

Ideology and Right-wing Militia Governance: The anti-Maoist Salwa Judum militias in India *

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Abstract:

What is the effect of ideology on militia governance? While recent scholarship has studied rebel governance and criminal governance, Non-State Armed Governance (NSAG) by militias remains undertheorized. The role of ideology in the study of militias is also ignored, though scholars have recently turned towards studying the effects of ideology on rebel governance. My project proposes to fill these gaps by integrating literature on ideology in social movements (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, eds. 1996) as well as insurgency (Gutiérrez-Sanín & Wood 2014) and applying it to militias, to analyze how right-wing ideology shapes militia-civilian interactions. I introduce an original typology mapping how *militia-state linkages* and *militia-society* ideological alignment shape patterns of violence and governance. One of the theoretical insights is that right-wing militias use a lot of violence against civilians but also provide governance in politics and land tenure in a selective manner to the landed elites and social / political elites in rural society with whom they share ideological affinity. I characterize this as *coercive governance* (Reno 2015). Empirically, the paper uses a comparative framework examining right-wing paramilitaries fighting leftist insurgencies, focusing on the AUC in Colombia, the Rondas Campesinas in Peru, and a detailed *plausibility probe* of the Salwa Judum militias in India, to show that these right-wing conservative militias engage in coercive governance that selectively benefits ideologically aligned landed elites and the state, but uses violence and provides “negative governance” to the rural peasants who are poorer and often support the leftist rebels.

1. Introduction

Do militias provide governance, welfare services and influence state formation? This paper analyzes this question by focusing on how ideologically driven right-wing militias fighting against leftist insurgencies provide governance to civilians. It explores whether the ideological affinity of militias influences the type of governance they provide. Scholars have studied patterns of violence by militias (Stanton 2015, Cohen & Nordas 2015, Ahram 2014), the relationship between militias and the state (Carey & Mitchell 2017, Biberman 2019), the effect of state weakness on militias (Cohen, Jung & Weintraub 2023, Jung & Cohen 2020, Jaffrey 2023), origins of militias (Jentsch 2022, Blocq, 2014) and various other topics. However, the role of militia ideology and its effects on militia governance have not been explored and remains an underdeveloped area of research. In this paper, I analyze how right-wing conservative militias that help the state fight leftist insurgencies use a lot of violence against civilians, but also provide ‘coercive governance’ to a select group of civilians who are ideologically aligned with the militias and landed elites.

This is a potentially fruitful direction of research, that expands analysis of Non-State Armed Governance (NSAG) beyond governance by rebel groups and criminal gangs. A growing body of scholarship studies how rebellions in different regions provide various forms of governance (Mampilly 2011, Arjona 2016, Stewart 2021, Waterman 2022). Parallel to this, an emerging literature on criminal governance examines how gangs, mafias, and other criminal organizations provide governance and interact with state institutions (Barnes 2017; Lessing 2020; Feldmann and Luna 2022). By contrast, governance by militias remains under-theorized despite the central role that militias play in contemporary armed politics. This article addresses that gap by developing a theory of militia governance, that argues that variation along two dimensions—organizational linkages between militias and the state, and ideological alignment between militias and local communities—shapes both the forms of governance and the patterns of violence by ideological militias. Building on this framework, I develop a typology of right-wing militia governance that extends the broader literature on Non-State Armed Governance (NSAG) beyond its predominant focus on rebels and criminal actors.

This typology provides leverage for analyzing the role of ideology in shaping militia governance. Most studies of insurgency and rebellion tend to treat ideology as epiphenomenal and difficult to measure (Balcells & Kalyvas 2025, Gutiérrez-Sanín & Wood 2014). While there has been a recent turn in the rebel governance literature towards analyzing the effect of ideology on rebel governance (Suykens 2015, Stewart 2021, Thaler 2025a & b), the effect of militia ideology on governance has not been explored. This omission is notable given the prevalence of ideologically driven militias around the world, including Hindu Nationalist militias in India that do “cow-lynchings” (Jaffrelot 2019, Jaffrey 2021), Islamic religious militias like the Shia Amal Movement and Hezbollah in Lebanon (Cammatt 2014), leftist militias in Medellín in Colombia (Gutiérrez-Sanin 2015), and anti-immigrant militias like Operation Dudula in South Africa (Landau & Misago 2022). In this paper, I show how class-based ideological alignments influence patterns of governance and violence for right-wing militias.

To develop this argument, I draw on evidence from conservative reactionary militias that emerged to combat leftist insurgencies. These include the *Comités de Autodefensa* (CADs) in Peru, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), and the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUs) in the Philippines. The few studies that have analyzed militia governance tend to focus on ethnic militias in Mozambique (Jentsch 2015) or Afghanistan (Dirkx 2017), demonstrating how such ethnic militias tend to provide protection and security governance to co-ethnic populations. In contrast to such ethnic militias, conservative right-wing militias not only provide security governance and help the state in counterinsurgency, but also deliver more *intensive* forms of political and economic governance (Stewart 2021, Thaler 2025a,b) by intervening in local politics, reversing land reforms carried out by leftist rebels, but also using violence against civilians, which is a form of *coercive governance*.

The article then illustrates the proposed framework through a plausibility probe (Eckstein 1975) of the Salwa Judum in India, which represents one of the most important instances of state-sponsored militias in a contemporary democracy. Existing studies have explained its patterns of violence and relationship with the state (Biberman 2019, Miklian 2009), but overlook how the militias also exercised certain types of governance. A detailed analysis using field-work interviews, archival data and Human rights documents reveals that the Salwa Judum also provided governance which was beneficial to the ideologically aligned landed elites, but harmful and exploitative of the larger group of tribal civilians who were supporters of the Maoist rebels. This pattern highlights a broader phenomenon of *coercive governance* by armed actors simultaneously governing and exploiting civilian populations, providing selective benefits to favored constituencies while using coercion against others (Reno 2015, Liu 2024).

The article proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the limited literature on militia governance and situates the argument within broader debates on Non-State Armed Governance (NSAG). Section 3 then discusses the cases of AUC paramilitaries in Colombia and CADs in Peru, and develops a theoretical framework that incorporates how ideology can affect militia behavior towards civilians and governance. Section 4 presents the novel typology linking militia-state organizational ties and militia-society ideological alignment to patterns of violence and governance. Section 5 evaluates these arguments through an analysis of the Salwa Judum in India. The conclusion discusses the implications of the argument for the study of militias, and NSAG more broadly, and provides suggestions for future research directions.

2. Literature on Vigilante and Militia Governance

Scholars have studied vigilantism and its contributions to justice provision, state formation, and governance. For example, since the onset of democracy in 1990s in South Africa, various vigilante groups emerged who wanted to take justice into their own hands against criminals who would otherwise go unpunished due to a dysfunctional justice system, thereby responding to popular demands for justice (Smith 2019). One of the few studies examining vigilantism as service provision focuses on Haiti, where vigilante groups called *brigades* emerged in a context of weak state capacity, and provided social services, including emergency

first-responder services (Jung & Cohen (2020, 47-48). Vigilantism is generally defined as the collective “extralegal prevention, investigation, or punishment of offenses” undertaken by local actors (Bateson 2021, 925). They are different from militias which operate within the context of insurgency and often have close links to the state which uses them to combat rebels (Jentzsch 2022). Because this article focuses on governance by militias rather than locally organized vigilante groups, the latter remains outside its scope.

The relative neglect of militia governance has been noted by several scholars, who propose that studying governance by militias would be a fruitful area of research. In their introduction to a special feature of *Civil Wars*, Kasfir, Frerks and Terpstra (2017) note that while recent scholarship has studied rebel-civilian interactions through the concept of ‘rebel governance’, other armed actors—militias, paramilitaries, police, warlords, strongmen, clan chiefs—can provide governance, as long as they exercise violence, territorial control and interact with civilians. Later in the article, Kasfir et al. (2017, p. 270) state that “The emergence of militias introduces an additional layer of governance, either with or without the consent of their senior fighting forces—if the militias regulate civilians at all.”

