risks whenever

possible”. Responses range from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. In models 9.a-b, people in combat zones claim to be more risk tolerant than refugees in Turkey. This is interesting given that the decision to flee Syria could also carry certain risks given the dangers inherent in travel. I decided to develop behavioral measures of risk via two risk games. The first game employs non-linear expected values so that extreme risk taking is not rational given the pay-off options. The second game is a standard risk game with linearly increasing expected values. Behaviorally, there are no significant differences between soldiers, civilians, and refugees in terms of risk in both games, with the exception of ex-FSA fighters who appear most risk averse (Models 9.c-d). Active rebel fighters claim higher risk tolerance, but they do not show it behaviorally. As for *risk and conflict (H1.9)*, I examine whether proximity to violence is associated with risk tolerance. I compare risk behavior among all respondents in Aleppo (extremely dangerous) to Idlib Province (less dangerous) to the Turkish refugee camp in Kilis and city of Gaziantep (relatively safe). I observe that people in Aleppo (civilians and combatants) are behaviorally more risk tolerant than similar civilians and combatants in Idlib. Those findings support hypotheses H1.8 and H1.9

Figure 7. Risk Tolerance

Kernel Density Plots of Risk Tolerance Inside Syria

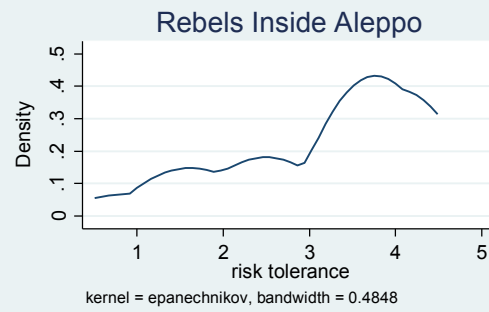
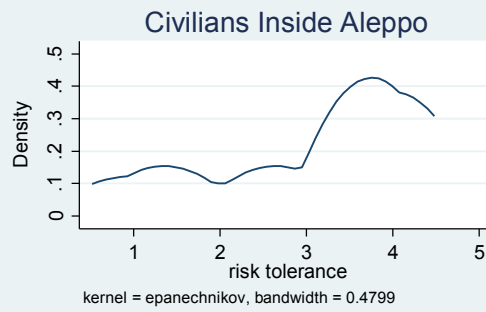
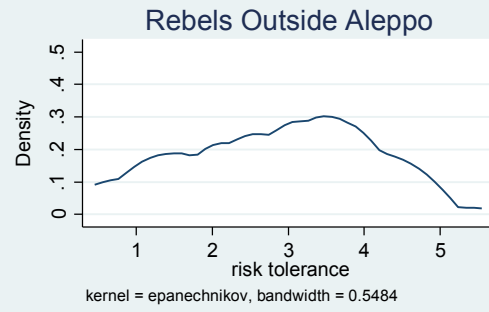
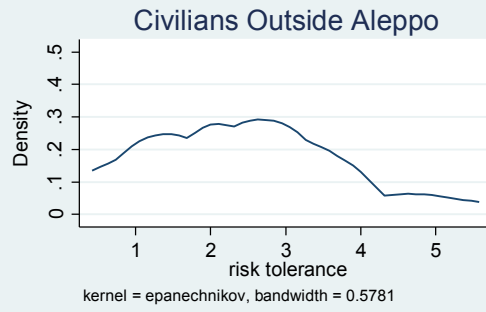


Table 17. Risk Tolerance

DV	(9.a) I am not afraid to take risks	(9.b) I avoid risks Whenever possible	(9.c) Risk Game 1	(9.d) Risk Game 2	(10.a) Risk Game 1	(10.b) Risk Game 2
FSA	0.577*** (0.133)	0.301*** (0.0218)	0.609 (0.507)	0.0350 (0.221)		
Fighters	0.963*** (0.0785)	0.629*** (0.0276)				
Islamist						
Fighters	0.0742*** (0.0232)	0.318 (0.243)	0.444 (0.546)	0.250 (0.239)		
Civilians	0.170* (0.0920)	0.381*** (0.0388)	0.0419 (0.121)	0.810*** (0.0199)		
Ex-FSA						
In Turkey						
Aleppo					1.298*** (0.319)	0.940*** (0.310)
Idlib					0.212 (0.306)	0.375 (0.309)
Refugee camp					0.155 (0.326)	0.853*** (0.299)
Constant	1.579*** (0.221)	2.873*** (0.315)	2.965*** (0.477)	4.047*** (0.296)	3.185*** (0.472)	3.352*** (0.462)
Constant Group	Refugees In Turkey	Refugees In Turkey	Refugees In Turkey	Refugees In Turkey	Ex-FSA in Turkey	Ex-FSA in Turkey
N	282	283	218	214	218	214

NOTE: models estimated by OLS regression with locational fixed effects, extended controls for gender, age, education, prior employment, robust standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Grievance

I evaluate individual-level grievance motivations based on a range of victimization indicators (H1.10)²⁵. In Table 23 below, I present the average marginal effects from logit models of self-reported victimization. First, I begin with victimization in the form of personal injury and property destruction. Over half the sample reported experiencing personal injury and nearly one-third of our sample indicated some form of property destruction. In Table 23 I find that differences in personal injury experiences are not significant across groups. However, one possibility is that I am selecting only people with minor injuries in the sample, as those with more serious injuries remain in hospitals or lack the capacity to conduct interviews. People inside the combat zone (FSA, Islamists, and civilians) are less likely to have suffered property damage and destruction than those who are displaced in Turkey (civilian refugees and ex-fighters). Rather than joining the fight, people who lose their homes and business are more likely to flee abroad.

Next, I examine the possible effects of victimization by loss of individual family members and close friends. Over two-thirds of the sample report that family members and close friends have been injured, killed, or are missing since the war began. However, Table 30 shows that Islamist fighters have experienced more victimization of family and friends compared to others. Of course, people who remain in combat zones could experience more victimization, so it is an effect of the decision to remain in a combat zone rather than a cause. However, time serving with rebel groups is not a significant predictor of victimization in the sample. In general, personal grievances proxied by victimization do not help distinguish between FSA rebels, civilians, and refugees, who experience comparable losses of family and friends. Those results support hypothesis H1.10 that victimization by violence increases the likelihood of joining rebel groups and/or fleeing violence. Non-victims are most likely to remain in place, but not join rebel groups.

²⁵ For descriptive statistic on victimization see appendix

I now turn to questions of collective parochial grievances based on sectarianism (H1.11 and H1.12). I hypothesized that combatants should have stronger in-group bonds (H1.11) and greater out-group aversions (H1.12) if parochial grievances are present. I first consider in-group ties (H1.11). Using social distance as another proxy for sectarianism, I ask how close people feel to other Sunni Muslims in Syria. In general, the survey indicates strong in-group sectarianism in the sample (Table 18 and Table 19). Over half the sample indicate that they feel “very close” to Sunni Muslims, while less than 1% feel “not close at all”. Examining subgroup variation in Table 23, I find that Islamists have strongest ties to other members of their religious in-group. However, differences among FSA rebels, the ex-FSA, civilians and refugees are negligible. Therefore, I only find support for the H1.11 hypothesis with respect to Islamist rebel fighters.

I then examine out-group aversions, focusing on the Alawite minority, who are often characterized as supporters of the Assad regime. I ask subjects how close they feel to Alawites in Syria. Again, I find strong sectarianism in survey responses. Less than 3% feel “very close” to Alawites in Syria, while over half (44%) feel “not close at all” (Table 19). Examining the models in Table 23, civilians are the least sectarian among the subgroups, while Islamist fighters are the most. FSA fighters, by contrast, are not distinctively out-group averse. As a result, H1.12 hypothesis is also supported only in respect to Islamist rebel fighters.

I now examine the extent to which combatants express grievances consistent with Weinstein’s (2006) activist rebellion conceptual framework. First, I ask all combatants to indicate why they joined the insurgency. Two main reasons given were “because Assad must be defeated” and “to take revenge against Assad’s forces”, which both imply that regime-based grievances are driving them to fight. Here, I assess whether such grievances are born out in comparison to non-combatants and whether stated political grievances might actually mask underlying sectarian and personal grievances at work.

First, I inquire whether respondents draw distinctions between Alawites in general and vilification of the Assad regime. Using measures of social distance, I find that people feel more distant to supporters of the Assad regime than to Alawites in the survey (76% vs. 44% respectively). I then compare views of the Assad regime across subgroups in our sample. In

Table 23, Islamists are most opposed to the Assad regime. In addition, I find that vilification of the Assad regime does not intensify with time spent fighting inside a rebel group, such that regime-based grievances are not simply a socialization effect.

If grievances are primarily directed at the Assad regime, I hypothesize that rebel fighters will be far more committed to a strategy of military victory and less willing to negotiate for peace with Assad's forces compared to civilians and refugees. In Table 23 I confirm that rebel fighters are more likely than civilians to believe that the Assad regime should be defeated no matter the costs. Conversely, civilians and refugees are more likely to support an immediate ceasefire to negotiate for peace.

I also find that rebel fighters are less willing to trade justice for peace. I ask respondents whether everyone in the Assad regime should be held accountable for war crimes or only the top leadership. Rebel fighters are far more committed to holding everyone linked to the Assad regime accountable for crimes committed during the war. In contrast, refugees and civilians are more willing to support a general amnesty in the interests of peace, undercutting the notion that they are as heavily aggrieved as rebel fighters. Hence, I also find strong support for the *activist* rebellion framework.

Finally, I consider inter-correlation between political and other grievances and time-effects in the supplementary appendix. First, most items are not well-correlated. It appears that political, sectarian, and personal victimization variables are capturing different aspects of grievance. Also, when I control for how long fighters have been actively fighting, how long refugees have been living in camps, and how long civilians have been living in their current locations, I find the effects of time are negligible or not significant for fighters and civilians. This helps reduce concerns that my observations of political grievances are primarily endogenous to socialization effects of fighting, staying, and leaving - mere rationalizations after the fact. The only notable socialization effect I found was that refugees have increased feelings of group solidarity the longer they spend in camps. Those results further support hypothesis H1.10 - Victimization by violence increases the likelihood of joining rebel groups and/or fleeing violence. Non-victims are most likely to remain in place, but not join rebel groups.

Table 18. Ties to Sunni Muslims

Sunni Muslims	FSA Fighters	Civilians
Vera Close	50%	22.2%
Somewhat Close	38.3%	45.6%
Not Very Close	11.6%	30.8%
Not Close at All		1.2%

Table 19. Ties to Alawites

Alawites	FSA Fighters	Civilians
Vera Close	3%	6.1%
Somewhat Close	22.0%	20.9%
Not Very Close	30.5%	29.6%
Not Close at All	44.0%	43.2%

Table 20. Ties to Assad Supporters

Close to Assad Supporters	FSA Fighters	Civilians
Vera Close		
Somewhat Close	3.5%	7.4%
Not Very Close	19.6%	23.4%
Not Close at All	76.7%	69.1%

Table 21. Fighting until Victory

Fight Until Victory	FSA Fighters	Civilians
Strongly Agree	70%	41.6%
Somewhat Agree	23.3%	16.6%
Somewhat Disagree	5%	16.6%
Strongly Disagree	1.6%	25%

Table 22. Bargaining for Peace

Bargain for Peace	FSA Fighters	Civilians
Strongly Agree	29.3%	11.2%
Somewhat Agree	10.3%	20%
Somewhat Disagree	20.6%	31.2%
Strongly Disagree	39.6%	37.5%

Table 23. Grievances and Civil War Participation (Average Marginal Effects)

Model	(1) Fighters	(2) Refugees	(3)				N
			FSA	Islamists	Ex-FSA	Civilians	
Personally injured (1.1)	0.01 (0.06)	0.02 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	0.08** (0.04)	0.07 (0.05)	284
Home destroyed (1.2)	0.27*** (0.05)	0.18*** (0.05)	0.10** (0.05)	0.17*** (0.04)	0.13*** (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	284
Family killed (1.3)	0.08 (0.06)	0.19*** (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.12*** (0.04)	0.14*** (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	284
Friends killed (1.4)	0.38 (0.28)	0.19*** (0.06)	0.05 (0.05)	0.13*** (0.04)	0.12*** (0.04)	0.01 (0.06)	284
Collective Grievances							
Close to Sunni Muslims (2.1)	0.12*** (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	0.06 (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)	0.33*** (0.08)	278
Close to Alawites (2.2)	0.09** (0.04)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.12 (0.18)	0.27*** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.03)	0.53*** (0.18)	278
Political Grievances							
Close to Assad Supporters (3.1)	0.10 (0.07)	0.08 (0.05)	0.03 (0.13)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.02)	0.49*** (0.16)	275

Fight until Victory (3.2)	0.20*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.04)	0.28*** (0.03)	0.45*** (0.14)	0.44*** (0.13)	282
Bargain for Peace (3.3)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.18*** (0.04)	0.29*** (0.04)	0.04 (0.05)	0.25*** (0.06)	279
Accountable for crimes (3.4)	0.21*** (0.07)	0.24*** (0.09)	0.04 (0.06)	0.18*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.04)	0.15* (0.08)	282

Average Marginal Effect with discrete variables treated as factorials. For Model 1 and 2, AME is for 1 unit increase in key IV. For Model 3, AME is for an increase from the lowest level to highest level (i.e. not close at all to very close, strongly disagree to strongly agree). See Appendix Table 1 for a description of variable coding.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Band of brothers or coworkers?

Next, I am looking at *Organizational Qualities*, *Individual Benefits*, *Ideology* and *Prestige* hypotheses about how fighters were choosing particular groups to join. See the next chapter for more extended hypotheses testing using qualitative methodology (small sample size does not allow me to conduct statistical analyses).

In the first year of the war, everyone was mobilized for the same goal; there were no organizational differences in groups, other than their geographical locations, and no resources available. Since at that time location was the only information prospective fighters had about the brigades they were choosing from, they joined neighborhood groups with people they knew. Although it was naturally a very noisy signal about the quality of the group and its fighting capabilities, it was the only one available at the time, so fighters chose groups based on it.

In addition, groups were financially stable at that time. In 2011, weapons and ammunition were also not a problem in Syria. Weapons had been available since the Iraq War in 2003, government army defectors usually brought their own weapons with them, and traditionally, civilians had small arms, mostly pistols, at home; many also had enough savings

to buy light weapons—Kalashnikov rifles, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and ammunition. Logistically, it was not difficult to get additional weapons if needed, since from weapons dealers selling old weapons were everywhere and would sell them to anyone at the very beginning. While fighters manned their positions, their family members and other civilians took the role of “combat support units,” by, for example, providing food for the brigades. They cooked at home and children would bring prepared food to the frontlines, along with portable ovens for reheating meals and brewing fresh coffee.²⁶ Fighters were also based in their own neighborhoods, so they not only went home to sleep, but also for anything else they needed like resting, taking a shower, or surfing the Internet. Public services such as hospitals were normally functioning as well, and there were not many wounded so there was no need for private medical care. Therefore, the role of the brigade as an organization necessary for facilitating logistics and providing weapons was very limited at that time.

While in previous generations of civil wars fighters usually needed the infrastructure and organization of a group to get the necessary essentials for a “civil war start-up” from the very onset of the war, this was not the case in Syria. Like the beginning of the Internet start-up boom, when the new “industry” appeared, everyone used their own savings to buy necessities (hardware and office supplies) and worked from “their parents’ basement.” Two years into the war, the role of armed groups completely changed - their role as organizations facilitating fighting significantly increased.

As war gets more intense and the frontline becomes more active, combat operations become more sophisticated. Without professional leadership, armed groups could not function as organizations and be successful in combat; and without being able to rely on each other, fighters could not perform to their best abilities on the front line.

The first urgent issues that brigades faced with the war progressing were logistics and combat organization. With the regime operating at full capability, insurgents had to provide an adequate response. Targets became more sophisticated. In the beginning, fighters had to only ensure safety in their own neighborhoods, but as the war continued, they had to attack enemy checkpoints and even well-guarded military bases. To defend against the regime’s airplanes and tanks, rebels needed expensive and hard-to-get anti-tank weapons

²⁶ During the battle of Aleppo, that started on Ramadan of 2012, in addition to food, civilians were even bringing fighters sweets for the iftar.

systems. In Hama, one interviewed fighter recalled how, “all of a sudden everything changed—we found ourselves fighting a real war with a professional and well-equipped enemy, and we were absolutely not prepared for it.”

In addition, after pro-Assad forces started attacking the FSA and arresting its members, small “neighborhood” groups had to change their positions and relocate away from their “home” areas, losing the logistical advantages of being closer to home and the resources therein, which increased their everyday expenses even further. After moving to the countryside, away from regime-controlled territories, groups needed cars to move around, so they also needed a constant supply of gas. Away from their communities, they could not always rely on civilians in other areas for basics such as food.

This situation was responsible for the second urgent problem armed groups faced. The costs of fighting skyrocketed, and at that point, brigades began to need constant income to cover its everyday expenses. In addition, fighters had to be provided with a salary to be able to support themselves and their families. Brigades’ resources became short for several related reasons: fighters were running out of their own savings; civilian jobs in the war-torn country started to disappear, so fighters could not rely on the income of their family members anymore; and food became scarcer and as a result more expensive.²⁷ Consumer good manufacturing declined during the war, so the majority of goods had to be imported. High inflation made almost everything unaffordable for average people.²⁸ Meanwhile, the brigades’ everyday expenses kept increasing—they needed increasingly sophisticated and expensive weapons to fight the enemy, fighters were getting wounded and required expensive medical treatment, and even ammunition was in short supply.²⁹ Thus, armed groups also had to urgently address the funding situation, and for that the group had to have professionals who could solve the funding problem and organize the group’s day-to-day operations. (More on the organizational and leadership problems armed groups faced in following chapters)

²⁷ Before the war, one dollar was equivalent to 50 Syrian lira; three years into the war, one dollar bought 250 lira.

²⁸ Before the war, 1 egg cost 7 lira and bottle of Coca-Cola 25 lira. Three years after the beginning of the war, the prices were 27 lira and 100 lira respectively.

²⁹ Before the war a bullet cost 25 lira; 3 years into the conflict bullets cost 200 lira.

At the same time, prospective fighters learned more about different armed groups fighting together, and they started realizing the gap between effective and ineffective brigades. At the beginning of the conflict, the only information available to fighters which helped them decide which group to join was their geographic location, but with the war progressing more “signals” about the brigades’ qualities and fighting capabilities become available. With experience, prospective fighters learn what signals and information about groups they need to look for.

This was the point when fighters started perceiving brigades as institutions and increasingly evaluating all the available information about a particular group before considering joining it. They began asking themselves: Which group will help me achieve my goals the most and will utilize my skills and sacrifice the best? And in what group will I feel more comfortable achieving my goal?

When prospective employees in the civilian world evaluate companies they are interested in working for, they look at things like adequate compensation alongside other material benefits, and they also value non-material issues such as a company's brand, employee development (i.e. training), medical benefits, and group cohesion, among others. Rebel groups are no different. When choosing a particular brigade to join, a prospective fighter also looks for those qualities. For a civilian, a poor choice will cost him the time and effort involved in changing jobs, whereas a fighter’s poor choice could cost him his life. So for a fighter this choice is much more crucial, and mistakes are much more costly.

When asked why they chose a particular group to fight with, the majority of fighters—both members of moderate and Islamist groups—answered that they based their decision on two things. First, they wanted to ensure that the group's goals matched their own goals. The second part of their decision was based on the quality of the group as an organization: 74 percent of fighters mentioned that the most important reason they joined a particular brigade was that if something happened to them the group would take care of their family; 61 percent said that they felt close to the people in their group; 59 percent said that their friends had joined it; and 58 percent said that they joined because of the particular group’s leadership. Even among members of Islamist groups, the reason that “it is the only group that truly fights for Islam” is second least important, while the least important one was

the share of power that the groups currently held.

Figure 8. Reasons for not joining other groups



As the war progressed, the gap between competent and incompetent groups widened, and because fighters not only discuss each other's units, but also often conduct joint operations, information about the organization, quality of leadership, and resources of different brigades very quickly becomes common knowledge on the front lines.³⁰ That causes new fighters to more deliberately choose their brigades, and even causes active fighters to switch brigades. By 2015, four years into the conflict, it was not uncommon for fighters to have changed brigades three or four times since the beginning of the war.

This re-matching of fighters and brigades takes place in a complete information market and causes fighters who are still determined to fight for the goal but are disappointed in the groups they were fighting for to shop for brigades. These fighters will reevaluate their choice of brigade and possibly switch to another brigade fighting for the same goal, but one that functions better as an institution (with, for example, more resources, better leadership, and better teamwork). Just like in any other industry, when an individual is not satisfied with

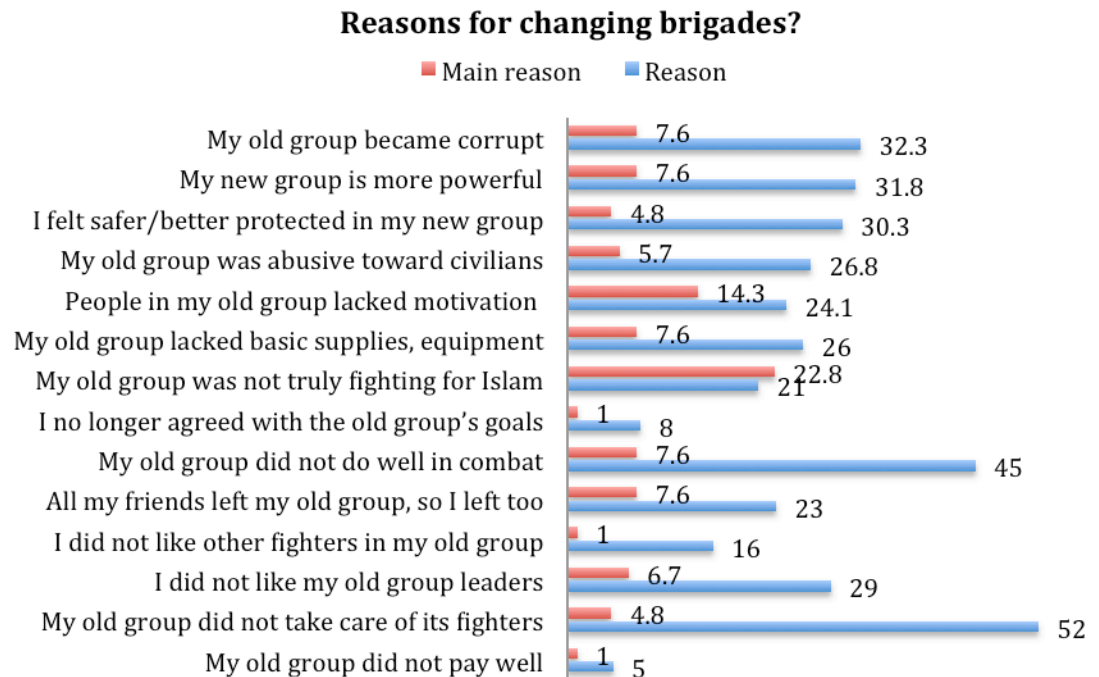
³⁰ Because brigades in Syria are not large enough to conduct major operations alone or to control large territories if they win in combat, they coordinate with other brigades and enter combat together.

the salary and work environment, no matter how much he likes what he does, he will soon start looking for a better job (although most probably in the same field).

According to the results of the survey, the main reasons for fighters to switch between brigades were related to the brigades as organizations. For example, the majority of fighters mentioned that they changed groups because their old group did not take care of its fighters (52 percent); 45 percent of fighters thought that their initial group did not do well in combat (and as a result was not utilizing fighters' skills properly); 32 percent mentioned that their old group became too corrupt; 32 percent thought that their new group was more powerful; and 31 percent felt that they were safer and better protected in the new group. Goal-related rather than institutional motivations were significantly less popular. Although 22 percent said that they changed groups mainly because only their new group “truly fights for Islam,” even this number is probably too high since it is very likely that the respondents assumed that this was “the answer they should give, taking into account their affiliation with the Islamist groups.” When the word “Islam” was not specifically mentioned and the answer was framed more generally as “I do not agree with my old group’s goals,” only 8 percent of fighters agreed with this statement.

As an additional question to check the importance of religion, when asked more generally about “abstract” others currently fighting in Syria, fighters confirmed that the majority of people in Syria were still fighting for democracy (85 percent) and to defeat Assad (73 percent), not to impose Sharia law and build an Islamic state. That further supports the idea that even fighters who switched from moderate to Islamist brigades did not switch because of ideology *per se*. Furthermore, in interviews with people who began fighting with the FSA and then switched to groups considered to be Islamist, almost all of them mentioned reasons which were not expressly religious: “My friends left my old group and I left with them,” “I didn’t like the people in my old group,” “My friend got injured, and they didn’t support him,” “I was with my old group (FSA) until I fought with Ahrar al Sham. I liked their way of treating fighters and I joined.”

Figure 9. Reasons for Changing Groups.



Thus, after a year of fighting, fighters seeking better situations started looking at brigades as organizations. They became more interested in how the group could provide for them, especially in terms of both individual benefit (basics such as food and salary) and combat organization (support such as logistics and ammunition). It is no secret for the groups themselves. Participants in the focus group recalled how “some fighters wanted to join our battalion, but our conditions are harsh. The brigade did not offer much for new fighters. We only provided training on heavy weapons such as tanks.” (Anonymous group, Deir ez-Zor Countryside, 122 members); “We used to get fighters constantly until the beginning of 2014. After that no one wanted to join since the battalion does not offer anything to the fighter, other than salary, food and cigarettes.” (Abbas group, 80 fighters); “There is no outside support so there haven’t been any new members.” (Sarayah Al-Naser group, 26 fighters). When most fighters were not satisfied with their groups, they tried to switch to better-

organized groups with the same general goal, which was not hard to do. Due to the nature of Syrian society, it is highly likely that a fighter knows someone (be it a relative or a neighbor) who is a member of the group he wants to switch to, so he just needs to contact him to ask whether they are taking new members.

This qualitative data sheds initial light on hypotheses about how people chose a particular group to join, but they will be tested more rigorously in the following chapter.

In particular, those observations support *Organizational Hypotheses*. For example there is support for the H2.1 Fighters prefer groups that are more effectively organized (less internal corruption); H2.2 When choosing a group to join, fighters prefer groups with the most qualified leadership; and H2.3 Fighters prefer groups that provide long term medical care for their members.

On the other hand, the *Ideological, Convenience, and Prestige* hypotheses are rejected, especially H 2.4 Fighters do not choose groups to fight with based on their social networks (friend and family); H2.5, fighters do not choose armed groups that are located in the geographic areas that they feel more connected to; and H2.8, fighters do not tend to join groups that are the most ideologically allied with their own opinions.

Also, when choosing a group to join, fighters look at the most prestigious one (H2.11), and group strength also does not play an important role in an individual's decision (H2.12)

In addition, the *Individual Incentive* Hypotheses are also rejected. Fighters do not choose a group to fight with based on the individual material benefits the group offers to their members (H2.6); and a fighter does not look at where he is the most likely to raise in rank and increase his personal power when choosing a group to join (H2.7)

Conclusion

The majority of fighters join armed conflicts because they want to achieve a non-material goal which can be achieved only through fighting. In the case of Syria, fighters'

primary motivation was revenge against Assad for the crimes that he committed against Syrian people, and in some cases, against them personally.

Even if a brigade makes the slightest deviation from their main goal, it causes problems between fighters and their leadership. Many fighters left their groups as soon as they suspected that their leadership changed affiliation or preferences, as has happened in other civil wars (Oppenheim et al 2005). Members of the Abbas brigade remember that their main problem with their commander was his relationship with ISIS, and members from another brigade from the Deir ez-Zor countryside said that the main disagreement they had was that their commander had “pledged allegiance to ISIS without the knowledge of the fighters.”³¹

The Assad regime was acutely aware of the rebel fighters' strong non-material motivation, which it strategically took advantage of. Their goal and emotions are so crucial for fighters that sometimes, they lose their capacity for rational decision-making in pursuing their goal. Sometimes even commanders have difficulty slowing down fighters for strategic reasons. Members of the Abu Ammarah Brigade remember that the biggest disagreement they had with their commander was that “the regime was advancing, and we all wanted to continue fighting, although we knew that we do not have enough ammunition. Our leaders had a hard time calming us down.”

While in this case the commander was thinking rationally and was able to stop his emotion-driven fighters, this is not always the case. In the Deir ez-Zor neighborhood of al-Djura, seven hundred people were killed in 2012 and many more were arrested in a three day span. Everyone who survived ran to the FSA headquarters and demanded weapons to go and fight Assad's army. There were only around one hundred assault rifles (Kalashnikovs) available on the base, so one hundred people were armed and rushed to attack the government forces. The regime was counting on precisely this reaction, and sat fully armed waiting to ambush those fighters. According to local activists, they killed as many as 60 percent of them.

³¹ Although both moderate groups and ISIS were fighting Assad, their main goals were different.

Personal benefits are secondary to the goal in the decision-making process of such not-for-profit fighters and become important only later in the war. Among the groups that are fighting for the goal, fighters evaluate brigades based on their qualities as institutions. Fighters seek out groups that will both do the most they can to help him fight for his chosen goal and also help him contribute most to the war. Salaries, for example, make it easier for a fighter to do his job, but they are also making him more effective in fighting for the goal, because he receives money from the group and does not need to spend time thinking how to provide for his family. Medical care that some groups provide to their members and the money that they pay to families left without a breadwinner also allow fighters to take more risks in combat and, as a result, inflict more enemy casualties.

Like civilian organizations, rebel groups differ in their internal organizational structure and financial health. With a developed market of armed groups like the one in Syria, fighters had the freedom to choose groups, and even switch between them if they think that their group is not good enough; there is always another group that is fighting for the same goal that is better as an institution and will be willing to admit them. If a fighter decides that he does not want to fight for the goal anymore, he quits and leaves. This occurs not when he is disappointed in the group, but when he is disappointed in the whole cause. In that case, merely switching groups will not solve the problem because they are fighting for the same goal in the same rebel block, so the fighters decide to quit.

Chapter 3 Demand Side - Armed Groups

In the previous chapter, I examined the fighters' side—the supply side—trying to understand their motivations for combat as well as their decision-making structure in conflict. This, however, is only one side of the story. In order to see the whole picture, the side of the armed groups—the demand side—must be considered as well, because they maintain their own goals and objectives. In his book, Shapiro (2013) sheds light on the complications terrorist groups face in their internal operations such as corruption and tactics, but only briefly touches on the human resource problem. In his book, he explores how armed groups try to fight internal corruption and develop unified military tactics. Although he discusses the problem that large armed groups experience with delegating tasks, he only briefly touches on groups' general recruitment and retention policies. In this chapter, I discuss the labor market from the armed group's perspective. What do armed groups want in terms of labor resources, how do they satisfy those demands, and what human resources problems do they face? Looking at this problem from the side of the armed group would increase the understanding of how armed groups try to affect individual fighters' decision making.

In this chapter, I am again testing hypotheses related to how fighters chose particular armed groups to join. To even further confirm results described in the previous chapter, I not only look armed groups' perspective, but also use different - qualitative methodology.

In addition, I test a new hypothesis - H3: Armed groups with more radical ideologies have more dedicated members.

Similar to a civilian organization or firm, the main goal of an armed group is to increase its share of power³². In particular, in line with Fjelde and Nilsson's (2012) argument, rebel groups have two overall goals: first, to maximize the political concessions that they can obtain, and second, to maximize the material spoils that can be distributed among those that participate in the rebellion. In order to achieve this goal, the brigade has to have resources and the ability to transform these resources into their most effective war-fighting capabilities. In the case of highly fragmented rebellions, groups have the additional challenge of

³² Nagl, John A., et al. The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

competing with other groups for resources, the primary one being manpower. Not only do they have to convince individuals to join the fight, but they also have to make them join their particular group and stay there as long as needed.

In order for brigades to compete for candidates successfully, they must do the following two things. First, the group must appeal to fighters; it needs to be popular among people who are considering joining or switching groups. This helps to boost their labor force in terms of both quality and quantity. This will help groups increase in size, and also enable them to be more selective in whom they take, increasing the bar for acceptance. This in turn would allow them to have only the best and most dedicated members. As a result, to have a successful human resources policy, groups must first win the organizational competition among other groups fighting for the same goal, which is a dynamic process.

Second, the group also needs to make the best use of the fighters it already has to be successful. This means that the group must have resources and utilize them to ensure that all fighters are trained for the jobs they do, are dedicated to the goal and loyal to the organization, work cohesively, trust each other, and follow leadership's orders, while the brigade takes care of things such as benefits, medical care, and postmortem arrangements, while also helping to create a good working environment.

Therefore, in order to be successful in both recruitment efforts and combat itself, the group needs to meet not only fighters' physical needs for food, water, shelter, and medical support, but also their social needs for affection, recognition, esteem, and protection. On par with material resources, human factors like cohesion, trust in peers, trust in leadership, teamwork, and competence are critical in determining why some groups fight well and some do not. This is something that the armed groups' human resources policies are concerned with, because these are the issues that help brigades be successful in combat and that prospective fighters evaluate when deciding to join or switch groups.

Below, I look at how groups make themselves attractive to prospective fighters, comparing the ones most popular with fighters to the other groups in the industry. In particular, I analyze the human resources policies of major Islamist groups such as Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra, considered by local population to be the best-organized, to various FSA groups, which are considered to have average organizational qualities. I show how the

former groups were able to defeat their peers in the organizational competition in Syria. Then, I will turn to negative externalities from such popularity, and how Ahrar Al Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra tried to overcome it, particularly through ideology.

Material Resources

Reward policies are one of the most important topics in human resources and labor economics literature. When employees choose between different organizations in the same industry, they ask themselves several questions, such as how much they will be rewarded for their work and whether or not the job will meet their expectations. As human resource experts highlight, reward policies provide guidelines for decisions and action in a number of areas, including consideration for market rate pay, internal and external equality, merit pay, and incentive. Therefore, the objectives for reward policies are to attract sufficiently suitable employees, encourage retention of effective ones, obtain optimal performance from employees, encourage them to improve their performance, and have sufficient flexibility to reward high performers and deal with poor performers.

After three years of intensive war in Syria, the majority of the moderate brigades were not in a healthy financial state. Therefore, they were not in a position to offer much incentive to their fighters, compared to a small number of brigades which were still in good shape and were able to offer much more. The differences became extreme.

Benefits potentially offered by the groups are divided into immediate benefits and insurance. Among the noteworthy immediate benefits, the most visible and important one is salary.

Since it is hard, even for groups that have money, to get supplies into war-torn Syria, some groups provide their members with in-kind good. They directly import these goods and distribute them among fighters through the brigades' aid offices.

Some brigades organize kitchens and stores for their members. Major bases often have their own kitchens where members cook for the whole brigade. Although there are civilian kitchens in many towns, kitchens operated by the armed groups are considered better because they usually stock more meat. If a group cannot make some type of food, it may

subcontract. For example, a brigade may make an agreement with a local bakery that several days of the week's work is for fighters, and the rest of the week's work is for civilians. In exchange, the brigade helps bring supplies to the bakery through the front lines and provides security to it. On the other side, groups that are poor are providing their fighters only same basic food such as eggs, potatoes and sandwiches every day.

Some brigades located in remote areas have their own stores on the base so that fighters do not have to go far to buy something. These stores are also cheaper than civilian ones because they are non-profit and, as a result, do not mark up the prices. Brigades also make arrangements with local businesses for discounts to the fighters. In exchange, they help the businessmen with the delivery of goods through the front lines.

In some groups, additional monetary rewards are offered for heroic acts and successful operations. For example, local activists confirmed that in 2015 a fighter from one brigade in Hama successfully destroyed several enemy tanks and got an expensive car as a bonus.

Finally, there is also a number of less official benefits associated with affiliation with the “right” armed group.

First, there are some marriage-related benefits that are locally considered as material, associated with the brigades' membership. After five years of war, the only people in the war zone who have at least some money are fighters, so they are considered the best marriage partners for the local girls by their families. The relative ranking of the groups also plays a role, with more girls trying to marry someone from more powerful groups. Because fighters unofficially compete with each other in the number of wives they have, this “market” is very dynamic. Usually fighters do not even meet their wives before the marriage. The matching is mostly done in refugee camps by a special woman (*khataba*) who herself is associated with the group (for example, a wife of the leader). Her job is to evaluate prospective brides, choosing the ones she thinks will make good wives. She is looking primarily for virgins, 13–18 years old, with light skin, fair hair, and a curvy shape. Intellect and education, on the other hand, do not matter. The youngest and most attractive girls are reserved for group leaders. Because families consider a fighter the best prospective husband for their daughter, they all

try to befriend the *khataba*; wherever she goes, the families show off their daughter in their best outfits and in the most makeup.

Even though war-time conditions mean that there is no *al mahr* (brides' price), which ordinarily should be paid by a prospective husband, brigades give a small allowance for the fighters' weddings. Those allowances range by group and by how far along the conflict was. In 2013, some groups paid their fighters \$700, but by 2016 the wedding allowance had decreased to \$100. In addition to the financial benefit, a fighter gets from two to ten days of vacation from the front line.

Second, some groups help family members of their fighters find jobs. These are very scarce in Syria, so this is considered a very significant bonus. Third, affiliation with the group, whether directly as a fighter or indirectly through a family member, allows for easier passage through checkpoints. A brigade that is well respected gives its fighters another non-direct, monetary benefit by saving them money at checkpoints. Some brigades have an agreement with others that makes it easy to pass through checkpoints. Showing a brigade ID at such checkpoints allows fighters to save money by not paying "tolls."

The more powerful the brigade, the more respect its fighters receive at checkpoints. Such affiliation also allows for easier access to different parts of the town—places where civilians are not allowed.

These immediate benefits are important, but taking into account the dangerous nature of the job, having good insurance is also something fighters cannot ignore. What happens to a fighter if he gets wounded? The worst-case scenario for any fighter is getting seriously wounded with no one will take care of him, and his family unable to afford treatment. Then, of course, there is also the matter of what happens to the fighter's family if he gets killed.

To make fighters worry less about injuries and to ensure that they will be willing to take more risks in combat, as well as to make the brigade more appealing to prospective fighters, some groups provide medical care and "life insurance". Of course, these are not official insurance documents, but are instead a group policy regarding what to do when fighters are wounded or killed.

Medical care on the battlefield and support for the wounded are important issues for prospective fighters. Here, the problem is not only money, although substantial investment is needed to organize adequate medical care on the battlefield. The absence of doctors, the difficulty of getting medical supplies, and the general remoteness of the locations where medical facilities are most needed make organizing healthcare nearly impossible. In addition, since health care is a long-term investment, long-term planning by the brigade is needed even to consider organizing and investing time and money into medical clinics. Only a small minority of brigades are willing and able afford this.

Five years into the war, the situation with medical care was generally bad for a majority of brigades, with only a slight difference between care in a private hospital (where one pays a fee) and a free hospital. Some brigades, however, have secured a stable source of funding, so they can afford more well-organized medical care. They operate their own medical facilities, which are better equipped for first aid than other hospitals. Although other fighters can also get help at these places, most know which brigades these facilities belong to. These are only first-aid stations, so in case of severe injuries, wounded fighters are stabilized on the battlefield and then transferred outside of the country, where the brigade continues to pay for their treatment. While some brigades do not want or cannot afford to cover the expensive treatment of their fighters, other groups go a long way toward ensuring that their fighters are well cared for.

Sometimes medical insurance also extends—with limits—to a fighter's immediate family members. Although the brigade will not pay the whole price of their treatment (as they would for the fighter himself), if a child or a wife is injured, they will, for example, provide a car to take the family member to a hospital in another town and provide a small amount of money for medicine.

With the ever-increasing number of fatal casualties, funerals and family protection after a fighter is killed have also become important issues. If a fighter is killed, his brigade will often organize and pay for the funeral and attend to other posthumous arrangements. In some cases, they provide material support for the families of their fallen soldiers, especially if he has been the only provider for his family. In some brigades, if a fighter dies, his family continues to regularly receive aid from the group as well as the dead fighter's salary. Death

benefits are not just a monetary question of who will pay for the funeral; due to the fact that many of the fighters are from enemy-controlled territories, their bodies cannot be returned home, nor can their families attend their funerals. Therefore, the brigade must find a place for the soldier's grave and conduct a funeral.

Though many fighters see such benefits as helpful, it is not a long-term solution for the family because wives and children may be uneducated, unable to work, or not permitted to do so. To help remedy this, some brigades find other ways of ensuring help for the family of fallen fighters. For example, the Eagles of Islam brigade provided a one-time payment of \$1,000 to a fighter if he marries the widow of a deceased comrade from his brigade. This is not an uncommon occurrence as it is within the rules of Islam, by their interpretation, for one man to have up to four wives. Such a practice is cultivated not only by this brigade but is also socially acceptable and desirable in fighting communities in general. Those who decline to marry the widow of a fallen soldier may be ridiculed. One man who chose not to marry a Syrian woman said he was chastised for being selfish when "the widows of their fighters needed support."

Some brigades can afford skill development for their fighters, namely military training such as basic instruction on how to use RPGs and automatic weapons. Others run full-scale, several-month-long military basic training camps, where, usually with the help of professional instructors, recruits study basic and specialized disciplines, such as use of explosive devices and sniper skills. Prospective fighters value the availability of these programs because they not only make the fighters more effective in pursuing their goals, but can also potentially save their lives in combat. This is so important in the eyes of prospective fighters that some groups highlight their training camp as a main selling point in the recruitment video. Having such training facilities and investing money in the human capital of fighters is also a win for the brigade because its performance depends on the competence of the work force. For fighters, training and development are important, not only for the present job but also for the future. Some brigades also provide religious classes for their fighters in mosques. Although these classes are generally propaganda, they also teach illiterate members of the group how to read and write.

Four years into the war, the major differences in what various brigades and

organizations offered became very visible. As a result, brigades are usually able to win organizational competition—directly by having funding to pay competitive salaries and offer additional material benefits; and indirectly, by investing in other long-term projects such as training camps, effective field medical care, care for the wounded, and support for the families of fallen fighters. Through this, they are able to attract the most qualified fighters, retain them, and make members of the group even more effective. Therefore, in addition to getting the best people from the outset, their fighters also get the greatest added value. First, they are better trained. Second, fighters are able to concentrate only on their goal without having to worry about how to provide enough food for their families. Third, they are healthier and have more energy because they eat more nutritious foods. Finally, fighters will be more willing to take risks in combat because they know that they will be taken care of if they are wounded, and their families will be taken care of if the fighter is killed.

In Syria, several brigades fighting against Assad, such as Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra, capitalized on this situation and became the most popular brigades in terms of their organization and success in combat.

Due to a lot of brigades going bankrupt and information about the organizational quality of others becoming common knowledge, the number of fighters who wanted to switch brigades surged in 2014, especially to the above-listed groups. They were not only considered to have the same goal as the fighters (defeating Assad), but were also one of the most effective institutions in accomplishing this goal due to their choice of missions (they have a reputation of always selecting the most dangerous ones) and highly successful tactics (including suicide missions)³³.

Prospective fighters saw Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham as the most effective and organized groups. It seemed to fighters that these groups could not only do the most harm to Assad but would make the best use of their people. Even in their recruitment video, Ahrar al-Sham showcased the specially organized training camps.

³³ The United States Department of State stated, "From the reports we get from the doctors, most of the injured and dead FSA are Jabhat al-Nusra, due to their courage and [the fact they are] always at the front line." Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/post/al-qaeda-affiliate-playing-larger-role-in-syria-rebellion/2012/11/30/203d06f4-3b2e-11e2-9258-ac7c78d5c680_blog.html

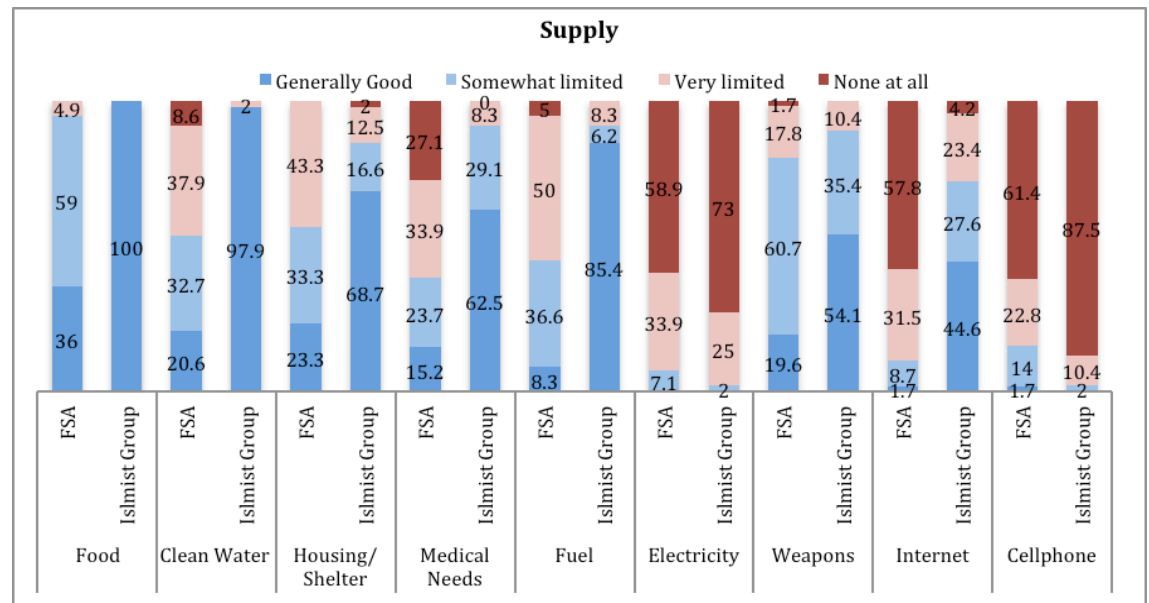
They highlighted the fact that they had resources and would invest in fighters to make them even more effective. In addition, while other groups were offering “food and cigarettes” to their fighters at best, Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra were providing the highest salaries on the market (around \$160) and distributing not only food but also cellphones and even cars. Another benefit offered by these brigades was access to basic necessities and imported goods, because even basic food items were limited in Syria; as well, prices on the black market were constantly rising, so the brigades developed offices to distribute food and supplies to their members. Every month, they distributed “nutrition baskets” to the members' families. These baskets include food necessities like rice, sugar, beans, and cooking oil, as well as non-food items such as mattresses, hygiene kits, and even diapers if a fighter has young children.