In their introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Jentzsch, Kalyvas & Schubiger (2015) note that “One of the least explored aspects of militias is their role in setting-up local forms of governance that depart from existing state structures and can operate with remarkable autonomy.” Yet contributions to the special issue primarily focused on patterns of violence against civilians (Stanton 2015), the role of state ideology (Staniland 2015), and sexual violence (Cohen and Nordås 2015), rather than analyzing militia governance. Joo and Sosa (2023) show that semi-official Pro-Government Militias (PGMs), which are more accountable to the state, can constrain rebel governance, whereas informal PGMs that are less accountable to the state are less effective in constraining rebel governance. However, they do not assess whether PGMs themselves provide governance functions such as justice, taxation, or healthcare.

The limited scholarship that does examine militia governance focuses primarily on ethnic militias and their role in supporting state authority. Such groups often help secure territory, displace insurgents, and occasionally provide policing, justice, or welfare services. During Mozambique’s civil war (1976-1992), for example, Renamo established the mujeeba militias, which “lived amongst the population and were responsible for vigilance, collecting food from the population for the base and enforcing rebel rule” (Jentzsch 2017, 326-27). In response, the Frelimo government allied with the Naparama militia, which adopted similar practices while assisting with policing and military functions. In Afghanistan, Dirkx (2017) examines U.S.-supported local militias in Kunduz province. Militias led by Nabi Gechi in Qala-e-Zal district were relatively successful in providing protection and dispute resolution, whereas those controlled by Mir Alam were predatory and had a history of “assaulting, harassing and exploiting local populations” (Dirkx 2017, 391-92).

Despite these contributions, existing studies pay limited attention to the ideological foundations of militia governance. Most analyses focus on ethnic militias, patronage networks, or militias' relationships with states and insurgents, while treating ideology as a secondary factor.

The next section develops a theory of class-based right-wing militias, and demonstrates how they provide *coercive governance*.

3. Theory of Right-Wing Ideology and Militia Governance

3.1 Ideology, Class and Right-wing Militia Governance

Gerring (1997) defines ideology as a set of political ideas that are bound together with a minimum level of consistency, and that stand in contrast to competing sets of ideas and suggests we need to adapt the definition to the topic being studied. For armed rebellion, Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood (2014, 215) define ideology as “a more or less systematic set of ideas that includes the identification of a referent group (a class, ethnic, or other social group), an enunciation of the grievances or challenges that the group confronts, the identification of objectives on behalf of that group ... and a ...program of action.” Gutiérrez-Sanín & Wood (2014) distinguish between the ‘weak’ program of ideology research which suggest that ideology is an instrumental tool used to mobilize conflict actors, and the “strong” program which proposes that some people sincerely believe in an ideology and are influenced by it.

The literature on insurgency has tended to treat rebel ideology as “fuzzy, inchoate, opportunistic, or epiphenomenal”, and has instead focused on ethnic identity as more “sticky” and relevant to explain insurgency than “malleable” and difficult to measure ideology (Balcels & Kalyvas 2025). However, recent scholarship has started exploring the how sub-national variation in ideology and strategy of rebel groups effects patterns of violence and socialization (Hirschel-Burns 2021, Thaler 2012, Ugarriza & Craig 2013). Scholars have also emphasized the impact of ideology on rebel governance. For example, Stewart (2021) highlights the influence of the ideology adopted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in China on governance patterns of similar revolutionary movements worldwide. Mampilly (2011, p. 217) suggests that insurgencies that adopt Maoist organizational strategies and structures are likely to develop more effective governance. Thaler (2025b, p. 25-26) compares insurgencies in Nicaragua, Liberia, and Uganda and finds that the ideologies established by these rebel groups during conflict influences their patterns of post-conflict governance.

Compared to the rebel governance literature, the literature on militias has not studied the effects of militia ideology, though there are many examples of both left-wing and right-wing militias. While Staniland (2015, 2021) analyzes how variation in government threat perception from religious vs. ethnic vs. class-based movements influences counter-insurgency strategy towards militias and insurgencies in South Asia, he focuses more on government ideology, and does not delve into militia ideology, which needs to be explored further. In one of the few studies on welfare provision by militias, Biberman & Turnbull (2018) focus more on the inner dynamics of militias, and bring in the role of militia ideology. They compare different militia groups in Pakistan and Nigeria, and show that those militias which are not very resource rich to start with but become “nouveau riche” and acquire material resources, are the most likely to provide welfare and public goods. This is because they are more likely to be led by “ideologically

committed and farsighted individuals" who have a long-term vision and want to build a relationship with civilians. In contrast, those militias which start off with a lot of material resources tend to attract opportunistic recruits, and this leads them to be not interested in providing public goods.

A call to develop a theory of militia ideology could be based on the suggestion by Schubiger & Zelina (2017, p. 948) that "research on ideology and political violence has tended to focus on extreme cases of strong ideology" while neglecting cases with weak manifestation of ideology. Examining right-wing militias and paramilitaries could reveal such "weak" manifestations of ideology. Thaler (2012, p. 549) shows that ideology is strongest among the elites of a rebel group and lower-level cadres are less committed and need to be indoctrinated, and this insight could apply to the case of right-wing conservative militias, where it is the leaders who have stronger ideological beliefs, while the lower-level militia members need to be instrumentally motivated, thus falling into Sanín & Wood (2014)'s weak program of ideology.

In this study, we focus on right-wing militias motivated by class-based ideology, which help explain conservative or reactionary militias in Peru, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nepal, Philippines, or India that fought against leftist insurgencies, on behalf of landlords, ranchers and capitalist companies exploiting natural resources. Their ideology is based on land and class-based divisions and they attempt to change the social and political institutions in favor of the rural landed elite, and reverse land redistribution carried out by leftist guerrilla groups. They could be thought of as counter-revolutionary movements of landed-class, allied with the state and capitalist class, mobilizing against peasant revolt (Skocpol 1979). Such counter-revolutionary alliances are similar to Barrington Moore's "landlord-bourgeoisie alliance" in which the bourgeoisie pursues industrialization while the landed elite retains political control in rural areas (Skocpol 1973).

The logic of this state-capitalist-landed-elite class alliance and ideological motivations are visible in these reactionary militias mobilized against various Marxist and Maoist insurgencies. I elucidate this using the cases of Rondas Campesinas in Peru, and the AUC paramilitaries in Colombia, to develop insights into governance provided by such right-wing militias. In Peru, the Sendero Luminoso rebels was driven by Maoist ideology that initially gained support from peasants in rural communities by attacking the police, handing over land from abandoned estates, killing criminals such as bandits and thieves (Fumerton 2001). However, as Sendero actions became more violent, their strategy disrupted rural livelihoods by cutting off access to markets, and banning cultural practices like fiestas, drinking, and coca, peasants became alienated (Fumerton 2001). In response, peasants started organizing self-defence groups known as *Rondas Campesinas*, to oppose some of the rules and governance institutions of the Sendero rebels. Later the Rondas were formalized as Comités de Autodefensa y Desarrollo (CADs), which successfully supported military counterinsurgency, and helped restore state presence in rural areas (Althouse 2018).

The core function of the various militias during the Peruvian civil war was to provide local security and justice in the absence of the state. In the Apurímac Valley, highly organized militia networks (DECAS) led offensive operations and retook rebel held territory with limited

state oversight (Fumerton 2018). It evolved into a network of 22 commands conducting offensive military campaigns with partial autonomy, funded via local donations, drug traffickers, and illegal arms (Fumerton 2001). Rondas Campesinas also exercised customary justice in areas with little or no state presence, rooted in traditions of communal decision making, thus providing Judicial Governance (Starn 1995; Shanee 2019). Their justice included public assemblies, beatings, and ritual punishments for crimes like theft or collaboration with Sendero Luminoso. These were based on communal norms rather than codified law (Starn 1995; Fumerton 2018).