The two brigades ran their own hospitals and kitchens, providing care for wounded fighters and families of those killed. For example, when a regular Ahrar al-Sham foot soldier suffering from an eye injury from an explosion required an extensive operation in 2012, he was sent to Turkey, where the brigade paid more than \$13,000 for his treatment. In addition, because they were one of the most respected groups fighting in Syria, their members had the easiest time passing checkpoints, and their prospects on the marriage market were the most positive. As a result, from the institutional point of view, these brigades were among the best ones to work for.

According to fighters themselves, Islamist groups were significantly better supplied. For example, 100 percent of Islamists evaluated their food situation in the group as generally good (compared to 36 percent of FSA fighters), 98 percent of Islamists were satisfied with their access to drinking water (compared to only 20 percent of FSA), 69 percent of Islamist fighters considered their housing situation as generally good (compared to only 23 percent of FSA fighters who thought the same) and 85 percent of surveyed members of Islamist groups considered their group's fuel supply to be satisfactory (compared to only 8 percent of FSA members). Members of Islamist groups also self reported much better access to health care (62 percent of members Islamist groups considered it to be generally good compared to only 15 percent of FSA members) and Internet (44 percent of members of Islamist groups think that they have relatively good access compared to only 2 percent of FSA fighters who think

so). Opinions about the supply of weapons ran along the same lines, with more than half surveyed members of Islamist groups saying that they had good access to weapons compared to only 19 percent of FSA members.³⁴

Figure 10. Supply of armed groups



Because rules are not enforced in the war torn country, reputation plays an important role. Jabhat al-Nusra, at that time an Al Qaeda branch in Syria, capitalized heavily on this association. Although Jabhat al-Nusra was not known in Syria before the war, al-Qaeda was already known for its effectiveness. A fighter who wanted to join Jabhat al-Nusra explained that he was most impressed by the al-Nusra Front bombings of government buildings in Damascus in 2012. It seemed to him that the al-Nusra Front was making a difference³⁵.

This means that Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, as well as other brigades that had money and were using it strategically, and as a result their supply of prospective members exceeded demand, and hence they were able to impliment a selective screening

³⁴ The situation with electricity and cell phones was slightly bad in Islamist groups but it could be related to where they were stationed (rural vs urban areas and cell phone coverage).

³⁵ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/10/the-jihadi-who-came-in-from-the-cold-islamic-state/>

process for prospective fighters to ensure higher quality members This made joining more competitive. Previously, a fighter only had to prove that he was not a spy for the regime, which could generally be verified by his neighbors. At this point in the fighting, however, the screening system became more advanced.

This evidence further confirms the importance of the *Organizational Hypotheses* in individual decisions to join particular armed group, while disproving the *Convenience*, *Ideology* and *Prestige* hypotheses. Fighters value good leadership, absence of corruption, and benefits that groups offer their members, while devaluing such characteristics as ideology and the ease of joining a group, such as a group's geographical proximity. Next I will test Hypothesis H3: Armed groups with more radical ideology have more dedicated members.

Non-Material Benefits

For people living in developed countries, a salary of \$40 a month and a bag of rice in the nutrition basket offered by brigades may seem unimpressive. In a war-torn country, however, these are significant benefits, possibly the only income for a majority of households. As a result, monetary benefits increase a group's popularity among fighters who are dedicated to the same goal and are looking to switch groups, as well as individuals who are initially more interested in a group's resources than its goal. After years of war, people who had remained civilians, for example, run out of money; because the brigades are virtually the only organizations working inside Syria that pay salary, they reconsider their decision to fight and now want to join. The more benefits a brigade is able to provide its members, the greater the number of people wanting to join the group merely for the benefits. These groups, however, still do not have to worry about for-profit fighters. People who were completely uninterested in the goal of the fighting would not consider joining effective not-for-profit groups because of the much higher risks involved³⁶. On the other hand, people who cared about both money and the goal could change their minds and decide to join.

Having members who are less interested in the goal of the war leads to unnecessary expenses and, more importantly, decreased cohesion within the group. That, in turn, could

³⁶ While not-for-profit groups are fighting on frontlines, for-profit groups do not have direct contact with the enemy (they control check points or are engaged in looting, for example.)

effect a decrease in the brigade's effectiveness, now comprised of fighters who are less dedicated to the goal and more worried about the risks involved with fighting. As a result, they consume scarce resources and hamper teamwork and cooperation within the group, while contributing less to the goal by avoiding risks and potentially endangering other group members. Without a wise human resources policy, having material resources could lead to a decrease in human capital and a non-cohesive environment in the brigade. While one variable (material) in the individual utility function increases, another (non-material) decreased. Brigades that have resources and are popular among prospective fighters have to find a way to ensure that they are recruiting only high goal-motivated fighters to their ranks.

There are several ways brigades can achieve this. Brigades rely on recommendations in the admission process. In a recommendation, brigades are interested in a prospective fighter's behavior at the very beginning of the conflict. This information is crucial in understanding the level of an individual's motivation. It is telling if a person was active in the revolution and civil war before any material support became available. If a prospective member was active in the opposition before the war (when Assad was strong), participated in demonstrations (unafraid of the high probability of imprisonment), and joined the war early on (paying for a weapon with his own money), a group can easily tell that he is dedicated to the goals of the war. Because this is a past-performance assessment process, brigades that want to have only the most dedicated fighters must find other ways to ensure that they do not accept free-riders.

The most popular groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham accomplish this by adopting a radical Islamist ideology. They required their members to follow a strict set of rules rationalized through Islamism.

1. First Filter: Entrance Screening

As the first step in the recruitment process, Islamist brigades act similar to other brigades by looking at an individual's fighting history. According to the official policy of

Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, they accept only “good Muslims,”³⁷ which is arguably not a crucial military strategy but justifies their very complicated screening process.

Similar to a job application in the civilian world, a prospective fighter wanting to join Jabhat al-Nusra or Ahrar al-Sham must be recommended. To prove that he is a “good Muslim” and a person of a good character in general, he needs a “tezkiyya,” or personal assurance from two commanders confirming that he has the necessary skills, religious commitment, and attitude to join the group. Several times a month, a group of Jabhat al-Nusra leaders meet to discuss military strategies and other organizational issues. During these meetings, they also discuss the admission of new members based on these recommendations. If they feel that the recommendations are not reliable enough and they are still unsure of the moral character and trustworthiness of the applicant, they may decide to monitor his everyday activities and habits for several days, by literally following him. In some cases, it takes several attempts to gain acceptance. In 2013, one prospective fighter who had a history of drug problems (he had even served time in prison for drug-related charges) decided to join Jabhat al-Nusra. His application was rejected despite two recommendations from Jabhat al-Nusra members. He spent the next two months meeting other Jabhat al-Nusra members and leaders and securing their recommendations and support for reapplication. By the end of this time, he managed to have seven people vote for him and persuade others that his drug problem was no longer an issue and that he would be a good fighter for the group. The leaders agreed to admit him, and he is still fighting with the group.

Once the group knows the fighters are dedicated enough, it needs to make the best use of them. Following admission to the brigade, a fighter is sent to a camp for basic military training so he can become more effective in combat. It is important to note that at this point the fighter receives little coursework on religion. The main religious classes start after the fighter returns from boot camp and is integrated into his unit. Then, at the base, during his free (non-combat) time, he is expected to study religion. This demonstrates that the primary qualifications are dedication and fighting capabilities, while religion is secondary.

³⁷ When asked, Jabhat al-Nusra members were not able to explain what a “good Muslim” is or how to recognize one.

This first step in the screening process works well in filtering out fighters who are not truly interested in the goal and just want the benefits that come with group membership. The problem is that such entrance exams cannot screen out people who join a group in good faith but become disappointed in the goal (i.e., their desire for the non-material goal cases to factor into their utility function) as time goes by. Since they already passed “the dedication test” and got in, if the entrance screening were the only mechanism, they would continue consuming the group’s scarce resources even if they no longer believed in the goal. Their presence in the group would then destroy cohesion. Thus, groups employ a complicated system of costly signals. This is where ideology, and in the case of Syria, religion, once again comes in handy.

2. Second Filter: Restrictions and Prohibitions

As a second-level filter, popular brigades like Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham use strict religious prohibitions, although any other artificial ideological restrictions would in theory work. Instead of measuring the level of dedication to their brigade, it uses religion to impose prohibitions that are easier to monitor. These should not be challenging enough to take a fighter’s focus away from his main job, but should still be obvious. For example, along with the requirement to pray five times a day and not drink alcohol, for which Islamist ideology provides easy justification, Jabhat al-Nusra also prohibits smoking. Islam does not condemn smoking, and Jabhat al-Nusra members were unable to clearly explain why the group prohibits smoking when the chance of dying on the battlefield is much higher than that of dying from smoking. In a Middle Eastern country where smoking is very popular, particularly among males³⁸, especially during wartime, this is a very strong prohibition that few men will agree to. Compared to the other appearance signals, which lose their meaning over time, not smoking is costly for a person no matter how others behave, and as a result, it is the costliest signal used among groups.

Jabhat al-Nusra does not, however, require its fighters to memorize the Qur’an. Although Jabhat al-Nusra fighters attend Qur’an recitation classes, no one tests the fighters’ mastery of the Qur’an, though this could be easily checked with a simple exam. Since memorizing the Qur’an is very difficult and time-consuming compared to other religious

³⁸ According to a prewar WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic (2008), 44% of males in Syria were smokers.

requirements, it is not in the best interests of the group to enforce this study strictly. In general, religious people who joined the group remember being shocked by how little the group knew and cared about religion. Conversely, such groups also prefer not to admit religious people, first because for them those additional costs are low enough so as not to be an effective screening mechanism, and second, these people will surely be disappointed with the group and as a result would not be effective, and could even be potential trouble.

By complying with prohibitions against smoking and praying five times a day, a fighter is signaling that he is willing to sacrifice to gain group membership. These seemingly unproductive measures provide an indirect solution to the free-rider problem by helping the brigades filter out less-motivated individuals, while at the same time increasing the devotion and contributions of those who join. According to research, such strictness helps in three ways: it raises overall levels of commitment, increases average rates of participation, and enhances the net benefits of membership³⁹.

Because of the limitations of this screening mechanism, there is a group of people such groups are trying to avoid in their recruiting efforts. Those are genuinely religious people who studied religion and understand it. First, this is because their interest in religion could take time and energy away from fighting, the main goal of the group. Second, they may enjoy the ideological restrictions imposed on them (making them uncostly for those individuals); and additionally, due to their knowledge of religion, they might disagree with restrictions imposed by the group and as a result be a potential problem. For example, although Jabhat al-Nusra carefully checked an ex-drug addict several times to make sure he was not taking drugs anymore before admitting him, they still admitted him. Obviously, history of drug addiction should immediately raise a red flag about an individuals' religious commitments, but the only thing that the group was interested in making sure of was if he would be a good fighter and not destroy group cohesion, and that he was not using drugs anymore.

In the survey, members of both Islamist and moderate groups were asked if they became more religious while fighting with their group. 73.4 percent of members of Islamist

³⁹ Iannaccone, Laurence R. "Why strict churches are strong." *American Journal of sociology* (1994): 1180-1211.

groups said that they became more religious while with the group (compared to 37.7 percent of members of moderate groups), 24.4 percent said that the level of their religiosity did not change since they joined the group (compared to 54.1 percent of members of moderate groups) and 2.0 percent said that they in fact became less religious (compare to 8.2 percent of members of moderate groups). So on one, the majority of members of Islamist groups admitted that they became more religious while fighting in the group, meaning that they got radicalized inside the group, not before joining it and it was not required (and this number could be in fact lower because respondents had an incentive to overstate their true religiosity), while only a quarter said that they did not change in their level of religiosity.

By imposing these restrictions, the most popular brigades like Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham can also ensure that less-dedicated fighters don't stay long. Once a fighter stops believing in the goal and is no longer willing to fight and die for it, he will become reluctant to pay these additional costs. Suddenly, being a member of the group becomes a burden too costly for him. Since these unproductive costs are typically very visible, it will be immediately noticed by the group when a fighter loses interest. It is very obvious if a fighter is not attending prayer five times a day, and the smell of cigarettes lingers on a person long enough to be eventually noticed. Even if a mercenary could fake dedication to the goal well enough to be admitted, it would be significantly harder for him to continue faking it the entire time he is with the group.

3. Third Filter: Easy Exit

No organization can afford to accept too many people, even if there are a lot of applicants; this is a cost that needs to be controlled. When labor supply exceeds demand, brigades such as Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham make it easy for their members to quit and leave the group when they so decide. The group wants only the most dedicated members who can do the job well. If a realizes that he cannot keep up with the group only after joining, he is free to either quit fighting altogether or switch to another group. This results in further reduction of the number of free-riders and a lower potential distraction from teamwork in the unit. Taking into account the group's budget constraints, losing one non-fully dedicated member allows the group to get a new, more dedicated one who will contribute to the group's

success, making the group even stronger.

One easy way to quit fighting is to become a civilian again. Jabhat al-Nusra provides grounds for this with the following quote from the Qur'an: `Abd Allah b. `Umar related that a man came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and asked his permission to join in the military effort. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked him: "Are your parents alive?" The man replied: "Yes." The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "By serving them you perform jihad." [*Sahîh al-Bukhârî, Sunan al-Nasâ'î, Sunan, Abî Dâwûd and Sunan al-Tirmidhî*] In the case of Jabhat al-Nusra, many fighters realize they cannot follow the group norms and switch to "the second best"—Ahrar al-Sham. The most common reason for the switch is the smoking prohibition. Members of Jabhat al-Nusra explained that they have no problem with people who switch to Ahrar al-Sham, saying, "It is okay; we are still fighting for the same cause."

In addition, Islamist brigades in Syria favor the interaction of their members with fighters from other groups. Such brigades as Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra not only allow, but also encourage their members to interact with outsiders. By doing so, they first and foremost promote their own group, making their successful internal organization common knowledge among non-group fighters. Second, in allowing group members free interaction with others, which invariably includes learning about the internal organization of other groups, a brigade ensures that only those members who are truly loyal and dedicated to their goal will stay. For example, if a fighter becomes disappointed with the goal of the war and decides to become a mercenary, he can learn which groups are "for-profit" by interacting with members of other brigades and switch to them. Losing this particular group member only benefits group cohesion and helps save resources.

Leaving the group doesn't always happen by a fighter's choice, either. Members are often punished or expelled from the group for not following the rules after being admitted. Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham have three official kinds of punishment:

1. Notice
2. Lashing
3. Eviction

Not all violations are equally weighted, and punishments for different types of

violations vary. For a violation of religious prohibitions, such as smoking or missing a prayer, a fighter is given a notice and lectured. Others will try to advise him against doing it in the future.

Lashing is considered a traditional Islamic punishment, although the exact number of lashings is still not clear⁴⁰. Despite the fact that this type of punishment is named by Islamist groups as one of the most Islamic types, it is almost never used within the brigade. Most often, it is applied to civilians for public image purposes by recording and widely distributing it on the Internet. The most common reason for such punishment is sex outside of marriage (for women).

For serious violations, which are usually related to combat performance, a fighter is immediately expelled. The most common reason for this, according to Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham fighters, is “not following orders in battle.”⁴¹ The practice of kicking out a fighter who does not perform his main job well (violating military rules) further saves the brigade's resources that could now be used on a new, more dedicated fighter. This disparity in how severe punishments are (minor for religious misconduct and major for combat failings) further demonstrates how little such groups actually value their religion's prescriptions.

5. Fourth Filter: Terrorist List

When the international community added Jabhat al-Nusra to its list of terrorist organizations, it unintentionally imposed an additional screening mechanism that had not existed before. Being on this list restricts the movement of al-Nusra's members outside of Syria, and result in members being arrested in countries that designate the organization as a terrorist group.⁴² As a result, people who are less than fully dedicated to fighting for the goal with this particular group and accept the possibility that they may become less interested in the war and leave the country are less likely to join the group. When asked, “Let’s assume

⁴⁰ The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “One should not prescribe more than ten lashes as a punishment except for *hadd*. ”(*La yajlid ahadun fawqa ‘ashrat aswat, illa fi hadd*). Some are of the view that lashings (*ta‘zir*) should not exceed thirty-nine lashes, since forty lashes are ‘*the hadd*’ for drinking. Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdal-‘Aziz recommended that the number of lashes, in *ta‘zir* punishment should not exceed ten.

⁴¹ After being kicked out, fighters either become refugees or join “for-profit” brigades.

⁴² Jabhat al-Nusra was designated as a terrorist organization by Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Turkey.

that someone is thinking very seriously about switching to Jabhat al-Nusra; what could be holding him back? Jabhat al-Nusra members acknowledge that the biggest worry prospective fighters have is being blacklisted and unable to leave Syria. This restriction stopped less-devoted fighters from joining.⁴³

These filtering mechanisms are possible and productive only when the brigade is highly popular among prospective fighters, and the supply of fighters interested in the group is larger than the demand. When a group is popular (due to its success on the battlefield, its resources and organization), it can afford to be strict, allow free exit and kick fighters out, as it will still have many applicants. When a group is less popular, it cannot afford to do so.

This policy seems to be working well for those groups. For example, when asked how close they felt to members of their group, all members of Islamist groups said that they feel very close. Members of the FSA on the other side were polarized in their answers. Although 63 percent said that they also feel very close to their group mates, 29 percent felt somewhat close, 7 percent not very close and an additional 2 percent- not close at all.

These results also contribute to rejecting the *Ideology* hypothesis, showing that ideology per se does not profoundly influence a fighter's decision of which brigade he will choose. Instead, ideology plays an instrumental role helping armed groups increase their organizational qualities that in turn increase supply of potential members. Conversely, the evidence presented above support the hypothesis H3: Armed groups with more radical ideology have more dedicated members

Conclusion

The qualitative results in this chapter provide more evidence supporting the *Organizational* hypothesis highlighting the importance of the internal groups organizational characteristics for fighters and show that Radical armed groups are more able to attack and screen the most dedicated fighters (H3), and as a result the quality of their manpower is higher.

Every year Forbes magazine lists the best companies to work for, ranking firms based on the following criteria: 1. job growth, voluntary turnover, and the number of job applicants;

⁴³ Prospective fighters who accept all the brigade-imposed restrictions but do not want to get on the "black list" will prefer Ahrar al-Sham (which is not a designated terrorist organization).

2. training provided for salaried and hourly employees; 3. compensation and benefits for hourly and salaried positions, including health care coverage; 4. diversity initiatives, percentage of minorities, and nondiscrimination policies. Although there is no such list of groups in Syria that the author is aware of, the criteria that fighters use to evaluate and select groups to join are quite similar (probably except for the last point about “diversity initiatives”).

Some brigades in the rebel block such as Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham had enough resources and vision to support and invest in their fighters by paying them competitive salaries, providing additional benefits, training them in military camps, and ensuring adequate medical care in case of injury. Other brigades did not offer their members such benefits.

These brigades did not experience a shortage of labor, because their policies attracted many prospective fighters and they started enjoying a rapid increase in prospective applicants. Along with good fighters, however, they were in danger of attracting many less dedicated members who were merely seeking the benefits associated with group membership, uninterested in contributing to group loyal or the goal. In civilian industry, this is a bad outcome, but in the civil war industry, screening such people out may be crucial for the group’s survival: not only will free-riders be poor fighters, but they may also destroy cohesion inside the unit, become defectors, or make the entire unit less effective.

In order to filter out as many “free-loaders” as possible, Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham have an incentive to introduce not only screening measures, but also additional costs of membership. Such measures lead to the overall increase of the utility of group members, although some sacrifices are required. With these additional costs, a person who is thinking of joining the brigade for reasons other than serving the goal will think twice because the costs of being a member will be high. Other brigades or even alternative occupations may look more appealing.

With these additional requirements, only the most dedicated fighters will join and stay. Without ideology, explaining and rationalizing such actions while imposing additional unproductive costs that are decorative in nature may be seen not just as illogical but even ridiculous to fighters and civilians. Therefore, ideology, and in the case of Syria, religion,

comes in handy. Using this strategy, those groups were able to harness ideology to not only to recruit the most dedicated fighters who are the best on the battlefield, but also to ensure that they always have only the best people in their group.

Chapter 4 Leadership

The most important and fundamental problem underlying groups' human resources strategies is not having the right people in the right place doing the right job in the brigades' leadership positions. No organization can have a successful, long-term financial plan if it does not have someone with the right qualifications to plan it. No group can have a winning military strategy if there is no one to develop it and no good plan or strategy will work if there is no one capable of executing it correctly. On the other hand, it is impossible to talk about groups' human resources by looking only at low-level soldiers while ignoring top leadership.

In this chapter, I plan to shed light on who the qualified top and mid level leaders of armed groups are, how they are chosen, what makes them effective at their job, and why some groups managed to attract them, while others were either not interested in doing so or were not able to get them despite their best efforts. In particular, I test the following hypotheses: Groups with more experienced leadership are more likely to be desirable to potential recruits (H4.1) and Groups that were able to develop unbiased promotion mechanisms are more likely to have better leaders (H4.2)

Top Level Leadership

Like any other organization, armed groups are not immune to general management problems (Shapiro 2014), which are a function of their leadership. Leadership plays a major role in how organizations function and, as a result, should be approached accordingly. Ideally, a CEO is chosen based on his experience and knowledge. He could be either chosen from inside the company or, if there are not qualified candidates inside, brought in from the outside, but usually from within the same industry. There are two main problems that any organization faces in selecting their leaders, and those problems are even more challenging in the midst of a civil war. First, groups should be able to choose the best candidate from as good of a pool of candidates as possible, meaning that there should be qualified people to choose from. Second, an optimal and non-corrupt system should be used to choose among them to ensure that an organization has the best leadership they can get in a particular environment and from a particular pool of candidates. Also, in case of start-up rebel groups, like the ones in Syria, the relative importance of these problems changes based on how far along in the conflict they are.