Although not formal political entities, Rondas Campesinas became de facto authorities and acted as autonomous local governance bodies in rural areas where both state and rebel institutions collapsed, and provided Political Governance (Starn 1995, Taccone, 2025). Their political roles included electing local leaders, organizing village assemblies, and coordinating inter-community pacts (Fumerton 2018). In regions like Llohegua, these roles became institutionalised with CAD militias having high legitimacy and continuing post-conflict, where they not only continued to provide security from crime and burglary, but also engaged in political brokering, policy making, collaborating with judicial authorities, and even managing public health crises like COVID-19 (Taccone 2025).

Rondas also exercised Economic Governance, particularly over land and environmental resources, in both wartime and post-conflict periods. Defending land ownership won through agrarian reform was a central motivation for resisting Sendero, whose collectivist agenda threatened recent gains (Fumerton 2001). Many communities supported the Rondas to reverse the Shining Path's seizure and redistribution of land, asserting communal ownership as an economic and moral right (Starn 1995). Following the end of the conflict, Rondas created community run reserves (ARCAs) for forest conservation, established rules for land use, and enforced bans on illegal logging, deforestation, and wildlife trafficking (Shanee 2019).

Another important case are the right-wing paramilitaries under the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) umbrella in Colombia which initially emerged in 1980s as self defense groups against the FARC and ELN leftist rebels and was funded by landowners and drug traffickers. Ugarizza & Craig (2013, p. 455) mention that the AUC paramilitary's ideology was "based on its opposition to leftist thought and discourse" and while economic motivations may have driven paramilitary activities, the AUC was also "ideologically driven, defined by virulent anticommunism." According to Gutierrez-Sanin (2008, p. 14-15), the leadership of the paramilitaries was made up of huge landowners, cattle ranchers, ex-military, and criminals who were socially conservative and ideologically opposed to the leftist FARC and ELN rebels, and paramilitary fighters "more or less easily grasp the basics of some right-wing principles." (Gutierrez-Sanin (2008, p. 24).

In an ethnographic analysis of the paramilitaries and state building in Colombia, Balvé (2020, p. 5) describes how the use of violence, drug trafficking and plunder by the paramilitaries "worked alongside development projects aimed at institution building, good governance, and political participation." The AUC provided some forms of judicial governance by and gained legitimacy by mediating "disputes among inhabitants over land boundaries, old debts and marriage" and also did "social cleansing" of prostitutes, criminals and social delinquents, and

helped construct “an alternative order in many localities where they came to be recognized effectively as the ‘state’” (Zukerman Daly (2016, p. 59-60).

The AUC paramilitaries also provided political governance and intervened in politics. The Bloc Elmer Cardenas of the AUC trained injured soldiers as community organizers, called Promoters of Social Development (PDS), who worked through the Juntas de Accion Communal (JACs) to set up dispute resolution committees, and organize work brigades to improve bridges, roads, community centers, which was very helpful to get civilian approval and legitimacy (Balvé 2020, p. 66-72). They were similar to the political commissars that FARC guerrillas deployed for their own political work among the masses, thus mimicking guerrilla strategy of political governance. The Bloc Norte paramilitaries in the Magdalena department, were able to take over the health care as part of a broader plan to control local politicians, and create a “self-defense state” to replace the “guerrilla state” (Gutierrez-Sanin 2019, p. 307).

One of the unique aspects of governance by the AUC paramilitaries, which demonstrates their anti-Communist ideology, was their intervention in the land market to counter the efforts of leftist rebels to take away land from the rural elite and give it to peasants, which was a form of economic governance. Larratt Smith (2022, p. 86) notes that “contestation over regional land tenure patterns” is one of the key factors in the conflict in Colombia, where land as a resource is not just wealth but linked to identity. The Domingo Lain front of the ELN guerillas tried to protect the peasant smallholder system in Arauca, but once the Elmer Cardenas Bloc paramilitaries consolidated control in Uraba and Choco by 1990s, they set up large cattle ranching estates and supported commercial agribusiness interests at the expense of the peasant underclass. The AUC in Colombia “favored landowners and promoted the accumulation of large estates”, which helped them realize economies of scale for large agricultural owners and cattle ranchers, who were their main supporters (Ch, Shapiro, Steele, and Vargas 2018, p. 996-997).

3.2 Defining militias and militia governance

In her book on militia formation in Mozambique, Jentzsch (2022, p. 2) defines militias as armed organizations that “emerge as counter-movements against insurgents either on the initiative of community residents or state representatives” and are not revolutionary but reactionary groups that guarantee security and “secure rules that already exist and present no systematic threat to the state.” But how to define militia governance? In one of the few studies of militia governance, Biberman & Turnbull (2018, p. 699) state that militias can be expected to provide welfare when they seek to govern a population, and when civilians cooperate with them. To define militia governance, I adapt and build on definitions of *rebel governance*. Kasfir (2015) defines rebel governance as “the organisation of civilians within rebel held territory” which assumes that territorial control is a necessity for governance. However, as Waterman (2022) and Loyle et al. (2021) note there are many cases where rebels can provide governance without strict territorial control. Since militias may not always have full territorial control, it is better to adapt from a more flexible definition of *rebel governance* “as the set of actions insurgents engage in to regulate the social, political and economic life of non-combatants during war” (Arjona, Kasfir & Mampilly 2015, p. 3)

Similarly, militia governance can be defined as the *set of actions militias engage in to regulate the social, political and economic life of civilians and other actors like companies and non-profit organizations working in insurgency zones, regardless of the level of territorial control by the militias*. I expand the definition to include not only civilians but also corporations and other non-state actors who also operate in areas of conflict and interact with militias. Militias provide governance and welfare of different types to complement governance by the state, with which they share formal or informal linkages. Sometimes militias may be opposed to the state and can provide types of governance and welfare based on their own interests and ideology.

To understand how militia ideology influences the type of governance, we look at two aspects of governance, *intensiveness* and *extensiveness*. The first dimension of militia governance is the **degree of intensiveness**. Stewart (2021) in her detailed analysis of the governance practices of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) categorizes rebel governance as more or less *intensive*. More intensive forms of governance range from redistribution of land and wealth, education and inclusion of women in political and education institutions, and changing religious and political institutions, and may cause resistance from certain sections of civilian population who are negatively affected by such deeper changes. In contrast, less intensive forms of rebel governance range from provision of basic security, food, dispute settlement, welfare which are broadly popular among civilians and generate legitimacy (Stewart, 2021, p. 8-10). Ethnic militias like the CJTF fighting against the Boko Haram in Nigeria, and militias in Afghanistan that helped fight the Taliban tend to focus on less intensive forms of governance like protection and security and some basic forms of justice. In contrast, militias which are more ideologically driven, like the right-wing AUC paramilitaries in Colombia, or CADs in Peru, tend to provide more intensive governance that intervenes in land and property rights, political governance at local level, or gender roles.



Figure 1: Intensiveness of Governance Institutions (adapted from Stewart, 2021, p. 9, Table 1.1)

The second dimension of militia governance is the **degree of extensiveness of governance**, which refers to the breadth of the population that benefits from governance. Some insurgent groups provide more extensive governance to civilians regardless of whether they support the rebellion, whereas others organize less extensive governance that is directed primarily toward civilian supporters or rebel cadres (Stewart 2021, p. 9-12). A similar distinction is made by Thaler (2025a), who conceptualizes the extensiveness of governance as a continuum between inclusive and exclusive governance. According to Thaler (2025a, p. 29), inclusive rebels seek to provide public goods to most of the population, whereas “exclusive organizations aim primarily to secure private welfare for leaders and group members and direct goods and services to limited constituencies or client groups.”