In the very beginning of the war, the main problem was the pool of potential leaders that groups could choose from. This pool, in general, was small and weak. There were no resources to distribute, and as such, there were no additional incentives for a fighter to take extra organizational responsibilities or a leadership position, because virtually everyone at that point had joined to physically fight instead of perform managerial tasks similar to the ones they were doing during peacetime. Individuals joined to satisfy their grievance and follow their emotions and desire for revenge, so they preferred to take part in actual fighting - to personally inflict cost and damage on the enemy rather than doing it indirectly through the managerial position of empowering others to fight. For them, such indirect fighting through leading was less emotionally satisfying. As one of the fighters said in the interview "I want to be like those guys who killed Kaddafi, I want to kill Assad personally with my hands".

Second, the pool of potential candidates was weak, at least for the majority of groups. When the Syrian Civil War started, there were not many people in the country with prior civil war experience (lacking even theoretical experience), so there were not many candidates to choose from. Even if members of the groups understood that they needed to find a qualified

person to fill their leadership positions, it was simply not always possible to find one due to the overall weak pool of candidates.

Due to the lack of qualified fighters who could take leadership position and wanted to do so, there was no actual leadership selection or competition for those positions. As a result, at that time, choosing a leader for a brigade did not lead to any disagreements or internal splits between the members, because it was not considered a position of any importance and it did not give anything to a leader other than extra responsibilities that he was uninterested in. Groups did not fail to notice the leadership shortage, and this general lack of leadership experience that most groups faced led to strategic mistakes on multiple levels.

In addition to not knowing the right thing to do and how to do it, there was also a psychological component related to the lack of civil war leadership experience, which also led to poor decision-making on the side of the leader, which had long term consequences for the entire group and its fighters. Too often, group leaders, like their regular fighters, were driven by emotions (they assumed that a brigade could not be destroyed by anything other than fighting) and economic shortsightedness (constantly expecting the war to end quickly) rather than thinking rationally and long-term. This lack of leadership experience led to additional unintentional mistakes for the majority of armed groups, ranging from temporary battlefield setbacks and losses to poor financial planning which for some groups spelled the end. Indeed, even some groups that were located “right next to the oil field,” meaning they were in a very good position to seize an opportunity and secure long term financial resources, went bankrupt due to their financial mistakes.

Additionally, at that stage of the conflict, it was very hard to choose the right leader since fighters simply did not know which leadership qualities were the most important and did not have enough information about candidates to evaluate them for leadership positions.

Fighters did not have time to accumulate knowledge about potential leaders' managerial and fighting skills, so they had to rely on very noisy signals, such as interpersonal relations or the general intelligence of an individual. Since few had previous war experience, groups had to assess their potential. This is already a difficult enough task under optimal conditions in the civilian sector, but for most, becoming a rebel group leader was an

absolutely new occupation that bore no similarity to his previous profession, making selection exponentially more difficult. Thus, under those circumstances, the selection process in the majority of groups was often less than optimal. In most cases, fighters recalled how “We all knew each other very well, and we chose a person who was the most respectful and trustworthy, had good relations with other members, had wisdom and knowledge, and has proven himself during the peaceful part of the revolution.”⁴⁴ In one known case in Deir ez-Zor, a brigade chose a person to be a leader because in his civilian life, he was a professor at a business school at a local university. The group based its decision on the following logic: “He has a PhD, so he is educated; and because he joined the war in spite of being a being a professor and having many outside opportunities, he must be really motivated to fight.” Is having an academic degree a sufficient qualification to be the leader of an armed group? Probably not, but at least it said something about the person's overall personal qualities to the members of his group, so this signal was better than nothing. Although it is a very noisy, it is still a signal.

Additionally, fighters did not know what role leadership should play, and consequently how to evaluate him. For example, Ahmad Suod, the leader of group 13, spent most of his time in Turkey trying to get funding for the group and was relatively successful at it. At the same time, members of his group were not happy that their leader was not on the battlefield and did not take care of the base. According to people who know him, Ahmad had a hard time choosing between two options – to go back to Idlib to personally lead battles and send someone else, probably less qualified and well-spoken to conduct fundraising, or to stay in Turkey to keep funding going. He chose to stay, but as a result he lost respect of the group fighters because he was not there fighting alongside with them.

Later in the course of the war, groups no longer had to choose candidates from a weak pool because Syrian fighters in general become more experienced both in fighting and in running an armed group, but the second problem, choosing the best candidate, increased in importance. It became harder to ensure that the best possible candidate for the leadership

⁴⁴ Members of Al-Zahraa (Deir ez-Zor) mentioned that they brought in an outside leader, who at the time was fighting with another group, but he was a relative of some members, and they knew him very well.

position was chosen from the given pool and assigned to the areas of responsibility that fit their knowledge and experience the most.

Over time, groups and fighters got better at recognizing what the characteristics and qualities of a potential leader were. For example, some small brigades institutionalized a probation period and tried a new leader for several weeks and a couple of battles to see if he would be a good leader before officially putting him in charge. At the same time, other problems of leadership selection became more acute and corruption became an increasing problem.

Due to the increase in the availability of resources and accumulated power, more people became interested in taking leadership positions simply motivated by personal greed, and it became crucial for the groups to be able to screen and choose the best possible candidates. Unfortunately, often the best possible candidates were not chosen. In many cases, experience and knowledge were not the main bases for selecting the leader, and the leader (or at least his advisers) was often chosen based on other criteria. As a result, this process became increasingly corrupt and inefficient, leading to bad results for the whole group. There are several types of such leadership selection corruption:

Nepotism — Using family ties to find leaders was one of the most prominent examples of a selection process that might not ensure the most qualified people are promoted to decision-making positions. The majority of small groups consisting of 50 to 70 people usually had a leader, a deputy leader (who did everything the leader did when the leader himself was away or resting) and regular fighters. According to local activists, in approximately four out of six brigades in urban areas, the leader and his deputy were family members (and in rural areas this ratio was even higher). For example, a deputy was a son of the leader or his daughter's husband. In some cases, groups were even called by the family's last name. Leaders of such brigades were not elected or appointed based on qualification, but instead, they were respected in the family. No other qualifications were required. In many cases, leaders were illiterate. This is not to say they did not have any previous fighting experience, or even more important, managerial experience. In the best case, when asked what made his leader qualified to run an armed group, one fighter mentioned that "their leader had enough money, and before the war, he was a member of the hunting club," while

in the majority of cases fighters were not able to identify any specific characteristic of their leader that made him stand out as qualified for the position. In such brigades, all the power and decision-making was concentrated in the hands of one person — the leader (and in rare cases his deputy). Leaders trusted only their family members, even if they were not always qualified for advising and rarely asked anyone outside of their small circle for advice.

It would be understandable to rely on family structure at the very beginning of the war when there were no signals of qualification available that would allow then to evaluate a non-family candidate, but with the war progressing, it was not an optimal long-term strategy. Despite that, some groups turned to such promotion strategies later in the war. Although some groups were successful in choosing a leader at the beginning of the conflict, they were not immune from promoting the wrong people, who turned the group into a family based structure, which eventually became less functional. In Aleppo, one brigade, like many other groups, was started by a group of friends from the same neighborhood. The brigade of 500 people was relatively successful in combat and soon controlled a large swath of land inside the city. But after one of the friends was promoted to a leadership position, the leader replaced all of the initial founders of the brigade with his family members and even put his sister in charge of a checkpoint, a move considered unacceptable in Syrian culture. As a result, the group lost all of its fighters to other groups almost immediately.

Time of joining — Some fighters mentioned that even if the group was not family based, but a true start-up with founding leadership, its leadership was chosen based on who joined first, earliest in the conflict. As a result, it was almost impossible for people who joined later to rise in ranks, and the people at the biggest disadvantage in this situation were regime defectors. Despite their knowledge and training, the fact that they joined later (due to the fact that it took time for them to find the best possible time to defect) meant that they ended up at the very bottom or outside of the chain of command of most groups, which obviously hurt the quality of the groups' military strategies.

Access to money — Another example of a poor selection mechanism was access to money. Over four years of conflict, it was not surprising to see three leaders in a 40-member brigade. Although this was obviously excessive and harmed the group, because all of them had connections to outside investors or donors, they were appointed to leadership positions.

As a result, such a system leads to not only incompetent leadership, but also to having too many incompetent leaders, tremendously slowing any decision-making.

Concentration of power in one set of hands — In some cases, there was no division of power at all because an already existing leader did not want to share his power. He was in charge of everything such as group finances, military affairs, human resources and public relations. There was no division of responsibilities or consultations with other members or experts (someone with experience in a particular problem). Even in cases when more qualified people, like regime army defectors, were available for leadership or at least adviser positions, they were not utilized. If this situation was tolerable at the beginning of the war when groups were small, it was not a sustainable system for growing groups. One person could not physically be in several places at the same time solving various problems.

Decision-making in such brigades was very authoritarian. There was no information sharing with fighters or anyone else, and some information (especially financial) was intentionally hidden from other group members. According to fighters, leaders were afraid that if low-level fighters learned about where resources came from, they would try to take them and start their own group. In some authoritarian groups, such practices were even more extreme and dangerous. According to activists, there were rumors among fighters that some leaders were so afraid of the competition that a fighter who had leadership qualities (were qualified and liked by other group members) and potentially could have challenged the leader of the brigade were intentionally sent to the most dangerous operations with a higher probability of being killed to prevent them from challenging the existing leadership. Although it is not clear and impossible to check if such rumors were in fact true, the fact that fighters were even thinking about it meant that they considered it as a possibility.

In general, such practices could in several ways endanger groups. First, it was reported that corrupt promotion practices were exploited by the enemy. In the interview, a member of ISIS who defected explained how his group used the FSA's tendency to promote people based on financial prosperity for their benefit. "A week before I defected, I was sitting with the chief of Amn al-Kharji, Abu Abd Rahman al-Tunisi. They know the weak point of the FSA. Al-Tunisi told me: 'We are going to train guys we know, recruiters, Syrians... Take them, train them, and send them back to where they came from. We'll give them \$200,000 to

\$300,000. And because they have money, the FSA will put them in top positions.”, “This is how ISIS took over Syria,” said the defector⁴⁵.

Second, such non-optimal strategies not only could lead to non-optimal group behavior, but also made growth and development of brigades almost impossible. Such structure and leadership attitudes did not allow the majority of groups much flexibility and ability to adapt to the constantly changing environment of a civil war, a crucial skill for survival in the civil war industry.

For example, in 2012, the presence of groups on the Internet and social media became increasingly important. Some groups immediately adapted, found a qualified public relations specialist, and started using the Internet to advance their group’s goals. Other groups, while also interested in the same goals, were reluctant to hire anyone from outside their family and close circle of friends. Eventually, they realized that their family members simply did not have the required technical knowledge and they either promoted a non-family fighter internally, such as a fighter who was wounded and was unable to continue fighting. Because he had some education (was a college student before the war), the leader thought it enough to give him this position. In other cases, brigades hired a media activist to be the groups communication director. Although those groups ultimately found a person to be their media presence, by that time, it was already too late because groups that had adapted to the new media environment earlier were dominating social media, increasing their popularity.⁴⁶

Regular low-level fighters understood problems with their leadership and the unsustainability of such organizational structures and were not satisfied with it. They were not able to do anything about it. At the beginning of the war, there was no information about other groups (they looked mostly the same to prospective fighters), they just wanted to be able to fight, so they did not have an option other than to comply with the rules and norms inside the brigade they had originally joined. Thus, fighters in those groups ended up acting as though they were okay with such group structures as long as the leader was able to get

⁴⁵ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/11/16/how-isis-picks-its-suicide-bombers.html>

⁴⁶ To reduce this dangerous gap in media capabilities, private companies sponsored by foreign governments had to take the role of moderate brigades' media offices.
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/03/how-britain-funds-the-propaganda-war-against-isis-in-syria>

money to support the group and its fighting capabilities. However, as soon as the difference between brigades became known and fighters learned about other (better organized) groups, they immediately tried to switch away from the more dysfunctional groups.

Did all groups face those problems? Although most likely all groups, like any other organizations, experienced such problems to some degree, some groups had it easier than others. Despite all the complications stemming from the Syrian population's lack of experience in the civil war industry, a small number of groups had more qualified leadership from the beginning and, as a result, got an additional competitive advantage. Those groups, once again, were mostly Islamist groups. Who were their leaders, and why were they qualified?

Top leadership qualifications

The only immediately visible solution to this weak and small leadership pool problem and the almost impossible ability to predict potential is to rely on either foreigners (expats) or locals who have experience in a similar industry but in different countries. Civilian industries do this all the time - bringing experts from other countries to newly opened local offices to help develop the company's operations there. This strategy is also possible in the civil war industry.

In Syria, civil war groups could rely on people with foreign experience who had already proven themselves while fighting in war zones such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, and especially Iraq. Iraq was the main source of civil war experience due to the following:

First, Iraq borders Syria, which makes it convenient for Syrians to fight there, and as a result, many Syrians gained experience in the country. Second, it was a war with a very strong enemy, the US, so experience fighting there was considered valuable for fighters. Third, the environment of operation in Iraq was similar to that in Syria, making military experience even more valuable. For example, the experience of Chechen fighters fighting Russian forces in the snow-covered Caucasus Mountains does not easily translate to the hot weather and sand storms of Syria. Also, the language is the same, so there were no

language-related misunderstandings, as was the case with people from Bosnia or Russia who spoke only rudimentary Arabic, making it difficult to communicate.

Fourth, the war was relatively recent, so individuals who fought there were still of fighting age. Many fighters who participated in other conflicts, such as in Bosnia, had already retired from the civil war business, and were not willing to join yet another conflict in the Middle East.

This understanding of the importance of previous war experience was so widely accepted among Islamist groups that it even mirrored itself in language. For example, in conversations when people mentioned the previous war experience of a particular fighter and his military qualifications, they use wording that in the civilian world is usually used to describe individuals' educational history and work experience. For example, they say what could be literally translated as *a person is an alumni of a particular armed conflict*. Also, the word *graduated* is often used to describe a person's experience in military prisons. For example, “he graduated from the Abu Ghraib prison”, but simply having been to prison is not enough. In higher education, when there are a variety of different colleges and many people with higher education, the value of a diploma naturally depreciates and merely going to college is no longer enough. What particular school one graduated from becomes important. Some are considered more and some less challenging to get into, and as a result, the more difficult ones become more prestigious. A similar situation has been occurring with prisons in the Syrian Civil War. There is also a hierarchy of prisons. For example, in the Syrian Civil War, Syrian “state” prisons — Military Intelligence’s notorious Branch 235, also known as the “Palestinian Branch” and “Sednaya” — were considered the most prestigious prisons, second only to the main US-run prisons in Iraq, and experience there was the most valuable.⁴⁷ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a leader of ISIS, along with other top ISIS leadership “graduated” from the US-run Bucca prison, on Iraq's southern border with Kuwait. Sednaya, some 20 miles north of the capital Damascus, which used to hold Muslim Brotherhood members, Islamist prisoners, and fighters returning from the Iraqi battlefield who were released after the beginning of demonstrations in 2011, had leaders who were less internationally famous — but who were still from crucially important groups such as Zahran Alloush (leader of Jaysh

⁴⁷ Although Guantanamo would be considered more prestigious, only a small number of prisoners held there went on to fight in Syria.

al-Islam), Hassan Aboud (leader of Ahrar al-Sham) and Ahmed Abu Issa (leader of Suqour al-Sham) — among its “alumni”. Why was being in prison considered important?

First of all, it is a signal of quality. A degree from a top business school sends a signal to future employers on Wall Street that the person was good enough to be admitted to the top school in the first place. Similarly, being imprisoned in a US-run prison, famous for the imprisonment of forefront Jihad leaders, sends a strong signal he is an important person in the insurgency industry. Otherwise, the US would not be interested in him. Even if this imprisonment was wrong and a person got there purely because of a US military intelligence failure, after being there, he could use this mistake to his advantage in the Jihadi hierarchy.

Second, as in any university, the connections one acquired play an important role. It is common knowledge that one of the most important reasons students strive for acceptance at an Ivy League school in the US is to socialize with people there and network through various clubs, teams, and study groups. It is no different in the insurgency industry. Spending 24 hours 7 days a week socializing with some of the main people in the insurgency industry allows one to build connections that could be used later. As one of the inmates of the Bucca prison noted, “Here, we were not only safe, but we were only a few hundred meters away from the entire al-Qaeda leadership.”

According to US military guards of that prison, there were people outside of the camp (not inmates) who knew how prison worked and how detainees were housed, and when they would enter Camp Bucca, they would ask to join the al-Qaeda bloc. “Sometimes guys would allow themselves to be caught. Then, in the intake process, they’d ask to be put in a specific compound which housed a lot of the al-Qaeda guys.”⁴⁸

It comes as no surprise that classmates or even roommates in universities started many company start-ups in the US, so it should not be surprising that particular brigades were formed in particular prisons. Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook with his roommates and classmates at Harvard University. ISIS was organized by al-Baghdadi and his campmates in Bucca prison,⁴⁹ and other groups were organized in other prisons. The correlation is similar.

⁴⁸ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/02/23/isis-used-a-u-s-prison-as-boot-camp.html>

⁴⁹ In all, nine members of the Islamic State’s top command did time in Bucca. Apart from Baghdadi himself, his deputy, Abu Muslim al-Turkmani, as well as senior military leader, Haji Bakr, and the

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The most prominent group was organized in one of the most elite prisons.

Third is facilitation. Similar to a university, prison brought people with the same interests together and gave them space to work on their interests and develop them further. One of the ex-Bucca prisoners, now a member of ISIS, said in the famous interview to The Guardian, “We could never have all gotten together like this in Baghdad, or anywhere else. It would have been impossibly dangerous... We had so much time to sit and plan... It was the perfect environment. We all agreed to get together when we got out. The way to reconnect was easy. We wrote each other’s details on the elastic of our boxer shorts. When we got out, we called. Everyone who was important to me was written on white elastic. I had their phone numbers, their villages. The first thing I did when I was safe in west Baghdad was to undress, then carefully take a pair of scissors to the underwear... I cut the fabric from my boxers and all the numbers were there. We reconnected. And we got to work.”⁵⁰

Creating brigades worked similar to the usual start-up incubators, which are now increasingly popular in high-tech industry. By definition, start-up incubators at universities help new companies develop by providing services such as management training and office space, while prison camps serve the exact same role for many start-up groups. It provided a safe space (keeping them away from the battle field where they could get killed), health care, dental care, food, and no outside disturbances. According to the prison guards, one large cell area was even nicknamed Camp Caliphate.⁵¹ In Syria, Sednaya prison inmates were also conveniently segregated, which allowed them to socialize better. Islamic Brotherhood members, who had been detained in the ‘70s and ‘80s, were on the second floor of the prison. The 400 or so more recent jihadists lived in isolation on the third floor, in an area the inmates termed “the black door” because the men behind it were cut off from other inmates. Their jailers called it the al-Qaeda wing.⁵²

Not only did prison mates socialize with each other, they also shared knowledge and taught each other. Thus, by the time one left the prison, he had learned from others there, and

leader of foreign fighters, Abu Qasim, were incarcerated there.

⁵⁰ http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/-sp-isis-the-inside-story?CMP=share_btn_tw

⁵¹ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/02/23/isis-used-a-u-s-prison-as-boot-camp.html>

⁵² http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/06/al-qaeda-iraq-syria-108214_full.html#.V0Divqsyfww

his time there was so important it was listed separately on his resume. The prison itself was only the first step assessing an individual who wanted to rise in the ranks of the civil war industry. It also mattered and added value to know with whom one had shared a prison cell. This is important because being in a cell implied a fighter spent time talking and learning from his fellow inmates.

Adel Jasim Mohammed, a former detainee, once described this education process to Al Jazeera. “Extremists had the freedom to educate the young detainees,” Mohammed said. “I saw them giving courses, using classroom boards, explaining how to use explosives and weapons and how to become suicide bombers.”⁵³ While theoretical knowledge is important, inmates did not overlook physical readiness. According to a US prison guard in Bucca, Islamist inmates were regularly conducting physical exercises including running and pushups.

There is an additional benefit if a person shared a cell in a prison with someone whose name is big in the jihad world: it is assumed that the important person taught the fighter about Islam and Jihad, so the important person could be considered his “mentor”.

This is just like when someone is asked who his adviser was at school. It can imply what someone knows and what ideas the person is standing by because it is likely that they were ingrained during the “mentoring” process. According to the former inmate in Bucca, “The most important people in Bucca were those who had been close to Zarqawi. He was recognized in 2004 as being the leader of the jihad.”

An ex-inmate of Bucca Prison and a current member of ISIS summarized his experience in the prison as follows: “For us, it was an academy... but for them [the senior leaders], it was a management school. There wasn’t a void at all, because so many people had been mentored in prison.”

Work experience followed a similar hierarchy, and it was not enough to have war experience in a particular conflict. As during a civilian job interview, job candidates were asked not only about the school they graduated from, but what classes they took and seminars they attended. In the civil war experience hierarchy, the particular battle a person participated in mattered a lot. By now, there are many wars a person could have participated in and gained

⁵³ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2009/12/2009121274712823455.html>

experience from, but these battles no longer enough. The more heavy battle experience a person has during those conflicts, the better. For example, in the case of the war in Iraq, desirable fighting experience a person could have would be participating in fighting in Falluja in 2004 or in the Battle for Baghdad airport in 2003. So if a person participated in these operations, it is especially highlighted in his civil war resume.

Also, as it is anywhere in the civilian world, although those requirements are important, they are not taken literally, as truly remarkable work achievements could fully substitute education. Later in life, when a person had much more real-world experience, it was absolutely irrelevant where he went to school or if he has a diploma at all.

One of the groups that enjoyed the luxury of having such experienced leadership from the very beginning was Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda branch in Syria. For this group, it was almost a prerequisite for promotion to any top leadership position to have a good “civil war resume”. Due to their leadership’s own previous fighting experience, they knew the exact qualities needed of prospective fighters and leaders and knew how to access them, as well as what to look for while making a promotion or recruitment decision.

They had professional leadership with massive prior fighting experience as well as advisers from prominent al-Qaeda leaders. For example, its current leader Abu Mohammad al-Golani was himself a graduate of Bucca camp and an alumni of the Iraq War. Other members included Abu Humam al-Shami with experience in Afghanistan and Abu Firas al-Suri with experience in Afghanistan and Yemen.