This distinction provides a useful framework for analyzing governance by militias such as the AUC in Colombia, the Rondas in Peru, the CAFGU militias in Philippines, and Salwa Judum in India, who helped fight leftist rebels. Although these organizations often intervene intensively into local governance, by reversing land reforms or reshaping local political institutions, such governance benefits a narrow section of the local population. Rather than governing for the entire civilian population, they selectively advance the interests of wealthier landowners and rural elites who are politically conservative, aligned with the state, and opposed to the redistributive agendas promoted by leftist insurgencies. Consequently, landless labourers and poorer peasants, many of whom support radical land reform and leftist rebels, are largely excluded from the benefits of such militia rule. These militias thus provide “positive” governance only to civilians who share their class interests and ideological orientation, while providing “negative” governance to civilians which whom they are not aligned ideologically.

Such exclusive governance, which is selectively positive toward a small segment of the population while simultaneously negative toward a much larger group of civilians, can be conceptualized as a form of *coercive governance*. A good example of such coercive governance would be the “predatory” National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), which used a lot of violence and recruited child soldiers, but also developed unconventional forms of governance designed to capture the state and generate short-term material gains through activities such as rent-seeking, rather than to improve civilian welfare (Reno (2015). Such unconventional forms of governance by predatory rebels that Reno (2015, 266-67) analyzes, could be considered to be *coercive governance*. Liu (2024) argues that even when rebels provide public goods or security, such cooperation is often established “under the shadow of the gun,” and rebel institutions are “underpinned by coercion” that is sometimes co-produced with civilians. Similarly, Arjona, Kasfir, Mampilly (2015, p. 16) note that even when non-state armed actors use a lot of coercion and violence and tax and exploit civilians, as long as they organize and coordinate civilian life, they are still providing some of rebel governance.

A similar insight can be applied to these right-wing militias. They provide *intensive* but *exclusive* governance to upper-class landed elites and those sections of the population who are suffering at the hands of leftist rebels and with whom such militias share ideological interests. In contrast, they use massacres and violence to discipline or eliminate civilians perceived as sympathetic to leftist movements and with whom they do not share ideological affinity. Gutierrez

Sanin (2008) argues that the AUC paramilitaries in Colombia initially relied on massacres and indiscriminate violence to establish territorial control, before transitioning to more selective forms of violence while simultaneously consolidating influence over local political and economic institutions. Such a form of governance is *coercive* and *exclusive*, but also *intensive*.¹

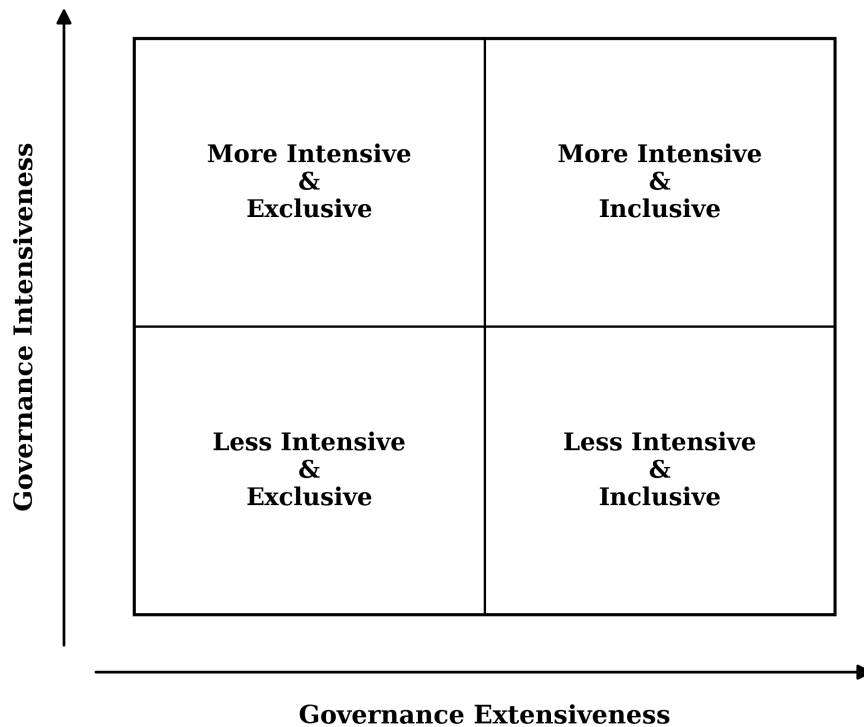


Figure 2: Dependent variable of type of militia governance (created using Claude from original figure I provided)

4. Typology of Right-Wing Militia violence and governance

Having developed a framework of how anti-leftist militia ideology generates *coercive governance*, I present a novel typology explaining how militia ideology intersects with militia-state linkages to shape its governance patterns.² Existing typologies mostly explain patterns of violence (Carey & Mitchell (2017), durability and aims of militias (Cohen, Jung & Weintraub

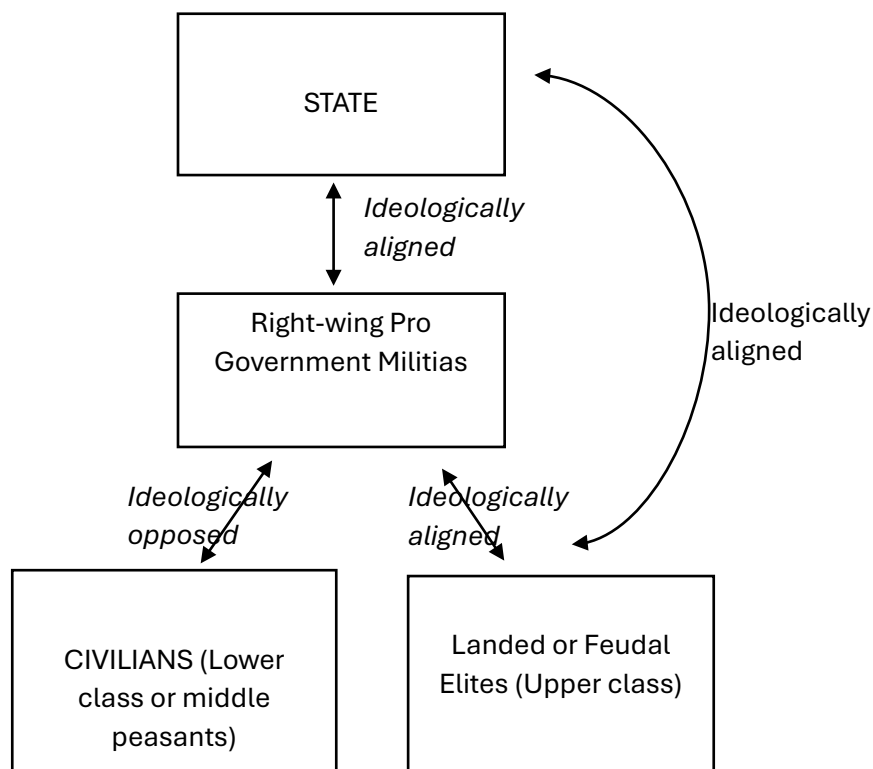
¹ Stewart (2021) notes that rebel governance that is *intensive* is also *extensive (inclusive)* because it affects a large section of the population. This makes sense for most rebellions. However, for the case of right-wing militias, the main cleavage that matters is not ethnic identity, but ideological divisions within an ethnic group or society, so it is possible for such militia groups to provide governance which is both *intensive* and yet *exclusive*.

² This typology was initially developed in a previous chapter currently under review (Author, 2026), but I expand upon it here.

(2023), origins of militias (Jentzsch 2022), and state-militia relations (Staniland 2015, Biberman 2019), and but does not address militia governance.