Under such experienced leadership, Jabhat al-Nusra was very successful in their financial planning from the very beginning, and was able to, in time, increase their resources while other groups were still learning how the industry worked. Describing relations with Jabhat al-Nusra in 2012, ISIS emir Abu Bakr al-Bahgdadi claimed, “we laid plans for them, and drew up the work policy for them, and gave them what financial support we could every month, and supplied them with men who had known the battlefields of jihad.”⁵⁴

They were not simply relying on advice from Al-Bahgdadi and his team, but were

⁵⁴ Audio statement by al-Bahgdadi, April 2013, cited in Seth G. Jones (2013) “Syria’s Growing Jihad” *Survival* 55(4): 53-72, 55.

building their own qualified mid-rank officer corps and were able to get other experienced people in their ranks. Moving from Iraq to Syria, al-Golani was specifically targeting former inmates of Sednaya to recruit for al-Nusra ranks. As soon as Golani made his secret trip across the border, he started reaching out to some of the cells of Sednaya men already active as well as others who were waiting for an al-Qaeda-affiliated organization to emerge through word of mouth or handwritten letters delivered by couriers.⁵⁵

Mid-Level Leadership

Although top leadership is important by itself, it is only part of the problem. The main role of leaders is not just running an organization's day-to-day activities, but building a sustainable institution (internal bureaucracy) that will function even after the founding leaders themselves are gone. For this to happen, groups needed to establish mid-level officer positions as well as clarify what it took to get promoted to such positions.

In contrast with groups that had problems assigning any position to a non-family member, the important task that leadership of successful groups did immediately after being established was building a sustainable institutional mechanism of the group to assure that they always have the best people in the right place. Being able to build a sustainable institutional mechanism for the group may be even more important than simply having a good leader, especially in a civil war setting. There are several reasons for this.

First, in general, without qualified mid-level leadership, even the best ideas from top leadership cannot be executed properly and, as a result, may be wasted. In addition, some problems are simply too minor to preoccupy top leadership and should be solved on the lower levels.

Second, and also in general, an organization needs clear structure so that it can grow without compromising its effectiveness. By definition, a successful group will grow in numbers and increase the amount of territories under its control at some point of its existence, so being able to smoothly do so is essential for groups that are trying to increase their share of

⁵⁵ http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/06/al-qaeda-iraq-syria-108214_full.html#.V0Divqsyfww

power. When a group grows, additional low-level leadership should be installed immediately to allow for power decentralization.

Thirdly, and specifically in civil wars, there is a large probability that group leaders may be killed, and one never knows when that may happen. In a civilian organization, one could approximate how long a director would be in his position, and even if he got sick or wanted to retire, he would have time to choose and train his successor. This is not the case on the frontline. On the frontline, one could be killed in a matter of seconds without having the chance to choose a substitute and share knowledge with him, or even worse, several people from top leadership could be killed at the same time. There should be a well thought out institutional mechanism that would ensure that the group could function even after the leader was killed or wounded, and he would be replaced immediately.

One organization, Ahrar al-Sham, was tested to the extreme on September 9, 2014 when most of its leaders were killed in an explosion in an underground site where they had gathered for a top-level meeting. This could have easily been the end for multiple groups, but immediately after the explosion, surviving members of the Ahrar al-Sham Shoura Council were able to gather to quickly elect a new team of leaders, including a number of former second-tier commanders and recent affiliates. This allowed them to continue their operations without any delay.

Some groups managed to construct a strong organizational structure and were already running an organization with an eye on long-term planning and ensuring that leaders on all levels were qualified for the responsibilities they took on. Most groups were more like small, family-run businesses, which were not able to survive in a constantly changing environment. For example, because they were leader-centric and were not able to build a sustainable structure, expansion or decapitation was fatal to their very existence, and they were easy targets for acquisition by larger groups. Just like how a major supermarket chain in any large western city could take over a small, local, family-run corner store if they wanted to, small brigades with inexperienced leaders and dysfunctional structure are not able to compete with major professionally run groups.

While groups suffering from internal corruption were not well organized in different

ways, well functioning groups were similar in their development. Take for example one group from Deir ez-Zor that was successfully functioning and growing before ISIS took the town and the group had to relocate to Idlib. From the very beginning of its existence in 2011, it took a professional, long-term planning approach to running a military organization. The most important people in the group were the leader and the military leader. Those two positions at the very beginning of the war and assigned a clear difference in responsibilities. Their military leader was appointed to his position based on his qualifications. Although he was Syrian, he had experience fighting in Iraq, in particular in Fallujah, for approximately a year, and he was considered qualified and experienced enough for the position.

From 2011 to 2012, when the group was still relatively small, it already had a well thought out internal structure. It had a military wing, consisting of 40 fighters, who were mostly university students, and a civilian wing, which included people in charge of media relations, aid (including food kitchen) and a medic (the first aid station). Those people were also chosen based on their qualifications, which were confirmed by references. For example, a brigade medic was usually a medical student or, as in this case, someone who used to work in the gym with sports injuries. Because of the importance of his position, references alone were not enough, and he was also checked on the field.

Since the group was successful — that is, able to get more funding, winning battles, and having PR experts with advanced computer knowledge promote its success through social media — the group started controlling more territory, recruiting more fighters, and increasing in size. At that point, they also adopted more Islamist ideology, which helped them sort out the most dedicated fighters from prospective fighters who were mostly interested in the benefits they offered.

Since the group leadership was experienced, they were able to quickly adapt to the constantly changing environment. In 2014, the brigade was rapidly expanding and taking control of more territory. They added another office to their structure, called court. There were disputes between fighters and civilians (like over stolen property or abuse), so the court was in charge of solving them. Also, the court was semi-independent and was in charge of ensuring discipline inside the brigade itself. For example, problems like spying for the

regime, not reporting for duty, and disobeying orders also fell under the court's jurisdiction.

With the rapid increase in size and territory, the groups needed internal restructuring. Previous group structures were not sufficiently effective in the new environment, so additional decentralization was needed. Since now the group was fighting on several frontlines, it was divided into three subgroups (by frontline) to make itself more decentralized in order to make more quick, efficient decisions and be more effective in combat. Each subgroup got its own leader with a deputy and an administrative office, which consisted of a store emir, warehouse emir, finance emir and garage emir, who was in charge of cars and gas for cars.

With the increase in the number of mid-level leadership positions being opened, more low-level fighters could get promotions to fill mid-level leadership positions. So what are the procedures and criteria for promotion?

Qualification. A person should be qualified, or as described by members of different groups- a person seeking promotion has to be respected by the group and proven in combat.

Dedication to the war. There are several problems related to this issue. If a person is not fully dedicated to the goal of the war, not only will he not work to the best of his abilities, but he could potentially defect to the enemy (or spy for the group from inside). To reduce the likelihood of this happening, priority for promotion was given to people who lost friends and family members in combat. It is assumed that the more grievance they have, the more revenge motivated they will be, and as a result, the more dedicated they will be to fight for the goal of the war and be less likely to defect. In the previous generation of civil wars, the number of promotion related problems ended here. In the new multi-faction rebellions, there is one more problem brigades are faced with.

Loyalty to the group. Not only do groups not want their leaders to defect to the enemy, they also do not want their leaders to switch to another group. In the best case scenario, a person who switches groups would merely be a loss of investment (training and mentorship), and in the worse case scenario, because groups are in a competition for power, such a move by the leader could cost his old group its competitive advantage.

To assure that a person is dedicated to his particular group, the principle of restriction and costly signaling of loyalty also applies. For example, in a group like al-Nusra, how could a fighter prove his loyalty to the group, especially since rather strict restrictions are already mandatory to any member of the group?

He could use additional costs that are rationalized by ideology, but in an a slightly different way. These additional costs are voluntary. The difference in unproductive costs that a person who is looking for promotion compared to the lowest ground soldier level will take is that those costs are not required but are voluntary, exceeding the ones required. The group knows this, so even if mandatory costs for low-level fighters were relaxed, those for mid-level leadership would not change. Even when Jabhat al-Nusra, for example, was short on funding and was less strict in admitting new members (when “you see those who smoke, who drink, and criminals”) they continued to be strict about promotions because “that cannot be applied to the leadership.”⁵⁶ Using such voluntary costs, people who seek promotion are signaling to other group members and leaders that they will go the extra mile for the group: they are even willing to take additional, unrequired costs for the sake of the group (and its official ideology). The fighter is signaling his dedication to the group and the sacrifices he is willing to make for the group and the group's main espoused ideology.

Much like mandatory unproductive costs, these signals should be highly visible both for those inside and outside the group. As a result, signals should be more showcase the more decorative side of Islamism (since that is what a group positions itself to be). Examples of such signals are (ranging from the least costly to the most costly):

Pictures with cats — Although the strategic use of cats may sound almost comical, the prophet Muhammad’s love for cats is very well known. Replicating it sends a signal of a fighter's desire to be similar to the most important religious figure. There are well known stories about the prophet Muhammad’s love of cats⁵⁷. To emulate the Prophet’s love for cats,

⁵⁶ <http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/al-qaeda-group-losing-influence-in-southern-syria#page1>

⁵⁷ For example, when the call to prayer rang out, a cat was asleep on one of the sleeves of the Prophet’s (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) robes. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) wanted to wear the robe to go to prayer. Rather than disturb the cat, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) cut off his sleeve to leave it in peace. The Prophet (peace and

some Jabhat al-Nusra fighters became close to cats and, in particular, because visibility is paramount, took pictures with them to post on the Internet to make everyone see how they were emulating the prophet Muhammad in every way possible. From outside the group, such behavior seemed extremely stupid and childish.

Islamic words — Extreme overuse of words with a religious connotation and making new expressions is also a symbol that some Islamist fighters employ. For example, phrases including *If God wants*, *Upon God's Permission* and *Sobhan allah* to refer to something beautiful were not used that much in an everyday conversation before the war. Of course, such words were used before the war, but now, some people are adding them to nearly every sentence. Before the war, overusing those words would be considered bad taste or poor language skills and the person using them considered generally lacking in education.

In addition, new expressions were constructed and were widely used. For example, *May God make you a martyr*. This phrase was used as a positive expression as in: “Thank you for helping me, may God make you a martyr.”

Red Bull — Drinking an expensive energy drink like Red Bull was never popular in the Syrian culture, but with the increase in the number of foreign fighters, it became part of the image of a tough fighter who was willing to dedicate his life to the war. In Syria during the war, Red Bull cost almost two dollars compared to Coca-Cola that was less than half of that price, making it a literal costly signal.

Jihadi nasheeds — Special songs (without instrumental music) were produced by Jabhat al-Nusra and other groups with the sole purpose of calling for Jihad and promoting groups. For example, Jabhat al-Nusra songs include such titles as *Peace on al-Nusra* and *Defeating Blasphemy*. Fighters usually listen to the songs on high volume while driving in their vehicles with the purpose of attracting attention.

Before the war, people in general were not exposed to such songs, if they existed at all, but if asked in a hypothetical situation what they would have done if someone had been

blessings of Allah be upon him) then stroked the cat three times, which, it is said, granted it seven lives and the ability to land on his feet at all times.

listening to such music, respondents answered that most likely they would have considered that person crazy or stupid and would have politely asked him to turn it off.

Traditional Central Asian dress (Shalwar kameez) — This pajama-like male dress is traditional to Central Asia (in particular to Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan), and it did not exist in Syria before the war.⁵⁸ Syrians call it either the Afghani outfit or Shari'a outfit if someone nearby is wearing it.⁵⁹ Although there are religious regulations for male dress in Islam, it does not require Muslims to wear this particular type of clothing.

Before the war, people in Syria generally looked down on people from Central Asia, and this kind of clothing was a signal of their low-level status. It was even part of public culture. For example, in the old popular Syria TV show Hammam Al Hana, a character called Ghawar Al Tousha, a low-level employee in the bath in Damascus, was wearing this type of clothing and as a result this dress was nicknamed after him — Sherwal Ghawar.

Teeth cleaning twig (swaak) — This is a chewing stick with one frayed end used to brush teeth, while the other end is used as a toothpick. In Islam, it is frequently advocated for in the *hadith* (written traditions relating to the life of Muhammad). For example in the *Sahih al-Bukhari* 244, Book 4, Hadith 111 Vol. 1, Book 4, Hadith 245 it says, "My father said, 'I came to the Prophet (be peace upon him) and saw him carrying a *Siwak* in his hand and cleansing his teeth, saying, 'U' U'," as if he was retching while the *Siwak* was in his mouth." *Sahih al-Bukhari* 244, Book 4, Hadith 111 Vol. 1, Book 4, Hadith 245. Before the war, Syrians considered it rude to chew it in public, but not any more.

Before the war, using a *swaak* was considered disgusting and village type behavior, unacceptable for educated people since spitting on the street was considered an uncivilized behavior. In general, people had never seen it in Syria before the war and were only introduced to this word at school in religious class on the topic of hygiene. According to Syrians, even the most religious teachers talked about the *swaak* only to explain how hygiene

⁵⁸ Only in very rare cases in rural areas would males working in the garden be wearing something similar, but it was still not the same.

⁵⁹ The word 'Afghani' could be considered shaming, since even Jabhat al-Nusra members wearing it think poorly of Afghanis.

was always important, but before toothpaste was invented, people had to rely on such primitive tools.

Hair — There are two acceptable hairstyles: completely shaved or fully grown. The only thing not permissible is to have it in different lengths. Traditionally in Syria, long hair was considered “gay” and was unpopular.

Before the war, having long hair for a man was considered feminine. People who had it were called *tant*, bullied, and often verbally attacked. Even four years into the war, these two notions are competing in the heads of Syrian fighters. Although more and more men decide to grow their hair out, the majority of fighters have it only down to their shoulders.

Enforcing rules on others — For a fighter, this means not only not smoking himself, but not allowing others (including civilians) to smoke, and may include taking cigarettes from others and burning them. Before the war, it would have been considered extremely impolite and generally unacceptable behavior.

Although such screening methods as additional unproductive costs have proven to be somewhat reliable, they are not without problems. The main problem is quite unexpected: over time, such restrictions become popular and enter mass culture (similar to having a prison or gang-style tattoo in the United States). As a result, it becomes a less costly signal. If many groups are doing something, it is less costly for others to do than when a single group was the only one doing it. Before the war, no one in Syria wore the “Afghani outfit,” but when Islamist group members started wearing it, it became more popular. Soon even kids started wearing it in order to look “cool” and emulate fighters they respect. Right now, more and more people, even in refugee camps, are wearing *kameez shalwar*, overusing expressions with religious connotations and increasing their consumption of energy drinks. Although Red Bull is too expensive for the majority of people, store owners in the refugee camps are now offering less expensive locally made energy drinks to satisfy the demand.

The same is true for hairstyles. Long hair has become more acceptable, even in the non-Islamist fighters’ Syrian culture. For example it is a big problem for NGO workers in refugee camps. Kids who want to look similar to fighters they respect refuse to cut their hair

and due to the lack of water and sanitation in the camps it leads to the outbreak of lice.

As a result, in order to continue sending costly signals, members of Islamist groups interested in promotion have invented new decorative elements and signals, a job that becomes harder and harder with time. Outside of this understanding, it appears that both fighters and the population in general are becoming more Islamist. It is also another reason why Jabhat al-Nusra prohibited smoking. Compared to the other appearance signals, which lose their meaning over time, not smoking is costly for a person no matter how others behave, and as a result, it is the costliest signal used by groups. Even here, though, peer pressure is constantly increasing. Before, smoking was acceptable in the society, but now it is not surprising to hear a mother mentioning smoking as one of the main disadvantages of her future son in law, although neither he or her family have any connection to Jabhat al-Nusra.

Conclusion

The main reason for most groups' suboptimal and myopic decisions their top leadership's general lack of experience, and that was a result of either not having any experienced leaders available or the lack of desire or ability to promote qualified people to top leadership positions. The qualitative evidence presented above supports the hypothesis: Groups with more experienced leadership are more likely to be desirable to potential recruits (H4.1).

While at the beginning there were simply not many qualified people to choose from for such positions, later on too many people wanted to become leaders for their personal benefit, and it became harder to choose ones that were truly qualified and dedicated. That was either done intentionally, because of the corrupt system, or unintentionally, because members simply did not know what made a good candidate. While some groups used family network connections along with other corrupted promotion methods, other groups approached this problem in a much more strategic way. In order to maximize the pool of potential candidates, they not only promoted the most qualified people inside the group but were very actively recruiting people from outside. Upper-level leaders also switched brigades. Not only did it

ensure that they had the best possible leadership in the industry, it also ensured that other groups would not take them because competing groups operate under zero-sum conditions.

As one example, a military emir of one of the groups in Deir ez-Zor left for Jabhat al-Nusra where he was immediately promoted to the emir of the whole town of Deir ez-Zor. Another such example of a leadership move between Islamist groups was a member of an aid group who switched to another group in Deir ez-Zor and was promoted to the emir of aid for the whole city after taking an additional sharia course. Some groups went even further in adapting civilian human resources best practices and insisted on fresh blood in leadership and promoted unexpected people from time to time. For example, Abu Jaber's appointment as the Ahrar al-Sham leader was only set to last for one year. He could have run for reelection, but he declined. According to Ahrar al-Sham spokesperson Ahmed Qara Ali, "As his term ended, brother Hashem al-Sheikh refused to extend his term, since he wanted to allow for new blood to be pumped into the leadership."⁶⁰

Those results support the *Leadership Selection Hypothesis*: Groups that are able to develop unbiased promotion mechanisms are more likely to have better leaders. While some groups had always approached top-level human resources strategically and sought out the best candidates, others did not. Some leaders got their experience in wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen, and by the time the war in Syria started, they clearly knew how to run an armed group. This experience gave them not only the knowledge of the civil war industry, but also connections in the field. Such groups were able to develop clear economic and other policies and take control of their long-term revenue source. Their previous experience, fighting against a strong enemy like the US, also taught them that they had to develop a stable institution for the group as soon as possible so that when one of the leaders got killed, it would not affect the group's overall performance significantly and a new, equally qualified person could immediately step in. By successfully doing that they ensured the group's long-term sustainability. When a group has a clear structure of positions and requirements for people to take these roles and the process is not corrupt, leaders can be rapidly replaced with the best possible candidate, even if their predecessor is killed, and it will not significantly encumber the group.

⁶⁰ <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/abu-yahia-al-hamawi-ahrar-al-shams-new-leader/>

Other groups with less experienced leaders were not able to make long-term financial plans or secure long-term funding and their resources ran out, and even if they were able to get outside funding, their lack of internal structure and good mid-level leadership made them extremely vulnerable and made it hard for them to successfully grow in size and expand their territory.

The best way for those groups to learn these practices was to learn from their own mistakes on the go. Not only was it damaging, but also the disparity between groups started to increase from the very beginning of the war. While groups learned the importance of leadership and long-term planning during the conflict, in some cases it was too late because groups with experienced leadership had taken off running, and it was almost impossible to catch up with them later in the war. This stark contrast between different brigades' leadership qualities immediately spilled over into an inequality in the share of power, which compounded over time.

Conclusion Implications for Peace

Although ongoing conflicts are very different from the previous generation of civil wars where there was one or a small number of rebel groups, it does not mean that today's moderate rebel groups could not win, or that armed groups cannot be effectively supported, or a negotiated settlement be achieved. It is still possible, even though this task becomes harder. Trying to outcompete other groups and consolidate power in a strongly competitive environment is much more difficult than simply entering a new market as an almost guaranteed monopoly. While their previous ability to monopolize a revolution meant that rebel groups did not have to be as effective and organized and could make mistake after mistake and still hold power, rebel factions now have much less room for mistakes, and any one of them could easily prove fatal. There are multiple competitors waiting for the group to make mistakes and immediately take advantage of it.

This relatively fair competition forces groups to be much more effective, which not only increases their chances against the enemy, but also the chances of them being able to control a post-war country effectively, which is crucial for stability in the long-term.

Therefore, after accepting that the environment has changed, and that policies should reflect those changes, the next step is to understand the nuanced rules of competition between fighting factions, especially for their main resource, manpower. Without knowing all the internal mechanisms that are in play on one side of the front line, it is almost impossible to make a clear strategy for defeating an insurgency, supporting an insurgency, or mediating a peaceful settlement between fighting sides.

So how could the knowledge from previous chapters help quell ongoing and future conflicts? If the government could not defeat the rebel groups, there are two options left - rebel victory or negotiated settlement. For either of them to happen there should be one or several strong rebel groups, which could establish a monopoly or oligopoly on the rebellion and be able to either win, or at least to enforce the decisions reached during negotiations on others. An international actor could help empower a particular armed group to transform such multi-factional rebellion into a monopoly or oligopoly.

In civil wars, as in any civilian industry, an investor expecting to achieve his own goals by speeding up the growth of a particular organization could invest in a group, giving them money and knowledge as well as providing it with necessary information, infrastructure, and innovations. While in civilian industry such investors are individuals or companies, in armed conflicts such investors range from foreign governments to international terrorist organizations.

Although an investor could choose to invest at any point in the conflict, getting in the game early will give him and his armed group a chance to move faster, be more effective and, as result, leave competitors far behind. That not only will help the investor get his dividends and save money, but it will also terminate the conflict faster, with less infighting and civilian casualties. As in a civilian market, although such early investment is the most profitable, it is also the most risky because it is hard to evaluate different groups and predict which one will

be more successful at the very beginning of the conflict.

Investor-organization relations are never simple, but in civil wars, they are particularly complicated because they happen within an environment of deep distrust associated with the absence of the rule of law. In a normal situation within civilian industry in developed countries, a legal framework could enforce contracts and agreements and protect the interests of both firms and investors. This security is not available in a war-torn country. In a war zone, an investor cannot be sure that the terms of a funding agreement between his entity and a rebel group will be honored, because even simply monitoring a group's behavior, not to mention enforcing anything in a war zone, is no trivial task. If the group violates the contract/agreement, there are no courts that an investor or an armed group can turn to. As a result, the armed group does not trust the investor because he is not obligated to them and could cut their funding any minute; but conversely, the investor does not trust the group because it could be working with several investors with competing interests, or it might not follow the rules set by the investor. Due to the absence of law in this distrusting, complicated civil war environment, it falls on investors to solve the usual investor-organization problems in the environment where the law and even minimal control are absent.

In previous chapters, I showed how internal competition between different rebel factions works, what makes a rebel group successful through the lens of labor market theory, and what makes some groups more powerful inside the rebel block than others. Now I will discuss how this knowledge could be used to help a foreign actor 1) choose a group in the rebel camp to support; 2) convince a group to agree to support; and 3) provide the proper help at the right time in order to empower one group at the expense of others inside the rebel block.

Choosing a group

Although choosing a group and convincing it to accept financial backing from a particular investor initially seem like separate steps, they are, in fact, very closely related to each other, because the differences between groups and investors play a much greater role in shaping their cooperation than their shared goals. Since armed groups look for funding that will help them achieve their goal, they look for investors that appear interested in

this goal. Investors look for a group that will advance their goal and produce dividends on their investment. This makes pairing investors and armed groups particularly difficult.

Why are their goals different, and how do they differ? First, by definition, if a brigade's goals and those of the investor are absolutely identical, then their financial backer is a donor and not an investor. Since there is no altruism in international relations, particularly between different countries during the war, there are no donors and the goals of the investor and group are almost always different.

Second, different investors also have different goals, but they differ only slightly. If some international actors have identical goals, they channel support through the same outlet to reduce transaction costs, and they become a single investor from a group's standpoint. Like in high-tech industry where investors with the same goals and motivations form an investment group and fund interesting projects together, in a civil war, investors form a coalition (like NATO or the anti-ISIS coalition). This allows them to reduce transactional costs, increase available funding, and broaden their expertise. Although the goals of different investors and groups vary, they do so only slightly, because otherwise investors would support groups on different sides of the frontline, like Iran and Russia vs. U.S. and Saudi Arabia in the Syrian civil war.

As a result, the goals of armed groups and an investor, and those of different investors, are very close but still different, and for an investor and an armed group to match either one of those parties, it has to misrepresent its true goal, or both parties have to agree on a middle ground.

Misrepresentating Goals

Who will misrepresent their goal? As with any industry, in a civil war there are at least two states of the market: the seller's market (when there are more investors than there are groups), and buyer's market (when there are more groups than investors), and the particular state of the market affects who intends to hide their true goal.

Seller's market. In a seller's market, many investors are interested in the ongoing civil war. In a situation like this, investors compete to fund and gain ownership of the most

successful armed group. As a result, investors have the incentive to misrepresent their goal to match that of the brigade's, as well as to have all groups striving for the same goal apply for their funding so they can choose the most promising one (or several) to fund.

In Syria, this was the case at the beginning of the war, when the civil war had just started. Many investors rushed in, but at that point armed groups themselves still had some savings and other sources of funding, so they were not desperately searching for outside support and were thus able to choose the best terms of agreement. As a result, potential investors had to compete for groups' attention and interest. For example, at a November 2012 meeting between the Syrian opposition's provincial military council leaders, the most prominent rebel commanders from each of the large independent groups was organized in Doha, Qatar. Not only did Qatari investors promise funding and weapons, but they paid significant financial incentives up front for simply attending the meeting. The Saudis saw this meeting as competition and offered vast sums to leaders to refuse to go to Qatar and to work directly with Saudi Arabia instead. Groups successfully exploited this competition. In order to increase funding and receive money and support from both sponsors; some rebel groups went so far as to nominally split, sending one commander to Doha with the other staying in Syria.

Buyers market. A buyer's market means that not many investors are interested in a particular civil war. This means that armed groups must work hard to find an interested investor. In this situation, groups have an incentive to hide their true goal and misrepresent themselves to the investor to match his goal.

This also happened in Syria, but only two to three years after the war started. With the war progressing, groups members' personal savings dried up and wealthy donors were unable to continue supporting an expensive civil war because they either lost hope in the possibility of winning, their money dried up, or new laws were adopted in their home countries preventing them from continuing to send money. As a result, not-for profit groups became desperate, looking for money to continue fighting.

Mr. Zeidan of the Idlib Military Council, talking about the provision of US support to Syrian fighters, said, "I know that they are afraid of something called al-Qaeda. They talk

about Ahrar al-Sham and Suqoor al-Sham. They are conservative Islamists, but they are not extremists. Many of these groups just want support.” He adds, “We are fighting to have a democratic country, not so that we can install people with American or European or Saudi agendas. We want to topple the regime, so whoever offers us help, we will call our units whatever they want as long as they support us. We just want to finish.”⁶¹ Similarly, local activists noted that at the same time armed groups started appealing to Gulf countries, highlighting the religion their countries share. In particular, they started portraying the conflict as religious, sometimes even sending their group's promotional videos with questions like, “Why are Muslim brothers not helping us?”, and groups started changing their flags from green (the revolutionary flag) to black to highlight their religious similarities.

In both markets, because one of the sides is misrepresenting itself, both groups have incorrect expectations of one another. In a seller's market, an investor has a greater incentive to misrepresent his true goal of supporting a group, while in a buyer's market groups are more likely to try to hide their objections. Although there are short-term prospects for cooperation even while groups or investors are misrepresenting their true goals, long-term failure is near guaranteed since groups need to fight for their goals, and the investor is expecting to receive dividends on his investment.

Problems stemming from misrepresentation could range from fighters not wanting to fight for the new goal and switching to another group (if an investor misrepresents himself) to the investor micromanaging the group's activities after providing support, making cooperation unproductive (if fighters hide their true goals). The US encountered this problem in Syria. In 2015, the US started training and arming Syrian fighters to fight against ISIS (a relatively unpopular goal among the Syrian opposition), making them pledge that they will not use their knowledge and weapons to attack Assad's forces. Because fighting against the regime was the main goal of almost all fighters, this program was not successful, and out of 1,500 who passed the first stage of selection, only 200 actually started training⁶². Later, when those fighters returned to Syria, some retreated instead of fighting Jabhat al-Nusra, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization, leaving U.S.-issued weapons behind, and some even

⁶¹ <http://world.time.com/2012/09/18/syrias-secular-and-islamist-rebels-who-are-the-saudis-and-the-qataris-arming/>

⁶² <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2015/6/24/us-trained-rebels-reject-pledge-not-to-attack-syrian-regime>

defected to the group. Such behavior from fighters dedicated to their goals was understandable. They saw Jabhat al-Nusra not only as a group that shared their own goal (fighting against Assad), but also as the most effective group in this regard that could make the best use of weapons and best train fighters. As a result, there was absolutely no reason for them to fight Jabhat al-Nusra, but rather provide them with everything they needed. Conversely, this situation naturally led to an immediate halt in US funding. A State Department official cited the “poor performance” of rebel groups in Idlib in October 2014 as the primary reason. When they were up against al-Nusra, the official said, “they didn’t fight hard enough.”⁶³

It was only because the Train and Equip program started in 2015 when the majority of groups had run out of money (buyer's market), that it was able to at least recruit this small number of participants who were willing to misrepresent their goals for a long enough time to finish training and receive money. Otherwise, had the program been started earlier, there would likely have been no interested participants because they had other options better correlated with their main war objective.

Therefore, any successful investor should always be sensitive to the slightest changes in his market market of interest and be able to quickly calibrate his strategies accordingly in order to make his investment the most profitable.

Foreign supporter dilemma

Since the goals of an armed group are at least slightly different from those of the investor, as long as a funded group is fighting for its true goal (instead of the investor’s one), the investor is not advancing his agenda (earning dividends from his investment).

After a group receives funding and fighters switch to it, the group must change its goal to match that of the investor for the investment to work and bear dividends. This is not an easy task since armed groups are motivated to reach their material goal and may not be interested in fighting for other goals. For-profit groups, on the other hand, do not care what they fight for as long as they are getting remunerated for their service, but in that regard they

⁶³ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/27/exclusive-obama-cuts-funds-for-the-syrian-rebels-he-claims-to-support.html>

are not a good investment. As a result, an investor should be careful to avoid working with such groups. First, they are the least reliable, least effective, extremely risk averse, and have the worst reputation among civilians. Secondly, they usually have their small share of the market and do not openly compete with the primary not-for-profit groups, so they will simply not be interested in receiving investment – it would not help them advance their goal (increasing profit while minimizing expenses). Finally, because their main activity is profit-seeking by any means (including looting and kidnapping), supporting them could lead to bad domestic publicity.

For an investor who is looking for an armed group to support in a civil war, it is important to understand the goal of a group and what type of fighters it has. With this information in mind, what are the possible options for cooperation between an investor and an armed group?

Fighters do not agree with the new goal

Dedicated fighters could be disappointed in the new goal and leave the group as soon as they learn about the new objective. They could either leave the fight altogether or switch to another group working toward their preferred goal. This will lead to the investor losing his initial investment. This was a widespread problem in Syria when leaders of opposition groups started pledging support to ISIS, which resulted in many fighters switching to other groups.

Also, with investors entering the market and the consequent increase in funding, some fighters would stay, enticed by the new benefits the group offers. This option could be even worse for an investor, because while in the first scenario he will lose only his time and the initial money he invested, in the second case he will continue sponsoring an ineffective group and as a result waste even more money and time.

Middle Ground Agreement:

Sometimes, if the investor's goal incorporates the group's goal, the group could agree to the investor's sponsorship and go on to fight for both goals. In this situation, fighting for the difference between the new and the old goal would be an equivalent of an "outside profit-generating activity," one that is not closely related to the main goal but could be used to

increase funding in order to bolster the group's success. On one hand, this would secure them the necessary funding, and on the other hand the group could still have control over their main goal. It is less preferable from the investor's standpoint because the group will not be interested in the “difference” between the investor's and the their own goal, and they would be fighting for it only as mercenaries (trying to increase profit while decreasing the risks involved) and would leave this particular investor as soon as another investor (one with a goal closer to their own), becomes available.

Fighters agree with the new goal

The most desirable situation for the investor is for fighters in the group to agree that the investor's goal is more preferable than group's one. Depending on how divergent the new goal is from the original one, group views could be hard to change, or the switch could happen easily, without losing any fighters to competing groups. Although a change in motivation and grievance is ideal for the investor, it is a very rare event, and one that could happen through coercion, persuasion, or simply take place naturally. In the Syrian civil war, there have been cases where fighters' goals were changed successfully and unsuccessfully.

Taking advantage of the rebels' generally low level of education and cursory understanding of democracy, some Islamist groups tried to persuade their members to give up fighting Assad with the aim of installing a democratic government in favor of building a caliphate. Islamist lecturers condemned the evils of Western-style democracy and preached the benefits of an Islamic state, but this did not work entirely. The fatal flaw in Western democracy, they argue, is the separation of state and religion, which they portray as an absolute prohibition on religious practice; and in the absence of the sharia law, they claim that corruption, prostitution, drug use, and other vices flourish. Aiming to connect the fighters' original grievance against Assad (the old goal) with the new grievance against secularism (the new goal), the sheikhs also teach that Western secularism is responsible for Assad's corruption and brutality. As one sheikh explained in the interview, “Assad is committing crimes because he is secular, and he is secular because of Western influence.” Nevertheless, those efforts were not successful, and at the time of the survey 94 percent of the

interviewed Islamist rebel fighters retained their revolutionary goals of defeating the Assad regime (old goal). Only a quarter of the ostensibly “Islamist” rebels claimed that their goal is “to build an Islamic state” in Syria (new goal).

At the same time, some fighters transitioned from one goal to another more naturally with the change of the object of grievance. For example, this happened in Shaitat, a village in an oil-rich region, which had sided with the opposition from the very first days of the revolution. In August 2014, ISIS entered the province and tried to reach a disarmament agreement with local villages. The village, being rich in oil, was reasonably afraid to do so and did not trust ISIS, and as a result did not comply with the disarmament agreement. This resulted in a conflict that left many casualties on both sides. After the massacre, those who survived demanded revenge, and because the only force in the region that was successfully fighting ISIS was Assad they joined the regime’s army. Among the leaders of the FSA group that defected back to the regime was Abed es-Sattar, who lost his brother in the fight in Shaitat and sought revenge against ISIS. At least fifty more people from his group followed him. Although they were on the wanted list by the government, they took the risk and switched to the government’s side to fight ISIS. Some of them joined the official army, while others joined local units, also known as “Jaish Watani.”⁶⁴ They took the risk of defecting to the former enemy, but even after they received official amnesty, other fighters in regime’s army did not trust them and were afraid of their former enemies. As a result, they are more frequently sent to the frontlines, with the leaders following the logic of “either you are going to die for us, or win for us.” However, this is actually what these fighters were looking for. They themselves volunteered for the most dangerous positions on the frontlines, because the only reason they defected back to the regime, despite the risks involved, was revenge, and the frontline is where they could have a greater chance of revenge against ISIS.

Supporting a group

Because there are a lot of moving parts on this market, an investor has to solve his first problem (choosing a group) as soon as possible to start working on the second one (actually

⁶⁴ While some locals were extremely unhappy with this decision, saying “they could have run to Turkey instead, why join the regime”, others agreed that “they would do the same if their sons or brothers were killed the same way.”

supporting the group) in order to be able to more effectively support it and make it the strongest group in the rebel block, in control of the greatest share of power.

A civil war investor has a lot of power over the organization he invests in, and he is able not only to affect internal policies, military operations, and finances, but also has a say in leadership decisions. Although exercising these powers is very important since startup groups usually have no prior experience with civil wars and, as a result, are in urgent need of guidance, groups need to carefully control investors' behavior and decisions since outside investors are not fully aware of the situation on the ground.

Leadership

As shown previously, leadership is crucial for the success of any organization, and armed groups are no exception. As a result, an investor should not only evaluate a group's leadership while choosing one to invest in but also manage it. This is not an easy task. Finding qualified leadership for a newly established startup armed group, especially in the Middle East, is harder than ever. This problem arose for several historical reasons.

The first reason it emerged was due to a shortage of homegrown talent. In the previous century, the West mostly lost its monopoly on training qualified, potential leaders of armed groups and terrorist organizations, particularly in the Middle East. While previous generations of armed group leaders in civil wars in Africa and the former Yugoslavia hailed from western military organizations such as the French Foreign Legion, British and South African special operations units, and so on, the majority of qualified Sunni Muslim potential group leaders today gained their fighting experience with Islamist groups in Yemen, Iraq, Chechnya, and Afghanistan⁶⁵. Why is that the case? Also, it is not only about added value while in the organization, but also self-selection into those groups. Very often, Middle Eastern countries have no effective opposition to the government except for clandestine organizations; so young people who disagree with the government do not have many options to join a peaceful opposition front if they want to make a change. Also, if a young Sunni male

⁶⁵ For example, a current member of the French Foreign Legion said in the interview that he did not remember encountering anyone from the Middle East (other than from Israel).

from the Middle East, for example, is interested in the military and wants to gain the best military education on the international level, his only option now is to join a al-Qaeda. In many countries, he would not be able to join his home country's army , but moreover, while he could have previously joined the Spanish or French Foreign Legion, for example, it is now very unlikely that he would even be able to get a visa to France (or permanent residency in Spain) to try to join those forces, not to mention other, more regular foreign armies where having the country's citizenship is mandatory to enlist.

Second, there is also a shortage of qualified people coming from the outside. Lately, western countries not only refuse to pay ransoms and use diplomatic pressure to rescue their citizens from war zones if something bad happens, but most western countries have also adopted new laws explicitly prohibiting their citizens from taking part in foreign wars their home country is not part of⁶⁶. Although, at least in the US, this law was made to prevent people from joining terrorist groups, moderate groups were also, if not more, affected by this practice because if not convicted and imprisoned, people who join even moderate groups are often jailed or under the constant radar of law enforcement. Such practices severally obstruct moderate groups in Middle East conflict zones from recruiting qualified leadership, because people qualified to take those positions probably have better alternatives, which significantly alters their cost-benefit calculations. Such people most likely would have citizenship in a western country, be respected as veterans in their adopted land, and as a result be less likely to risk long prison sentences or being under surveillance for their efforts to join such groups. On the other hand, people who want to join radical groups, enticed by its ideology, are more likely to take a risk. Usually, they have fewer outside options, do not plan to ever come back, and most likely are already under the radar of law enforcement (or at least they are under this impression). For them, trying to join radical groups on a foreign battlefield does not add much to a possible prison sentence.⁶⁷

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https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/25122631/HLS_PILAC_Research_Briefing_Suppressing_Foreign_Terrorist_Fighters_and_Supporting_Principled_Humanitarian_Action.pdf?sequence=1

67 For example, a Russian ISIS foreign fighter explained why he was fighting in Syria – “I faced a lot of pressure from my government because I converted to Islam. They came to my house several times searching for anything that to use against me but they found nothing. Russian intelligence always puts pressure on Muslims.”

Of course, these events have not gone unnoticed by civil war industry participants across the globe, so it is now more difficult than ever for investors to find qualified and experienced leadership for their armed groups, if not impossible. An investor could appoint a foreign military adviser to the group, but finding a professional leader to coordinate all groups operations who: 1) knows the details of the country of operation (speaks local languages and has deep local ethnographic and political knowledge); 2) has experience with startup armed groups and operations (understands the best management practices); 3) has enough experience in the country to be able to identify and recruit qualified low-level leadership; 4) knows cultural and social norms in the country of investment; 5) and at the same time will be willing to take the necessary risks to run such an organization (i.e. he is not a for-profit fighter simply hired to do his job, but instead stakes his reputation on the success of the rebellion) seems almost impossible. An ideal candidate for this job would be a member of the diaspora (he knows the country well) who has connections to his country of origin (shares grievances and is interested in the goal of the war), experience in leading special operation units in professional western armies (that is, combat experience in a semi-independent unit), and wants to participate in the future of his native war-torn country. Even if such a person exists, it would most likely be illegal for him to take this position, so now an investor has to look for the most qualified local individual, who is much less qualified than an investor would prefer. Such a candidate will most likely have no experience with a startup armed group because he could neither have gotten it from the West or from fighting in Iraq, Chechnya, Yemen, or Afghanistan (because such experience and affiliations automatically disqualify him from this position due to the domestic public opinion of the investor's country). So even if there are locals with at least some of the required qualification, an investor will compete for them with other armed groups (and investors) fighting on the same side, and most likely he will still be less experienced than leaders affiliated with al-Qaeda, for example.⁶⁸ These groups are starting with a crucial disadvantage, and one that is very hard to overcome later on.

Monetary support. After leadership, next crucial concern for group survival is finance. It is very important for both an investor and the group to agree on the amount and timing of

⁶⁸ A similar situation happened during the Ukraine-Russia war in 2014 when ultra-radical armed groups on both sides got leaders who had experience in radical groups during the Yugoslavia conflict on the Croatian and Serbian sides respectively.

support to reduce unintentional budget planning problems. The group's leadership needs to be able to plan its long-term budget to match its long-term goals in the war to target more strategic achievements instead of small, short-term victories. For the group to be able to do so, it needs to have a long-term budget and be sure that it will not be delayed or affected in any way. Such assurance will give both the investor and the group the best long-term results.

Attracting fighters. If the group has qualified leadership and a long-term budget, it is now important to popularize it among prospective fighters to increase the quantity and quality of its manpower. If their efforts are successful, other groups (no matter how well funded they are) will eventually have to disband. In this case, simple propaganda will not only fail in the long term, but could even be harmful. If the actual conditions in the group do not meet fighters' expectations, they could easily switch to other groups or worse—they could stay and continue consuming the group's resources without taking required combat risks, spy on the group, or even sabotage the group from within. To prevent that, an investor and/or group leader should actually take care of the group members, and essentially follow common textbook guidelines which outline the best practices for civilian human resource management.

One such practice is providing direct benefits: the group should make sure that their fighters are getting all the basic necessities. In a war zone, they should receive not only a monetary salary, but also direct aid, because sometimes it is hard to get anything imported into the war zone. In Syria, for example, fighters should be getting bread, food, cooking oil, hygiene products, child necessities, and cloths, and depending on the location of the war, heating oil, mesquite nets, or fans and generators. The main goal of these direct benefits is two-fold. First, it makes the group more attractive to potential recruits, and second, it helps fighters focus on the war without thinking about other everyday problems that he and his family would otherwise be facing. It will increase the pool of qualified applicants and up retention rates because group members' needs are met. It will also make fighters more effective because they will be getting nutritious food and more rest (and consequently have more energy for combat) and they will not have to think about anything other than fighting.

Another direct benefit is medical care and insurance. This includes short-term and long-term care. The first thing an investor and leader of a group should pay close attention to

is medical care for the wounded. There should be hospitals and medical checkpoints in place with enough medicine and qualified medical personnel to take care of wounded fighters. There are several benefits from investing in medical care. Having immediate access to healthcare sets a group apart from the other groups fighting on the same side; it will allow fighters to take more required risks on the battlefield; it will reduce training costs, because qualified fighters will experience fewer casualties; and finally it will bolster the reputation of the investor. Even for the most causality-averse segment of the domestic population, this is an acceptable sort of intervention because it does not endanger the investors' home country personnel (hospitals could be located away from the front line or in the neighboring country) and because medical help is generally perceived as a humanitarian cause and is favorably viewed. This is known and widely used by Israel, where local hospitals treat wounded Syrian fighters, including members of groups like al-Nusra, who have been brought there by the Israeli Army from the Syrian border. In doing so, Israel is increasing its good standing with groups fighting in Syria because they are helping fighters when they need it the most— and it is seen as a purely humanitarian action by the domestic public and international community, so it only promotes a positive image of the country internationally.⁶⁹

The question of long-term help is more complicated. Any protracted conflict will leave many fighters dead or permanently disabled, so fighters are looking for groups that will take care of them if they are wounded and their families if they are killed. This is difficult because not only does it require more money and a longer commitment, but because there is no enforcement in this lawless, war-torn country, and everything is based solely on reputation and past behavior. Consequently, an investor should have a reputation for fulfilling promises in order for groups to even remotely consider a proposal that includes long-term commitments. While some countries do have this reputation (even if unjustly earned) and are successfully capitalizing on it, others do not, and as a result, they are seen as less trustworthy. The first major blow to the US's reputation among fighters in civil wars was when the US failed to provide visas that were promised to local military servicemen who fought alongside the US in Iraq and Afghanistan. Subsequently, the US slowly lost its positive reputation in Syria on two fronts: in the political arena due to the failed “red line” engagement and on the ground when promised weapons and equipment were regularly not

⁶⁹ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/thousands-syrians-horrific-war-wounds-7221386>

delivered and financial support for US-backed groups was delayed⁷⁰. The US's failure to honor its word significantly reduced the credibility of future US's promises. On the other hand, Russia has the opposite reputation (even though it is unearned): that of a country that helps its friends no matter what, and they are capitalizing on it, even in Syria. For example, when Russia started investing in rebel groups in 2016, one of their main points was that, in stark contrast to the US, "We will support you forever. We won't leave you on your own like your old friends did," clearly referring to the US.⁷¹ Groups that were approached by Russians also mentioned that Russia's credibility was the main reason they considered accepting Russian investment. Mousa Humaidi, a 40-year-old, ex-businessman from northern Syria, who was a senior leader with the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, commented, "Honestly, I found that they were honest and good friends, because they support their friends ... Russia has more honor than America."⁷² And unlike other investments such as paying salaries and building hospitals, changing one's reputation takes much longer.

Getting better Human Resources. After the group becomes popular with fighters, investors and group leaders need to ask themselves if their military goal and strategies require (and budget allows for) a large group or a small group comprised solely of the most dedicated and qualified fighters. And even if they opt for the first route, the group should start small because in the beginning it is very important to increase reputation so that they can later increase the supply of qualified labor. Even if the applicants are few, the group has to screen prospective fighters. In particular, they need to make sure that fighters are qualified, willing to fight for the goal, and will be loyal to the group. Without screening, less dedicated people might be able to join the group, which could destroy group cohesion and make it hard to prevent those fighters from looting, among other counterproductive activities. While qualifications can be easily checked, other criteria are much more difficult to verify. However, Islamist groups in Syria were successful in screening applicants, so it is not impossible. The investor and group leaders need to add additional costs to participating in the group. Such additional costs can be uncomplicated in nature but must be costly and visible.