To fill this gap, I adapt Carey & Mitchell’s (2017) typology that predicts militia violence, but could possibly explain militia governance. The first dimension of their typology is ***Militia-State Linkages***, which distinguishes *semi-official militias*—which have institutional ties to government, greater accountability and commit less violence—from *informal militias* which lack official links to the government, have less accountability, attract opportunists, and commit higher levels of indiscriminate violence. Stanton (2015) agrees that direct command allows governments to exert control over militia behavior and reigns in violence, whereas more militia autonomy prevents governments from preventing militia violence. The second dimension is ***Militia-Society linkages***, which differentiates between *local militias* which share ethnic identity with civilians which prevents them from looting and violence against their co-ethnics, and *non-local militias* that do not share ethnic linkages with civilians and are more violent. Other studies also show that non-local militias disconnected from communities are more predatory and use more violence due to lack of local-level monitoring and constraints (Taccone 2025, Biberman & Turnbull 2018, Jentzsch 2022, Stanton 2015).

Figure 3: Relationship between State, right-wing militias and civilians



While Carey & Mitchell’s (2017) framework effectively predicts violence by ethnic militias, it fails to predict right-wing militia violence and governance for two reasons. Firstly, states frequently use right-wing *semi-official militias* to attack civilians and commit human rights

abuses. For example, in Guatemala, the military used the semi-official Civil Defense Patrols (PAC) to launch a violent counter-insurgency campaign against the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) leftist guerrillas (Allison 2009, 191), various CAD militias in Peru were used by the military to commit indiscriminate violence (Taccone 2025), and the CAGFU militias used by the Philippines army to fight the leftist New People's Army (NPA) were used to perform human rights violations (Kowaleski 1990). Contrary to Carey & Mitchell's (2017) assumption, *semi-official* status does not ensure accountability or restraint in counter-leftist contexts; instead, it often enables high levels of state-sanctioned predatory and indiscriminate violence.

Second, the assumption by Carey & Mitchell (2017) that local militias will be more restrained in using indiscriminate violence applies primarily to ethnic insurgencies, where the role of co-ethnicity is important for violence patterns and counter-insurgency (Lyll 2010, Kaur 2026). In contrast, for right-wing militias fighting against Marxist or Maoist rebels in Peru, Guatemala, India, or Philippines, ideological differences based on class or land interest within the local community matters more than the local (co-ethnic) vs. non-local (non co-ethnic) divides. Such right-wing militias and paramilitaries fight on behalf of landed elites, ranchers and corporations to protect upper class interest, and reverse land redistribution by leftist guerrilla groups. They also intervene in local politics to favor conservative landed elite and politicians who were supportive of them. These actions constitute different forms of *intensive* economic and political governance (Stewart 2018, Thaler 2005a). Unlike ethnic militias fighting against ethnic insurgencies that focus predominantly on order, security governance, or basic service provision, right-wing militias fighting against leftist insurgencies additionally engage in more intensive governance designed to reorganize local political and economic power. Analyzing these conservative militias reinforces recent findings by Balcells & Kalyvas (2025) that Marxist-Leninist insurgencies during the Cold War differed from ethnic insurgencies.

In Table 1 below, I introduce the role of ideology and class dynamics for right-wing militias, and develop a novel typology combining *State-Militia linkages* and *Society-Militia linkages*, to explain the variation in militia governance and violence in the context of insurgency.

- (1) **State-Militia linkages:** During anti-leftist campaigns, states either direct or tolerate right-wing militias targeting suspected rebel sympathizers among poor and landless peasants. When the state controls these militias (*Semi-official*), it results in *collusion* (Staniland 2015). The militias inflict indiscriminate violence, looting, arson, and sexual assault while imposing “negative” governance through destruction of livelihood, and undermining justice and security. Concurrently, the state uses these militias to enforce intensive, exclusive “positive” economic and political governance by reallocating land and political influence to rural elites. When such militias are more autonomous from the state (*Informal militias*) states adopt a strategy of *containment* (Staniland 2015). These autonomous militias still use high violence based on commander preferences, though lacking state coordination may slightly reduce overall scale of violence. They still pursue land reversal and political interference, though less effectively without direct state backing.

- (2) **Society-Militia ideological linkages:** When these militias share class and ideological affinity with civilians, usually rural elites, they are constrained in their use of violence, while providing security and order, as well as “positive” economic and political governance like reversing land reform, securing conservative election victories, and restoring elite social status. In contrast, when facing landless or poor peasants with whom they do not share ideological affinity, they are less restrained in use of violence. They capture land, natural resources from these poorer peasants, and also political power, and redistribute it to the landed elites or allies of the state with whom they share ideological views, thus imposing “negative” economic and political governance upon poorer populations.

Table 1: Typology of Right-Wing Coercive Militia governance

	<i>State – Militia organizational linkages</i>	
<i>Society – Militia ideological linkages</i>	<i>Informal</i>	<i>Semi Official</i>
<i>Same Class/ Ideology</i>	<i>(Quadrant 1):</i> Autonomous protective order (Containment and Protection) Low violence & Intensive-Inclusive governance	<i>(Quadrant 2):</i> State-backed patronage order (Collusion & Protection) Medium violence & Intensive-Inclusive governance
<i>Different Class/ Ideology</i>	<i>(Quadrant 3):</i> Autonomous predatory order (Containment & Coercion) High violence & Intensive-Exclusive governance	<i>(Quadrant 4):</i> State-backed coercive order (Collusion & Coercion) Very high violence & Intensive-Exclusive governance

Autonomous Protective order (Quadrant 1): Represents conservative militias which are autonomous from government (*Informal*) but share ideological/class position with rural landed elites who dominate the feudal class structure (Paige 1975), thus providing a form of *feudal/landlord protective governance*. Such militias operate as private order-enforcers for landed elites, maintaining social hierarchies and property rights without direct state backing. Since these militias are autonomous from direct state control, they cannot be compelled into using indiscriminate violence, and states use a strategy of *containment* (Staniland 2015). However, they provide economic governance in favor of co-ideological elites by reversing rebel

land-redistribution. They may also engage in political governance in the form of increasing social/political status of landed elites, and provision of some minimal services and public goods. These militias thus provide selective positive governance (intensive & inclusive) that is restricted to those landed elites with whom they share ideological affinity.

State-backed Patronage Order (Quadrant 2): Consists of militias under government control (*Semi-official*), and also share class/ideological ties with rural landed elites. They collude with state forces to provide security to landed elites with whom both the militias and the state share class identity. The state uses them to carry out indiscriminate violence against poorer civilians who support leftist rebels. They deliver intensive and inclusive economic governance by redistributing land to landed elites, facilitating land acquisition for corporations that want to exploit natural resources. Such militias also help the state intervene in local politics and help conservative politicians win elections and control office. They provide selective positive governance (intensive & inclusive) that favors state and landed elites.

Autonomous Predatory Order (Quadrant 3): This describes militias that are autonomous from state (*Informal*), and from a different ideological/class position from local peasants and poorer civilians. The state does not control these militias, which inflict high levels of indiscriminate violence and predation, land seizures and coercive control over poor peasants with whom they have ideological or class differences. These militias also try to get back land or status from landless peasants, which would be a form of intensive but exclusive or “negative” economic governance for the majority of poor peasants, and try to sometimes interfere with local politics. They do not care about providing services or public goods to their co-ethnic civilians with whom they have ideological differences, resulting in a form of *predatory* and *reactionary governance* (Skocpol 1973, Moore 1966) that supports the landed upper class while resisting redistributive threats from the peasants and their supporters.

State-backed coercive order (Quadrant 4): It is a form of *coercive* and *counter-revolutionary* governance that favors the landed-class against peasant or leftist revolutionary attempts (Skocpol 1979). It represents conservative militias under government control (*Semi-official*), which do not share ideological or class alignment with poorer civilians and peasants. The state supports the militias (*collusion*), and uses them for counter-insurgency against leftist rebels and their peasant supporters, causing Very High violence. Backed by state forces, these militias dispossess poor peasants of land and return it to rural elites. The state uses them to secure control of territories which can be provided to corporations to build factories and exploit land and natural resources. These militias are unmotivated to provide much welfare services to poorer classes and peasants. This results in *intensive* but *exclusive* governance that excludes the majority of civilians who are landless peasants or laborers, while interfering in the political and economic spheres in favor of the state and landed elites.