⁷⁰ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/07/30/pentagon-turns-its-anti-isis-rebels-into-cannon-fodder.html>

⁷¹ https://www.buzzfeed.com/mikegiglio/russia-is-recruiting-the-uss-rebel-allies-in-syria?utm_term=.wn4yyoQW2B#.piqaaG2vJB

⁷² https://www.buzzfeed.com/mikegiglio/russia-is-recruiting-the-uss-rebel-allies-in-syria?utm_term=.wn4yyoQW2B#.piqaaG2vJB

Conclusion

Although no easy task, ending the war with outside help is still possible. If help comes at the right time, in the right amount, and to the right group, there is a chance that a moderate group might achieve a monopoly on the rebellion, or at least the most moderate group in the rebel block may take the lead, and they may also become strong enough to possibly challenge the enemy. But even if that never comes to pass, if a single group wins the organizational competition within the rebel block, it could increase the chances of successful peace negotiations. First, if one group significantly increases its power, most other groups in the multi-factional rebel camp, including radical ones, will disband and disappear. Second, the group will be able to persuade its members that there are no options other than to accept the settlement. Third, the group could enforce whatever will be agreed upon during negotiations on other groups that are still left inside the rebel camp.

As a result, using labor market theory to analyze rebel fighters in civil wars may potentially reduce the duration of the Syrian civil war, and as a result decrease death and suffering by empowering a moderate armed group to take charge of the rebel block.

Appendix

Security

Loubna Mrie (currently an MA student in the Middle Eastern Studies program in NYU) has been working on the project since its inception. Loubna Mrie is a Syrian national fluent in English. She conducted the surveys used in the dissertation to make the interviewer effect consistent across the sample.

At time of research, she was working at Aleppo Media Center. She was recommended to Vera Mironova by several international humanitarian organizations (for whom she was monitoring and evaluating aid distribution) and major international news agencies such as Reuters (where she worked for several years) and newspapers such as The Guardian and Al Monitor, among many others. She has been translating for, interviewing, and reporting on issues of fighters and armed groups from Aleppo and Idlib for several international newspapers since the very beginning of the conflict. For her reporting from Syria, she received a Magnum Foundation Award in 2014.

In the US, she had an Atlantic media fellowship and is still regularly writing for Quartz and The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Group) on Syria.

All her references considered her to be the most experienced person to conduct interviews in Syria. She also successfully passed an online NIH IRB training (requirement of a High Point University IRB).

Interviews for the project were conducted only in areas that were approved for major news agencies' security offices to operate in. For example, all interviews were stopped when journalists became kidnapping targets (that is the reason there are only 50 members of Islamist group surveyed).

Vera Mironova was presented during several interviews in Turkey to ensure quality control, at the beginning of the project (in Turkey refugees and ex-fighters were surveyed). Not only was the ability of the RA to conduct the survey checked, but more importantly,

questions were tested (to screen out sensitive ones⁷³). Also, it was crucial to make sure RA understood behavior games and was able to conduct them properly without supervision.

Permission from field commanders was obtained to conduct research in the territory under their command. Sometimes getting permission was relatively easy and sometimes it took a longer time (research was never started without proper permission from field commanders).

All surveys were anonymous. Surveys were paper based, but due to security conditions some of survey copies were sent by internet, while the original copies destroyed. It was done to avoid them being confiscated at military checkpoints.

Research design and research logistics were discussed with experts conducting academic research in conflict zones- Fotini Christia, Jason Lyall, Dara Cohen, and Jacob Shapiro, who will be thanked for their input in the acknowledgment section of the dissertation and book. Richard Nielsen (Assistant Professor at MIT) contributed to several questions⁷⁴ which he later used in his book (published by CUP)⁷⁵.

In general, survey procedures in this project were similar to those used in other surveys in conflict zones⁷⁶. Several surveys and interviews conducted by Loubna Mrie were for training purposes observed by another RA (Karam Ahmad) who was later hired by Vera Mironova to work on a different project⁷⁷.

Loubna Mrie did a fantastic job on the project and Vera Mironova recommended her not only to graduate schools in US, but also to researchers from Yale University who were also conducting research in Syria (a project on armed group courts). In addition, to Vera's best knowledge Loubna Mrie was also working on a project on children in war zones conducted by George Mason University.

⁷³ Several questions were excluded, in particular questions on financing and relations with foreign countries.

⁷⁴ Issues of religion are outside of the area of Vera Mironova's expertise

⁷⁵ Those questions were not used in the dissertation

⁷⁶ Vera Mironova also designed and organized several survey projects in conflict zones, such as Yemen, Ukraine, and Sudan for the UN, UNICEF, and UNHCR.

⁷⁷ Research conducted by Karam Alhamad is not part of the dissertation, but will be included in the book.

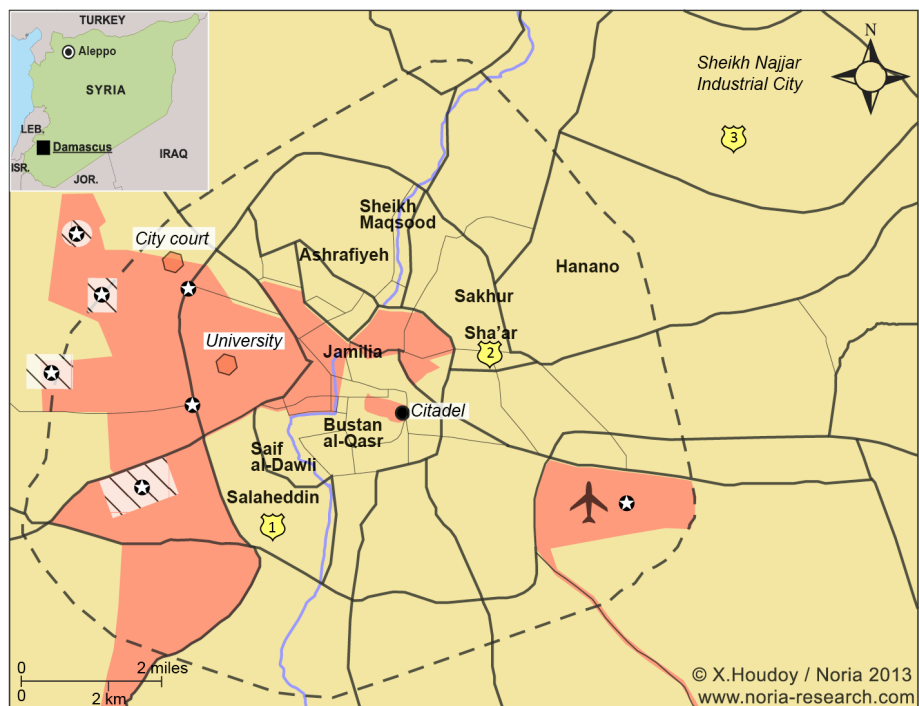
The Voices of Syria project was funded by High Point University and Harvard Law School. HLS faculty also made sure that it was not violating any laws⁷⁸. In addition, this project was sponsored by a research grant from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (UMD START). To avoid endangering research assistants on the ground, no government funding was used for the project. While Vera Mironova briefed multiple government agencies, the data that was used in those briefings was only on the aggregate level. No government agency ever asked for individual level data.

⁷⁸ For example members of Islamist groups did not receive payment for the behavior games they participated in.

Locations

Map of the military situation in Aleppo at the time of the study

ALEPPO DIVIDED: AN OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN SEPTEMBER 2013

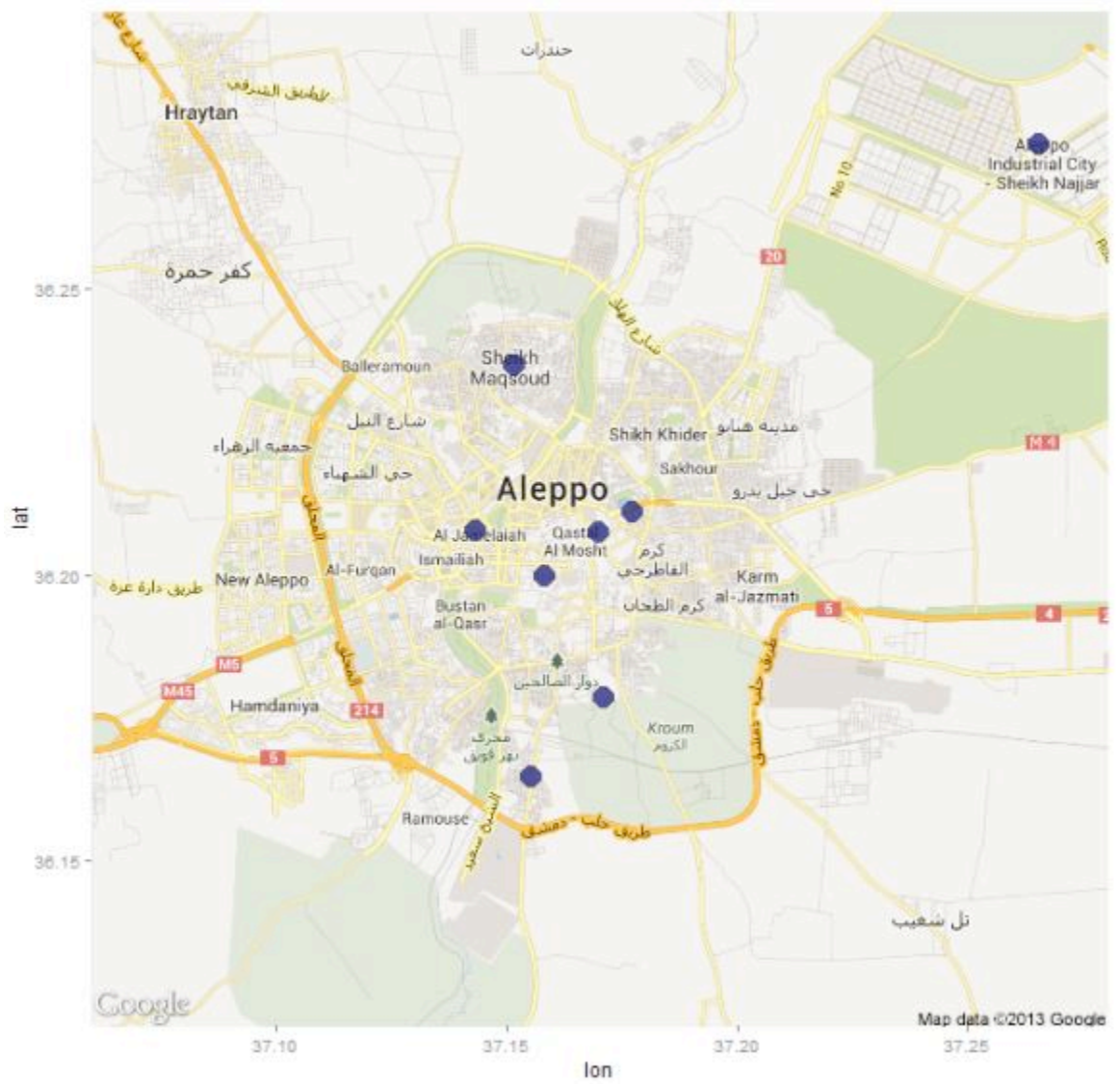


Legend

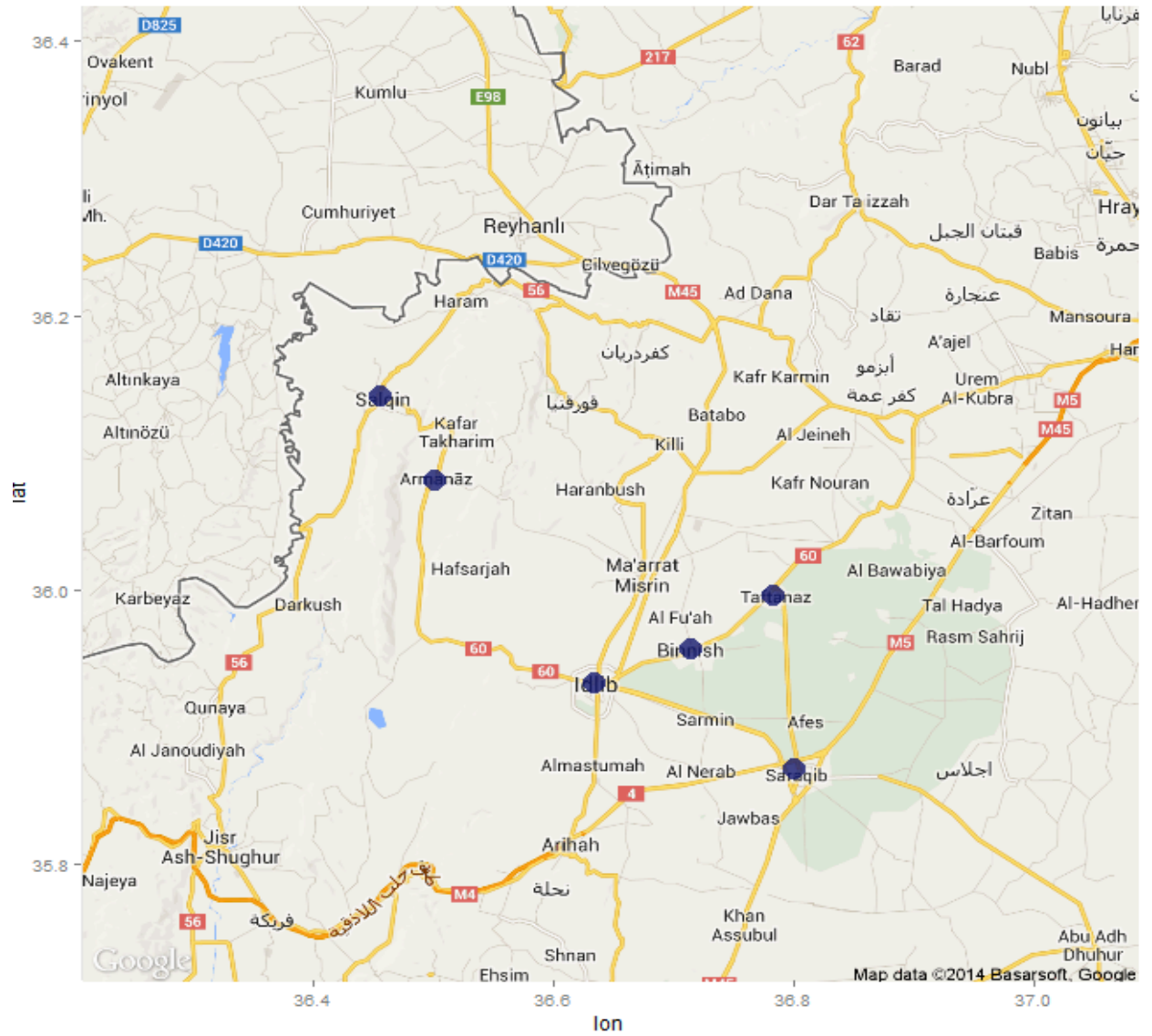
	Area under government control	Salaheddin	Neighborhood
	Area under opposition control		Aleppo municipality
	Military Base		Road
	Syrian armed forces HQ		Insurrection's Institution
	State Institution	1	United Court of the Judiciary Council
		2	Municipality and Legal Committee
		3	Governorate Council

Base maps : Google Earth, d-maps

Sampling Locations in Aleppo



Sampling Locations In and Around Idlib



Statistics to Chapter II

Table 1. Feelings

		Extremely	Quite a bit	Moderately	A little	Very slightly
Afraid	Refugees	18.3%	18.3%	36.6%	15%	11.6%
	Civilians	3.5%	15.4%	44%	32.1%	4.7%
	Fighter	6.4%	7.4%	38.8%	30.5%	16.6%
Angry	Refugees	20%	11.6%	20%	23.3%	25%
	Civilians	7.1%	17.8%	34.5%	30.9%	9.5%
	Fighter	13.8%	20.3%	30.5%	27.7%	7.4%
Ashamed	Refugees	13.3%	20%	23.3%	28.3%	15%
	Civilians	4.7%	18.8%	30.5%	34.1%	11.7%
	Fighter	4.5%	12.8%	22.9%	33.9%	25.6%
Sad	Refugees	30%	30%	28.3%	10%	1.6%
	Civilians	7%	11.7%	34.1%	34.1%	12.9%
	Fighter	17.4%	14.6%	30.2%	26.6%	11%
Tired	Refugees	26.6%	21.6%	25%	15%	11.6%
	Civilians	8.2%	12.9%	37.6%	31.7%	9.4%
	Fighter	5.5%	21.3%	30.5%	28.7%	13.8%

Table 2. Feelings

		Extremely	Quite a bit	Moderately	A little	Very slightly
Determined	Refugees	16.6%	18.3%	30%	28.3%	6.6%
	Civilians	8.4%	20.4%	31.3%	32.5%	7.2%
	Fighter	8.4%	23.3%	36.4%	24.3%	7.4%
Strong	Refugees	6.7%	16.9%	28.8%	27.1%	20.3%
	Civilians	8.2%	24.7%	24.7%	29.4%	12.9%
	Fighter	16.8%	20.5%	19.6%	32.7%	10.2%
Happy	Refugees	16.6%	11.6%	26.6%	20%	25%
	Civilians	2.3%	16.4%	35.2%	35.2%	10.5%
	Fighter	8.3%	15.7%	29.6%	24%	22.2%

Table 3. Optimism

Very Optimistic	Islamist	FSA	Civilian
Strongly Agree	28.6%	36%	16.5%
Somewhat Agree	16.3%	22.9%	28.5%
Somewhat Disagree	32.6%	26.2%	26.9%
Strongly Disagree	22.4%	14.7%	27.9%

Table 4. Influence on life

Have no influence on the life	Islamist	FSA	Civilian
Strongly Agree	53%	66.7%	52.8%
Somewhat Agree	20.4%	16.7%	18.6%
Somewhat Disagree	6%	13.3%	17.6%
Strongly Disagree	20.4%	3.3%	10.8%

Table 5. Future

Worried about the future	Fighter	FSA	Civilian
Strongly Agree	30.6%	57%	57.2%
Somewhat Agree	12.2%	18%	14.9%
Somewhat Disagree	16%	18%	20.1%
Strongly Disagree	40%	7%	7.7%

Table 6. Damage to Property

Home damaged	Fighter	Civilian
Yes	29.0%	57.4%
No	70.9%	42.5%

Table 7. Individual Injury

Injured	Fighter	Civilian
Yes	56.3%	54.8%
No	43.6%	45.1%

Table 8. Family Members killed

Family Killed	Fighter	Civilian
Yes	66.3%	57.9%
No	33.6%	42%

Table 9. Friends Killed

Friend Killed	Fighter	Civilian
Yes	77.2%	70.2%
No	22.7%	29.7%

Evidence Collection

Data collection for this project was a major challenge due to the very real dangers our interviewer faced inside Syria. Unknown population parameters and security concerns precluded the possibility of random sampling. There is also no way to estimate the true population to draw a random sample. Instead, the project relies on non-probability based cluster sampling. Two locations on the Syria frontlines of different combat intensity were identified. A sample was chosen in and around Aleppo, Syria's second largest city and a place of major battles, which will serve as an environment of high intensity exposure to violence. As a comparison point, a sample was chosen in and around the city of Idlib, which was also experiencing violence, though to a lesser extent than Aleppo, and it generally was considered a safer area for rebel forces and civilians at the time of research.

In order to recruit civilians, random route sampling was avoided due to inherent uncertainties and dangers of movement from street to street. The project also refrains from door-to-door sampling to protect the interviewer. Instead, areas of the city where civilians congregate in public were identified based on local knowledge. For example interviews were conducted near the market or a local shop. These clusters are the initial sampling point for the project. Interviews were conducted with no more than five respondents per cluster and no more than two clusters for a given street or neighborhood. The goal was to interview people from as many different neighborhoods as possible taking into account security conditions. The research design and sampling mechanism is similar to other studies conducted in non-stable environments⁷⁹. Interviews were limited to 1 person per household or extended family. If multiple family members were able and willing to participate, one family member was selected at random. Each interview was conducted in an open, public location for safety concerns, but the interviewer kept a distance from crowds to ensure privacy, and did not permit others to listen in on the interview once in progress. This is not a random sample, but is better than a convenient sample because randomization was done on the cluster level.

In the extensive thirty-page survey, the same core questions were used for all subgroups, with additional questions related to self-selection into a particular role in the

⁷⁹ For an example of a cluster sampling with non-stable populations, see Sam Whitt and Rich Wilson (2007) "Public Goods in The Field: Katrina Evacuees in Houston"

conflict that varied between groups. The study generally took from forty-five minutes to an hour to complete. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in Arabic.

To deal with selection effects resulting from massive displacement by violence, internally displaced persons were interviewed inside Aleppo and Idlib, as well as a sample of refugees from a UNHCR run refugee camp in Kilis Turkey, which is just across the border from Syria and a primary destination for refugees fleeing the Aleppo and Idlib regions. Inside the camp, the interviewer followed a random route, interviewing no more than 1 per household and no more than five subjects on a given street or pathway.

For interviews with rebel fighters, a sample from two predominant groups – rebels fighting with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and Islamists with various groups including the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic Front/Ahrar al-Sham was conducted. Locations where rebel fighters were currently stationed were identified based on local knowledge. FSA rebels were interviewed in both Aleppo and Idlib regions. Interviews with Islamists took place only in the Idlib area. The interviewer was granted permission to conduct surveys with FSA rebel fighters by their superiors and by an informal “Islamic court” for interviews with Islamist fighters (including fighters from the al-Nusra Front, the Islamic Front/Ahrar Al-Sham). While conducting extensive qualitative interviews with people on all levels of the chain of command, the survey was limited only to rank-and-file FSA and Islamist fighters, not officers or unit leaders. For a given unit or cluster of FSA or Islamist rebels, no more than five soldiers per cluster or unit were interviewed. For example, if a group of fighters lived in one room in a house or were stationed in the same position, only one individual would be interviewed.

Because of safety and security concerns as well as the practical challenges to conducting field research, the study was conducted incrementally from August 2013 to April 2014 in a series of month-long waves. The response rate was over 80% in each location among those contacted for an interview. Even rebel fighters had periods of down time during the conflict and were eager to express their views. Samples are remarkably well-balanced across gender, age, education, and whether the subject was employed before the war began (a proxy for pre-war income/savings). Nevertheless, extended controls for demographics in our subsequent analysis are included. Also covariate matching techniques (propensity score

matching, coarsened exact checks is used).

Islamists were not provided any monetary incentive to participate in the study due to prohibitions on providing material aid to groups that may be considered terrorists organizations by the U.S. government. The sample size was not large enough to conduct statistical comparisons between various Islamist groups. Most of our sample of Islamists were from the Islamic Front/Ahrar al-Sham.

The survey was conducted by an experienced person who was recommended to the author by several journalists and NGO workers working in the area. The author was also presented during several interviews to ensure the quality of the research.

In all interviews, an enumerator informed respondents that the study is being done for a High Point University research project and asked for a consent.

Regular quality checks of the data were preformed for the study. Recommendations for the enumerators were obtained, all permission to conduct the study from field commanders were obtained, and the author supervised several interviews.