Ethnic militias provide security governance, and to some extent judicial governance, to members of their own ethnic group. In contrast, right-wing militias linked to the state and landed elites rarely deliver “positive governance” to co-ethnic civilians with whom they do not share ideological or class affinity. Instead, they direct high levels of violence against those co-ethnic they view as ideological opponents, while exercising coercive governance over land markets,

labor markets, and politics, that benefits the state and the rural elites who share their conservative ideology. Such coercive economic and political governance is more intensive (Stewart 2021) than the security governance offered by ethnic militias, but it is also more exclusive (Thaler 2025), reaching only a subset of co-ethnics rather than the group as a whole.

Table 2: Summary of expectations (could be put in Online Appendix?)

	Violence & Security Governance	Social Governance & Services	Political Governance	Economic Governance
Quadrant 1: Containment and Protection	Positive Security governance: Low violence against civilians and some security to landed elites, less collusion with police/army	Few Services: Not much services like Health, Education	Positive Political Governance: Low redistribution of political power in favor of landed elites at local level	Positive Economic Governance: Low redistribution of land to landed elites with similar ideology and natural resources to state
Quadrant 2 Collusion & Protection	Positive Security governance: Medium violence against civilians, collusion with police/army to provide security to Landed elites	Few Services: Not much services like Health, Education	Positive Political Governance: High redistribution of political power in favor of landed elites and social groups with similar ideology	Positive Economic Governance: High redistribution of land to landed elites with similar ideology, and natural resources to state
Quadrant 3 Containment & Coercion	Negative Security Governance: High violence against civilians who are poor landless peasants, though less collusion with police/army	Negative Services: Not much services like Health, Education	Negative Political Governance: Removes political power from poor civilians who are rebel supporters	Negative Economic governance: Low redistribution of land and natural resources which is taken away and given to landed elites, extractive companies and state
Quadrant 4 Collusion & Coercion	Negative Security Governance: Very high violence against majority civilians who are poor peasants and rebel supporters and collusion with police/army	Negative Services: Not much services like Health, Education	Negative Political Governance: Removes political power from poor civilians who are rebel supporters	Negative Economic governance: High redistribution of land and natural resources which is taken away and given to landed elites, extractive companies and state

5. Case Study of the anti-Maoist Salwa Judum movement in Chhattisgarh

5.1 Case selection – Right-wing reactionary militias in India

Having outlined the typology of how militia ideological affinity with civilians shapes militia governance, this section demonstrates the causal mechanisms the typology proposes, through process tracing of the Salwa Judum militias in India. The case is a *plausibility probe* which “allows the researcher to sharpen a hypothesis or theory” (Levy 2008, p. 6) and facilitates theory building and allows us to demonstrate the empirical relevance of a theoretical proposition by identifying at least one relevant case (Eckstein 1975: 109). India offers two such cases: the *semi-official* Salwa Judum militias in Chhattisgarh which exemplifies **State-backed Coercive order**

(Quadrant 4) in the typology, and the *informal* Ranvir Sena militias in neighboring Bihar, which represents **Autonomous predatory order** (Quadrant 3). Both were mobilized by landed elites against Maoist-aligned poor populations but the Salwa Judum was formally armed and funded under the Chhattisgarh Police Act, while the Ranvir Sena operated despite a formal state ban, which offers variation along the typology's state-linkage dimension and governance outcomes. Given space constraints, this paper focuses on the Salwa Judum as the more extreme case of coercive governance.³

There are multiple reasons why it is useful to study the Salwa Judum case. First, the Salwa Judum became part of government counter-insurgency strategy to combat Maoist rebels in 2005-2011 and led to escalation of violence. It is one of the best examples of the Indian state relying on militias to fight leftist rebels in areas of historically weak state capacity (Mukherjee 2021), and reveals novel insights, yet remains understudied. Miklian (2009) and Biberman (2018) offer excellent analyses of its violence patterns and state-militia linkages, but no study examines how the Salwa Judum also provided coercive governance to tribal society.

Second, it is a *deviant case* (Seawright & Gerring 2008), which is poorly explained by existing theories and has the “aim of generating a new hypothesis” (Gerring 2007a, p. 106-9) that permits theory development. The Salwa Judum case does not fit neatly within Carey & Mitchell’s (2017) typology, which would predict that *semi-official* militias like the Salwa Judum that also share co-ethnicity with civilians, are constrained in use of violence. Yet, the Salwa Judum performed indiscriminate violence, looting, rape, and forcible displacement. Process tracing reveals that this stemmed from ideological differences between the Salwa Judum leadership who were landed elites, and the poor tribal civilians and peasants who supported the Maoists. The case thus highlights ideological divisions based on land or class as the politically relevant schism in such cases of conservative militias, and not co-ethnicity as assumed in existing theories of militias.

As Seawright & Gerring (2008, p. 302) note: “One deviant case study may lead to a new cross case model that identifies an entirely different set of deviant cases”. The Salwa Judum thus reveals causal mechanisms generalizable to other reactionary militias governing on behalf of landed elites against leftist insurgency, including Peru's Comités de Autodefensa (CAD), Colombia's Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), Guatemala's Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PAC), El Salvador's Organización Democrática Nacionalista (ORDEN), the Philippines' Civilian Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU), Chiapas paramilitaries in Mexico, and anti-Maoist militias in Nepal.⁴

5.2 Case study of the Salwa Judum

The Salwa Judum was a state-backed militia movement that emerged in southern Chhattisgarh in 2005 and lasted till 2011, when it was banned by the Supreme Court of India. It typifies militias in Quadrant 4 of the typology in Table 1 of **State-backed Coercive Governance**. Their leadership was made up of landed elite tribals allied with corporations and the state, and

³ A brief analysis of the Ranvir Sena appears in the Online Appendix and can be developed in future research.

⁴ A summary table of these cases appears in the Online Appendix.

ideologically distinct from the poor tribal (adivasi) villagers who bore the brunt of its coercion. While initially they emerged as *informal militias* the state soon started supporting their activities to suppress a leftist insurgency and clear land for industrial development.

5.2.1 Origins of anti-Maoist militias in Chhattisgarh

The emergence of Salwa Judum was a counter-revolutionary response to activities by People's War Group (PWG) faction of Maoist rebels who emerged in early 1980s in areas of historically low state penetration, which were part of former colonial indirect rule through princely states of Bastar and Kanker in the south of Chhattisgarh (Sundar 2006, Mukherjee 2021). They started providing protection to tribal Gondi villagers from pillaging by police and forest guards, ensuring the tribal villagers had access to forest resources. They also created *alternate governance* institutions based on socialist principles, in the tribal *Gond* villages in Bijapur and Narayanpur districts of Chhattisgarh.⁵ To carry out political governance, and to reduce the social and political power of the landed elites and *mukhiyas* or village headmen, the PWG-Maoist rebels created overground organizations called *sanghams*, which became the unit of political organization and recruitment of tribal villagers. In 1989-90, as the insurgency intensified, anti-landowner movements were launched, and a lot of land was confiscated by the Maoists with the help of the tribals, and the control of the village *mukhiyas* started getting replaced by Maoist governance in the villages.⁶

Such revolutionary actions by the PWG Maoists in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh were examples of *intensive* or *transformative* rebel governance (Stewart 2021, Thaler 2025). In response to these radical activities by Maoists, which threatened the dominance of landed elites and village *mukhiyas* in tribal society, as well as the economic interests of non-tribal traders, there started emerging landlord led militia movements, which were a form of civilian resistance which usually happens when “rebels try to intervene broadly in local affairs, attempting to replace a community's existing institutions ...” (Arjona, Kasfir, Mampilly 2015, p. 13). The first militia movement started as a *Jan Jagran Abhijan* (people's consciousness campaign) in July-August 1990. Following the killing of the headman of Bedre village near Kutru tehsil by the villagers, the headman's brother along with police forces started organizing retaliatory attacks against Maoist sympathizers, and villages were attacked, houses burned, and tribals associated with *sanghams* were arrested, and forced to join the *Jan Jagran Abhijan*.⁷ Mahendra Karma, a tribal landlord and Congress politician, took over the leadership, and the state-level Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government extended support. The PWG-Maoist rebels launched a counter offensive targeting the police forces and militias, and forced the villagers who were part of the *Jan Jagran* to surrender, leading to a collapse of the movement (PUDR et al. 2006, p. 12-13).

This was followed by a second *Jan Jagran Abhijan* in 1997-98, in villages surrounding Pharsaphal, Mahendra Karma's native village, where there was historical land inequality (PUDR et al. 2006, p. 13). A Maoist publication mentions attacks committed by this Abhijan “where

⁵ C Vanaja, “Janatana Sarkar: A Parallel Government in the Dandakaranya”, *Andhra Jyothi*, April 10, 2005

⁶ Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee, CPI-Maoist, *Jan Jagran Nahi, Jan Daman Abhiyan*, 12 Aug 2005, p.1-7.

⁷ Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee, CPI-Maoist, *Jan Jagran Nahi, Jan Daman Abhiyan*, 12 Aug 2005, p.1-7. See also PUDR et al, *When the State Makes War on its Own People*, Delhi, 2006, p 11-12.

about 180 Sangham members and sympathisers were forcibly taken and handed over to the police.” (HRF 2006, p. 24).⁸ This movement also ended within a couple of years, because of Maoist counter mobilization and attacks. While there was not sufficient time for these militias to establish governance, a pattern of anti-Maoist mobilization led by landed elites, with some state support, and repertoire of organization and violence was already created, which was available for Karma to apply at a far greater scale in the future.

The Salwa Judum, which means ‘purification hunt’ in local Gondi language, had similar origins as the previous Abhijans, though with conflicting accounts. Official narratives describe spontaneous mobilization in Kutru tehsil in mid-2005, triggered by a Maoist ban on tendu leaf collection and anger over a CRPF ambush. Maoists instead claim it was a backlash against land redistribution across roughly 25 villages, alleging that tribal headmen there handed DAKMS members over to police. (PUDR et al. 2006, p. 14-15; ICI 2006).

5.2.2 State-Militia Linkages of Salwa Judum: While the Salwa Judum started as an *informal militia* in the form of a spontaneous movement by local tribal landed and traditional elites, it soon transitioned into a *semi-official militia*, whose leadership was assumed by Congress MLA, Mahendra Karma, and supported by the BJP government logistically and financially. Miklian (2009, p. 442) mentions that the Chhattisgarh government consented to “secretly fund and arm” the Salwa Judum. However, the Salwa Judum remained a “largely informal organization”, with no uniforms and no identification, thus providing the state “official deniability of any violence taken against civilians and suspected Naxals” with the goal of reasserting control and “bolster official military capacity” (Miklian 2009, p. 442).

Even though the government official denied it, there is significant evidence of direct state sponsorship. There are several video shots of Salwa Judum meetings clearly showing the presence of the BJP Chief Minister Raman Singh, District Collector K.R. Pisda, and Congress leader Mahendra Karma addressing them, as well as both police and paramilitary accompanying Salwa Judum processions (PUDR et al, 2006, p. 17). The *Dantewada Collector's 2005 Work Proposal* is the clearest evidence of state planning: it warns that “if they are not given support from the administration, the Abhiyan will die out,” and specifies the need for a “common leader,” “adequate security,” and government-funded “transport... food and a place to stay” (cited in PUDR et al. 2006; HRW 2008). This dovetailed with national policy, since the *Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) Annual Report, 2004-5*, p. 45, mentions that in order to tackle the Maoist insurgency in Chhattisgarh, the Indian government was planning: “coordinated and sustained intelligence based anti-naxal operations ... and creation of Local Resistance Groups.”⁹

5.2.3 Social linkages of Salwa Judum and its ideological roots: The Salwa Judum lower-level cadres were local tribals or “adivasi foot soldiers” many of whom have “their own grievances against the Maoists” since they may have lost family members to rebel attacks (HRF 2006, p. 26). The leadership was like a *counter-revolutionary* cross-class alliance similar to Moore’s “landlord-bourgeoisie alliance” (Skocpol 1973). It consisted of tribal landed elites like Mahendra

⁸ Human Rights Forum, *Death, Displacement and Deprivation: The War in Dantewada*, December 2006; p. 24

⁹ *Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) Annual Report, 2004-5*, p. 45-47.

Karma whose lands were being taken by the Maoists, traditional figures like *mukhiyas* and religious figures whose authority had been subverted, and also non-local immigrant traders and contractors from outside the region whose profits were affected by Maoist policies of increasing wages for picking tendu leaves and other forest produce (PUDR et al. 2006). Behind this alliance was the state and mining corporations who stood to benefit from ridding these lands of Maoist rebels and being able to access its rich iron ore, bauxite and timber.

Other than this counter-revolutionary landed elite upper-class ideology, there were also subtle elements of right-wing religious Hindutva ideology that influenced the Salwa Judum movement. The non-tribal traders and businessmen were from other states like Andhra Pradesh or Uttar Pradesh and “Sangh Parivar ideology ... pervades their thinking.” (HRF, 2006, p. 26).¹⁰ Renowned anthropologist of Bastar, Nandini Sundar also mentions that this non-tribal constituency is “the very constituency which has been responsible for support to Hindutva...” in the region and that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) cadres are very active in the Salwa Judum camps (Sundar 2006, p. 3190).¹¹ Miklian (2009, p. 457) notes the paramilitary CRPF's own “Bastar Tiger” medal for successful Salwa Judum activists, shared its tiger emblem with the Hindu-nationalist Shiv Sena, thus indicating the “Red vs. Saffron” (Maoist vs. Hindu Nationalist) ideological undertones of this conflict. The BJP government of Chhattisgarh of that time was controlled by Raman Singh and other upper caste Hindus whose religious Hindutva ideology meshed well with the upper class landed elite's motivations.

Ideological divisions within tribal society based on class and land tenure, fused with right-wing religious ideology of non-tribal traders and BJP government, made the Salwa Judum a potent militia movement. Such ideological schism between the militias and the poor tribals who supported the Maoist rebels resulted in indiscriminate violence and *coercive* and *intensive-exclusive* governance. Such governance had a counter-revolutionary flavor and led to reversal of political power in favor of landed elites, destruction of Maoist *sanghams* in the villages, and forced removal and displacement of tribals to camps to free up land for the state and mining companies. All this was a form of “negative” governance for the majority of poor tribals who were Maoist sympathizers, with only the few landed elites and Salwa Judum leaders benefiting from “positive governance”.

5.3 Salwa Judum patterns of violence

The Independent Citizens Initiative (ICI) report (p. 11) mentions that according to the Maoist spokesperson, initially “the Salwa Judum seem to have targeted sangham members, but after August, they started killing randomly.”¹² A lot of villages were burnt, and villagers were displaced into camps, or ran away into neighboring forested areas. According to the Independent Citizens Initiative Report (p. 10-11), the Salwa Judum destroyed the grain stocks of villagers, “their livestock looted, and even the gourds that people grow on the roofs of their houses have been destroyed”, which would prevent the tribal villagers from returning to their villages, and

¹⁰ Human Rights Forum, *Death, Displacement and Deprivation: The War in Dantewada*, December 2006. p. 26

¹¹ The RSS is the right-wing Hindu-nationalist social organization behind the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which is the political party.