In summary, I acknowledge the limitations of our data. The sample collected is non-random and the number of observations is limited, collected over an extended period of time. Security concerns prevented me from sampling certain sub-groups, such as forces loyal to the Assad regime and more radical Islamist groups. The sample is relatively small and due to the logistical complications, the survey was performed over a long time frame.

Though far from ideal, this data was collected by a trained researcher with intimate ethnographic knowledge of the field, with difficult to reach populations in an extremely challenging and dangerous environment.

Questionnaire

Interview Date_____ Interview Location:_____ Survey number

TASK 1

How much money do you want to send
to?



Someone living in Idlib

Amount Send
0
50
100
150
200
250
300
350

400
450
500

TASK 2

How much money do you want to
send to?



FSA Soldier in Idlib

Amount to Send
0
50
100
150
200
250
300
350

400
450
500

TASK 3

How much money do you want to
send to?



**Someone Living in Territory still
under Assad Control**

Amount Send
0
50
100
150
200
250
300
350
400

450
500

TASK 4

How much money do you want to send to?



Someone who supports ISIS

Amount to Send
0
50
100
150
200
250
300
350

400
450
500

TASK 5

Circle one of the following Options
for Payment

Option		
1	20% chance of receiving 500	80% chance of receiving 0
2	40% chance of receiving 400	60% chance of receiving 0
3	60% chance of receiving 300	40% chance of receiving 0
4	80% change of receiving 200	20% chance of receiving 0
5	100% chance of receiving 100	0% chance of receiving 0

TASK 6

Circle one of the following Options
for Payment

Option		
1	50% chance of receiving 500	50% chance of receiving 60
2	50% chance of receiving 400	50% chance of receiving 70
3	50% chance of receiving 300	50% chance of receiving 80
4	50% change of receiving 200	50% chance of receiving 90
5	50% chance of receiving 100	50% chance of receiving 100

Introduction

1. The following is a list of emotions people sometimes feel. Please indicate to what extent you have felt this way: very slightly or not at all, a little, moderately, quite a bit, extremely.

	Very slightly Or not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
a. Afraid, scared, frightened, nervous, jittery, shaky	1	2	3	4	5
b. Angry, hostile, irritable, disgusted, loathing/hatred	1	2	3	4	5
c. Proud, strong, confident, bold, daring, fearless	1	2	3	4	5
d. Alert, attentive, concentrating, determined	1	2	3	4	5
e. Sleepy, tired, sluggish, drowsy	1	2	3	4	5
f. Happy, joyful, cheerful, delighted, excited, enthusiastic, lively, energetic	1	2	3	4	5
g. Sad, blue, downhearted, alone, lonely	1	2	3	4	5
h. Guilty, ashamed, blameworthy, angry at self, disgust at self, dissatisfied with self	1	2	3	4	5

Section I. Demographic Information

2. Gender:

Male 1

Female

2

3. How old are you? (record age in years) _____

4. What is the highest level of education that you have received?

None	1
Primary	2
Secondary	3
Higher	4

5. What type of work were you doing before the war began?

Employer/ manager of establishment with 10 or more employees	1
Employer/ manager of establishment with less than 10 employees	2
Professional worker lawyer, accountant, teacher, doctor	3
Supervisory - office worker: supervises others	4
Non-manual - office worker: non-supervisory	5
Foreman and supervisor	6
Skilled manual worker	7
Semi-skilled manual worker	8
Unskilled manual worker	9
Farmer: has own farm	10
Agricultural worker	11
Member of armed forces, security personnel	12
Was not working/unemployed	13
Student	14
Other (write in) _____	15

6. Where are you currently living/seeking shelter (or stationed for FSA)?

The city center	1
In neighborhood outside the city center	2
In a village outside the city center	3

7. What is the name of the city and neighborhood where you are currently living/seeking shelter? (record city name _____ neighborhood/district _____)

8. How long have you been in the location where you are currently living/seeking shelter?

Less than 1 week
1 week – 3 weeks
1-3 months
3-6 months
6-12 months
1-2 years
More than 2 years
174

9. If you lived in a different place before the war, how many times have you moved since the war began? _____

10. Please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a.I feel I have no other options but to stay here	1	2	3	4
b.I would go somewhere safer if I had family, friends to help me	1	2	3	4
c.I would go somewhere safer if I had money to do so	1	2	3	4
d.I would go somewhere safer if traveling were less dangerous	1	2	3	4
e.I stay here to protect my family	1	2	3	4
f.I stay here to protect my home, business/property	1	2	3	4
g.I stay here to fight in the war	1	2	3	4
h.I stay here to help support others who are fighting in the war	1	2	3	4

11. How safe do you feel in your current location in Idlib today – very safe, somewhat safe, not very safe, or not safe at all?

Very safe	1
Somewhat safe	2
Not very safe	3
Not safe at all	4

12. Based on what you know of this area, how would you describe the place where you are currently living compared to other locations in the city?

Safer than most other locations in the city	1
More dangerous than most other locations in the city	2

13. How much confidence do you have in the following to help keep you safe – a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or not at all

	A great Amount	A fair Amount	Not very Much	None at all
a. FSA fighters	1	2	3	4
b. ISIS fighters	1	2	3	4

c. International aid groups	1	2	3	4
d. Local police forces	1	2	3	4
e. Local political leaders	1	2	3	4
f. Local religious leaders	1	2	3	4
g. Friends	1	2	3	4
h. Family	1	2	3	4

14. How would you describe your ability to gain access to the following - good, somewhat limited, very limited, or not at all?

	Generally Good	Somewhat limited	Very limited	None at all
Food	1	2	3	4
Clean Water	1	2	3	4
Housing/Shelter	1	2	3	4
Health care, Medical needs	1	2	3	4
Fuel	1	2	3	4
Electricity	1	2	3	4
Weapons (FSA ONLY!)	1	2	3	4
Television	1	2	3	4
Internet	1	2	3	4
Cellphone or landline	1	2	3	4
Radio	1	2	3	4

15. Are you fighting or have you ever fought with the Free Syrian Army or any other group since the war began?

Yes 1 (go to question 16)

No 2 (go to question 27)

The following questions are for former and present fighters only. For those who have never fought in the war, please go to question 27

16. Are you currently fighting with the Free Syrian Army?

Yes 1

No 2

17. How long have you been fighting with the FSA?
Months(_____)

18. Are you currently fighting with any other group other than the FSA?

Yes 1 (if Yes, interviewer please record name of other group _____)
 No 2

19. How long have you been fighting with this group?
 Months(_____)

20. If you are not fighting presently, did you fight for any group in the past?

Yes 1 (if yes, interviewer please record the name of the group _____)
 No 2

21. How long did you fight for this group? Months(_____)

22. If you are fighting with the Free Syrian Army or any other group, are you from Idlib or did you come here from another location in order to fight?

From Idlib 1
 I came here from another location to fight 2

23. If you are currently fighting or have fought with the FSA or any other group in the past, why did you join (select all that apply)?

Reason for Joining	Yes
1. I supported the group's goals	1
2. I felt inspired by other people in the group	1
3. All my friends had joined	1
4. My family wanted me to join	1
5. I joined because I wanted people to respect me	1
6. I joined to defend my community from attack	1
7. I joined because Assad must be defeated	1
8. I joined to take revenge against Assad's forces for their crimes	1
9. I didn't want to join but I was forced to by others	1
10. I joined because I needed money	1
11. Other _____	1

24. What was the most important reason ? (enter the number _____)

25. If you are no longer fighting with the FSA or any other group, why are you no longer fighting?

Reason for No longer fighting	Yes
1. I was wounded and am now no longer able to fight	1
2. I have to take care of my family	1
3. The group no longer wanted me to fight with them	1
4. My family wanted me to leave	1
5. I decided I no longer supported the goals of the group	1
6. I do not have skills necessary for combat	1

- | | |
|--|---|
| 7. I am too old or not in good health | 1 |
| 8. Fighting was too emotionally stressful for me | 1 |
| 9. Other _____ | 1 |

26. What was the most important reason for leaving? (enter the number _____)

27. If you have never fought with any group, why you did not join?

- | Reason for Not Joining | Yes |
|--|-----|
| 10. I have to take care of my family | 1 |
| 11. I have a job and I need the money | 1 |
| 12. My family does not want me to join | 1 |
| 13. I was never asked to join | 1 |
| 14. My religious views do not permit me to fight | 1 |
| 15. I do not support the goals of the rebel groups | 1 |
| 16. I do not have skills necessary for combat | 1 |
| 17. I am too old or not in good health | 1 |
| 18. I am fearful of what will happen to me if I join | 1 |
| 19. Other _____ | 1 |

28. What was the most important reason for not joining? (enter the number _____)

Section II. Outlook for the Future

29. Compared to 12 months ago, do you think conditions here have:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Got a lot better | 1 |
| Got a little better | 2 |
| Stayed the same | 3 |
| Got a little worse | 4 |
| Got a lot worse | 5 |

30. And over the next 12 months, do you expect conditions here to...?

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Get a lot better | 1 |
| Get a little better | 2 |
| Stay the same | 3 |
| Get a little worse | 4 |
| Get a lot worse | 5 |

31. Please indicate to what extent you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements.

Strongly	Somewhat	Somewhat	Strongly
Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree

a. I am very optimistic about my future.	1	2	3	4
b. I am not afraid to take risks	1	2	3	4
c. I feel like I have no influence over the direction of my life	1	2	3	4
d. I am a very unlucky person.	1	2	3	4
e. I am very worried about my future.	1	2	3	4
f. I avoid risks whenever possible	1	2	3	4

32. How important it is for you right now to plan for the following – very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important.

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Somewhat Unimportant	Not at all Important
a. What you would be doing tomorrow	1	2	3	4
b. What you would be doing next week	1	2	3	4
c. What you would be doing after the end of the war	1	2	3	4
d. Your long term career goals	1	2	3	4
e. Saving money for the future	1	2	3	4

33a. Imagine you had a choice of between being paid (A) 10000 pounds today or (B) 10000 pounds in a year. Which would you choose? A or B (circle one)

33b. Imagine you had a choice of between being paid (A) 10000 pounds today or (B) 15000 pounds in a year. Which would you choose? A or B (circle one)

33c. Imagine you had a choice of between being paid (A) 10000 pounds today or (B) 30000 pounds in a year. Which would you choose ? A or B (circle one)

Section III. Personal Identity and Relations with Others

34. Do you belong to a particular religion?

Yes 1

No 2

35. What religious denomination do you belong to?

Sunni Islam	1
Alawite	2
Druze	3
Christian	5
Jew	6
Other _____	

36. In general, how important are your religious beliefs to you in your daily life – very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?

Very important	1
Somewhat important	2
Somewhat unimportant	3
Not at all important	4

37. Since the war started do you think you have become more religious, less religious, or are about the same?

More religious	1
Less religious	2
About the same	3

38. In general, how close do you feel to people of your religion compared to other people in Syria?

Much closer to people of my religion	1
Closer in some ways but not in others	2
No real difference, not closer to one over another	3

39. In your opinion, what role should religion play in Syrian politics in the future – a very important, somewhat important, not very important, or no role at all?

Very important role	1
Somewhat important role	2
Not very important role	3
No role at all	4

40. Generally speaking, would you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that most people can be trusted?

Strongly agree	1
Somewhat agree	2
Somewhat disagree	3
Strongly disagree	4

41. In general, how close do you feel to other people in the following locations – very close, somewhat close, not very close, not close at all?

	Very Close	Somewhat Close	Not Very Close	Not Close At All
a. your neighborhood	1	2	3	4
b. your town (Idlib)	1	2	3	4
c. your province/region	1	2	3	4
d. your country (Syria)	1	2	3	4

42. And how close do you feel to the following– very close, somewhat close, not very close, not close at all?

	Very Close	Somewhat Close	Not Very Close	Not Close At All
a. Sunni Muslims in Syria	1	2	3	4
b. Alawites in Syria	1	2	3	4
c. supporters of Assad	1	2	3	4
d. fighters in the FSA	1	2	3	4
e. other rebel group fighters	1	2	3	4
f. people in regions of Syria under Assad's control	1	2	3	4
g. foreign fighters in Syria fighting against Assad	1	2	3	4
h. ISIS	1	2	3	4

Section IV. The War and Syria's Future

43. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable view of the following:

	Very Unfavorable	Somewhat Unfavorable	Somewhat Favorable	Very Favorable	Unfavorable
a. Turkey	1	2	3	4	
b. NATO	1	2	3	4	
c. Russia	1	2	3	4	
d. United States	1	2	3	4	
e. Iran	1	2	3	4	

44. Tell me whether you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the following

Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose
---------------------	---------------------	--------------------	--------------------

a. Continue fighting until Assad defeated, no negotiations with Assad	1	2	3	4
b. Immediate cease-fire to begin negotiations with Assad's forces	1	2	3	4
c. Continue fighting until we are in a better position to get what we want from negotiations	1	2	3	4
d. Start negotiating only if it becomes too difficult to defeat Assad militarily	1	2	3	4
e. If we must negotiate, we must demand a high price from Assad in exchange for peace	1	2	3	4
f. If we must negotiate, we should be willing to make concessions in the interest of peace	1	2	3	4

45. Which of these options do you support the most (write letter_____)

46. There is often discussion about the role of what other countries could do to bring an end to the Syrian conflict. To what extent do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the following

	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose
a. UN Peacekeeping intervention	1	2	3	4
b. NATO military intervention	1	2	3	4
c. US military intervention	1	2	3	4
d. Increase use of sanctions on Syria	1	2	3	4
e. Negotiate more with Assad	1	2	3	4

47. How likely do you think the following is likely to happen within the next year - very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, not at all likely

	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Very Likely	Not at all Likely
a. Negotiations with Assad will begin	1	2	3	4
b. Assad will remain in power	1	2	3	4
c. Assad will negotiate a deal to step down from power	1	2	3	4
d. Assad and his forces will be defeated by FSA	1	2	3	4
e. Nothing will have changed	1	2	3	4

48. To what extent do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. It is essential that Syria remains unified state	1	2	3	4
b. Parts of Syria should be allowed more regional autonomy ¹	1	2	3	4

49. Which of these two statements comes closer to your own view?

All those who are responsible for war crimes in Syria should be
held accountable in the courts for what they have done 1

Only the top leadership should be held accountable for
crimes committed during the war in Syria 2

50. Which of these two statements comes closer to your own view?

Democracy is preferable to any other form of political system 1

Under some circumstances, a non-democratic government
may be preferable to a democratic one 2

For people like me, it does not matter whether a
government is democratic or not democratic 3

51. Given the way things are now, to what extent do you think Syrians on different sides of this conflict will be able to do the following – definitely not, probably not, probably yes, definitely yes?

	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
a. live together in a common state	1	2	3	4
b. Support the same political leaders	1	2	3	4
c. Support the same political party	1	2	3	4
d. Live peacefully in same town	1	2	3	4
e. Live peacefully as neighbors	1	2	3	4
f. Respect each other's religion	1	2	3	4
g. Treat each other fairly	1	2	3	4

h. Trust one other	1	2	3	4
i. Work together in business	1	2	3	4
j. Be close friends	1	2	3	4
k. Forgive the wrongs of the past	1	2	3	4
l. Avoid another war in the future	1	2	3	4

52. What about Alawati people of Syria who are supporting Assad? Do you think it will be possible to do the following again after the war? Definitely not, probably not, probably yes, or definitely yes?

	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
a. Trust one another	1	2	3	4
b. Live together in a common State	1	2	3	4
c. Forgive the wrongs of the Past	1	2	3	4

53. During the war, many people have been forced to flee their homes or move to a different location. Please indicate which of the following applied to you and when. (Interviewer – please code “when” as 1 = today or this week, 2 = last week, 3 = last month, 4 = in last 6 months, 5 = last year, 6 = last 2 years).

	Yes	When
a. Forced to flee home to another location in Syria	1	
b. Forced to flee home to location outside Syria	1	
c. Home damaged during war	1	
d. Home destroyed during war	1	
e. Home confiscated, occupied by others	1	
f. Place of business damaged, destroyed during war	1	
g. Moved to new location because of war	1	

54. In addition, many people have been killed, injured, and suffered the loss of family members and close friends. Please indicate which of the following applied to you and when (Interviewer – please code “when” as 1 = today or this week, 2 = last week, 3 = last month, 4 = in last 6 months, 5 = last year, 6 = last 2 years). If there are multiple events, code for the most recent event.

	Yes
When	
a. Recently saw violent acts committed against others	1
b. Narrowly avoided injury by bombing/shooting	1
c. Personally injured during war	1

- | | |
|---|---|
| d. Members of family injured during war | 1 |
| e. Members of family killed during war | 1 |
| f. Close friends injured during war | 1 |
| g. Close friends killed during war | 1 |
| h. Family members have gone missing | 1 |
| i. Close friends have gone missing | 1 |

55. FOR FSA ONLY - When was the last time you were in combat?

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Today | 1 |
| Yesterday | 2 |
| This week | 3 |
| Last week | 4 |
| Last month | 5 |
| In last 6 months | 6 |
| Last year | 7 |
| Never | 8 |

56. What are your most important sources of news and information?

- | | |
|------------------|-----|
| | Yes |
| 1. Television | 1 |
| 2. Radio. | 1 |
| 3. Internet | 1 |
| 4. Phone | 1 |
| 5. Newspaper | 1 |
| 6. Word of Mouth | 1 |
| 7. Other _____ | |

57. How much do you trust the following news sources for objective reporting about what is happening today in Syria? Do you highly trust, somewhat trust, somewhat distrust, or highly distrust the following?

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| | Highly
Trust | Somewhat
Trust | Somewhat
Distrust | Highly
Distrust |
| a) Al Arabiya | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b) Al Jazeera | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c) FSA news Channel | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d) Orient New channel | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| e) BBC | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

58. In your opinion, who deserves blame for the protracted conflict in Syria?

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| | Strongly
agree | Some
what agree | Somew
hat disagree | Stro
ngly
disagree |
| Bashar al-Assad | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Alawites who support Assad | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Iran and Russia | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Western powers	1	2	3	4
FSA	1	2	3	4
ISIS	1	2	3	4
Foreign Fighters in general	1	2	3	4

59. How would you describe your views of the following rebel forces currently fighting in Syria today – Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the following.

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
FSA	1	2	3	4
ISIS	1	2	3	4
Al Nusra Front	1	2	3	4
Idlib Martyr's Brigade	1	2	3	4

61. And who do you support the most? (write in _____)

62. Please indicate to what extent you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree about whether opposition groups should be doing more of the following.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Rebel groups should do more to prevent crime in my community	1	2	3	4
Rebel groups should do more to help provide for the basic needs of people in my community	1	2	3	4
Rebel groups should do more to promote and enforce Islamic-based law in my community	1	2	3	4

63. In your opinion, who is responsible for the chemical attack in Ghouta?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Bashar al-Assad personally	1	2	3	4
People fighting for Assad	1	2	3	4
People fighting for rebel groups	1	2	3	4

Agents of Israel or the West	1	2	3	4
Agents of Hezbollah, Iran, or Russia	1	2	3	4

64. And who do you blame the most for the attacks? (write in letter _____)

65. Finally, Which of the following statements best describes the level of comfort or unease you had in answering the questions in this survey?

- 1 I was comfortable (at ease) with the entire questionnaire.
- 2 I was comfortable with most of the questions.
- 3 I was comfortable with only some of the questions.
- 4 I was generally uncomfortable with the survey questionnaire

66. And how safe did you feel in conducting this interview in this location today?

- 1. very safe,
- 2. somewhat safe
- 3. somewhat unsafe
- 4. very unsafe.

(Interviewer completes these questions after leaving the interview)

S1 Interviewer: Which of the following statements best describes the interview situation?

- 1 Private location, only the respondent and I were present
- 2 One or several family members/friends were present, but did not interrupt the interview
- 3 One or several family members/friends were present, and did interrupt the interview

S2 Interviewer: Which of the following statements best describes how well the respondent understood the questionnaire?

- 1 The respondent understood all of the questions.
- 2 The respondent understood most of the questions.
- 3 The respondent understood most of the questions but with some help.
- 4 The respondent had difficulty understanding most of the questions, even with help from me.

S3 Interviewer: And how safe did you feel in conducting this interview in this location today

- 1. very safe
- 2. somewhat safe
- 3. somewhat unsafe
- 4. very unsafe.

S4 Interviewer: And how safe did you feel conducting this interview with this person today?

1. very safe
2. somewhat safe
3. somewhat unsafe
4. very unsafe.

S4. **Interviewer:** For which task was this person paid?

1. Task 1
2. Task 2
3. Task 3

S5. **Interviewer:** How much money was this person paid? _____

Participation Consent

Your Consent to Participate in this Research

You have been asked to participate in a research study of economic decision-making. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of the project is to understand how people of different cultures and backgrounds make decisions, interact with other people, and how they are affected by the conditions in their local environment.

What we will ask you to do: You will be asked to complete a short survey and take part in a series of decision-making exercises. In the survey and exercises you will be asked to respond to some standard questions which have been asked of people throughout the world. Some of the questions will deal with issues of religion, politics, and conflict. In the decision-making exercises, we will ask you to perform some simple tasks about how to allocate money between yourself and other people. Rest assured we will provide all the money to be used in these exercises and at no point will you be asked to contribute any money in the course of the exercises. This study will take less than 1 hour to complete.

Potential risks and benefits: There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study. You will be compensated for your participation in this study.

Participating is voluntary: Taking part is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, any information you provide will be destroyed.

Your information will be confidential: Confidentiality means that the researcher will have a record of who participated in this study, but that any information that you provide will be kept private. Any information you provide will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. We will not ask you to include your name, address, or any contact information in this research project. We will use random ID numbers in place of your name on all research materials, and there will be no record to link your name to the random ID number we assign.

Compensation: Because we understand that your time is valuable, you have the opportunity to earn up to **\$5** for completing the decision-making tasks. Compensation will be paid in your local currency.

Injury: No activity is required that might result in injury. However, if you are injured during the research, no form of compensation is available. Any medical treatment sought will be at my own expense or at the expense of your health care insurer which may or may not provide coverage. If you have any questions, you should contact your insurer.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Sam Whitt. If you have questions following the study, you may contact Sam Whitt by email at swhitt@highpoint.edu and by phone at 011+615-504-7897. If you have questions regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact Dr. Kimberly Wear, IRB Chair, Drawer 37, High Point University, High Point, NC 27262.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Statement of consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I agree to participate in this research study and am at least 18 years of age.

Signature: _____

Date:

Person Obtaining Consent: I have explained to the above named individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research. I have answered any questions that have been raised and I will provide the participant with a copy of this consent form.

Signature: _____

Date:

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on (date).

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the High Point University Human Participants Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or about a research related injury, you may contact Kimberly Wear, Ph.D., IRB Chair, Campus Box 3397, High Point University, High Point, NC 27262. (336) 841-9246.

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