¹² Independent Citizen's Initiative, *War in the Heart of India*, 2006; p. 10

thus deprive the Maoists of their support in these areas. Miklian (2009, p. 442), notes that since 2005, "thousands of combatants and civilians have been killed, and 40,000 villagers languished in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps during the 3 years when the conflict was at its most intense. ... Tens of thousands have fled to other parts of Chhattisgarh and neighbouring states." The Committee Against Violence on Women (CAVOW) write that they "heard many reports of rape and sexual violation of women by men in uniform in the course of the Salwa Judum's forced evacuation of such villages."¹³

Initially, from June 2005 till February 2006, the Maoist counteractions appear to have been limited to police and individuals who were actively involved in the Salwa Judum. However, from February 2006 onwards, since the Salwa Judum spread to Konta, Maoist rebel violence also became large scale and aimed at not just the leaders but the rank and file of the Salwa Judum, many of whom are not in the camps by choice." (Independent Citizen's Initiative, p. 11). To counter the increasing influence of the Salwa Judum in their core base areas, the Maoists retaliated with a series of equally brutal attacks on some of the Salwa Judum camps, including the attacks on Errabore camp on July 17, 2006 in which at least 25 people including civilians were killed, and an even bigger attack on the Ranibodli camp on March 16, 2007 where at least 55 policemen and SPOs were burnt to death.¹⁴ This broke the momentum of the Salwa Judum campaign, and hampered the political support for it.

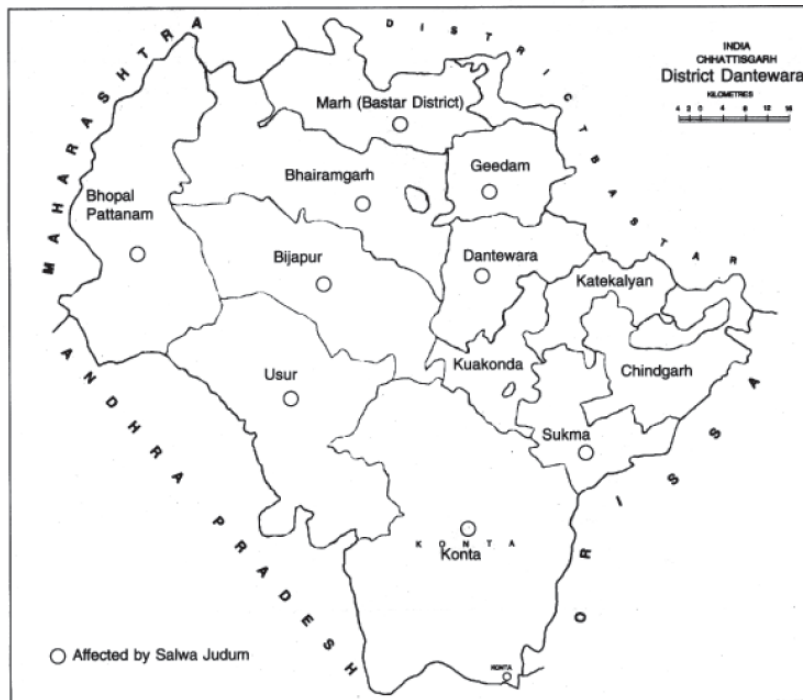
5.4 Salwa Judum and Coercive governance (*intensive but exclusive*): Most media reports and human rights reports tend to portray the Salwa Judum in a negative light, and suggest that they were part of the government's counter-insurgency strategy to divide tribal society along class lines, and to evacuate tribal civilians to allow Tata, Essar and other companies to exploit natural resources from the region. There was massive displacement of villagers, and burning of villages and looting, which had long term negative consequences for tribal society in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh (Miklian 2009, Sundar 2006).

However, unlike most ethnic militias which tend to provide security governance, the right-wing Salwa Judum militias also provided more intensive political and economic governance by trying to intervene in the local economic and political markets (Stewart 2021). However, such *intensive* governance was also *exclusive* in nature and provided selectively to the richer landed elites and state supporters. This was a form of *coercive governance* (Reno 2015), which relied mostly on use of violence that led to "negative" security and economic governance for the majority of indigenous civilians who were perceived to be Maoist supporters, accompanied by minimalist provision of services and public goods.

¹³ Committee Against Violence on Women (CAVOW), *Salwa Judum and Violence on Women in Dantewara, Chhattisgarh*, December 2006; p. 18-19.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Being Neutral is Our Biggest Crime*, July 2008, p. 109-10.

Figure 4: Locations of Salwa Judum camps



Source: Human Rights Forum. 2006. Death Displacement and Deprivation; The War in Dantewada.

➤ **Security Governance through provision of order:**

The Chhattisgarh government started raising an auxiliary force of Special Police Officers (SPOs) from surrendered sangham members and Salwa Judum activists in the camps, with the goal of using them to assist in counter insurgency operations (Human Rights Watch, 2008, p. 19). The Human Rights Forum report (2006, p. 350) mentions that these SPOs “accompany the paramilitary in their raids on villages, and the paramilitary relies on them for identifying sympathisers who are then picked up, tortured or killed.” The SPOs thus augment the information gathering capacity of the state police and paramilitary and help neutralize the information advantage of the Maoist rebels. The SPOs and other Salwa Judum activists were also useful to provide manpower to augment the counter insurgency capacity of the security forces, and help them reestablish security and order for tribal civilians who were not Maoist supporters. Miklian (2009, p. 442) notes that the Salwa Judum was armed by the state “in the hopes that it would fight the Naxals, make the mineral-rich area safer for industry, and allow for official deniability of violence against civilians and suspected Naxals in the name of reasserting control.” This is in line with the expectation of the literature on militias which notes that militias are useful for various reasons like plausible deniability, to increase counter insurgency capacity, and to gain local information (Jenztsch, Kalyvas & Schubiger 2015, Carey & Mitchell 2017).

The *Human Rights Forum* report mentions that the “abdication of administration to the Salwa Judum by the Government of Chhattisgarh is complete and the SPOs wield the police powers of that administration” (HRF, p. 35). This implies the Chhattisgarh administration had privatised the state’s responsibility for security governance to the Salwa Judum and SPOs. Another report by the PUCL/PUDR team also found that the “civil administration now operates on the whims of the Salwa Judum activists and the security forces”. The Salwa Judum activists have their checkpoints on roads and control access to these camps and areas, search people’s belongings and control the flow of transport. (PUDR, p. 28) They harass bus drivers and sometimes have looted shops in Bijapur, but the “police simply look on at the checkpoints...” (PUDR, p. 28) This shows a symbiotic relationship between the police & local administration in Chhattisgarh and the Salwa Judum and SPOs, and indicates *collusion* between State and Militias (Staniland 2015).

➤ **Political Governance through VDCs replacing the Maoist sangham as basic units of social & political organization at village level:**

The Indian government has a counter-insurgency policy of creating Village Defence Committees (VDCs) and Special Police Officers (SPOs) in different insurgency contexts like Jammu & Kashmir, North East India, which are funded through the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme of the Ministry of Home Affairs. In the case of Chhattisgarh, many Salwa Judum tribal civilians and their family members have been recruited as Special Police Officers (SPOs), who were provided arms and training. A government document from 2005 clearly identifies that the “real strength [of Maoists] lies in sangham membership who are from among the villagers.. ... To end the problem of Naxalites, it is not enough to kill Naxalites but more important to crush and destroy their system operating at the village level.” (p. 15-16).¹⁵

To achieve this, the government used the Salwa Judum militias to destroy the sanghams and replace them with VDCs, which helped reestablish the social and political control of landed elites and village chiefs among the Gond tribes. The VDC’s composition is similar to that of Salwa Judum and comprises “village head person, panch, sarpanch as well as young men” in opposition to the sanghams set up by the Maoists which had replaced these traditional authorities. (PUDR PUCL, p. 31). This type of activity by the Salwa Judum militias epitomized ideological class conflict between the landed elite and the poor peasants among the tribals, and the attempt by the leaders of the Salwa Judum to take back political control in the villages and fight the attempt by the Maoist rebels at land redistribution to the poorer tribals.

➤ **Economic Governance by freeing up land for Steel and Iron Ore Plants**

While the official state motivation was to use the Salwa Judum militias for counter-insurgency against the Maoist rebels, the ulterior motivation was to displace the area of tribal *adivasis*, which would free up the land for exploitation of the rich deposits of iron ore and bauxite in the Bailadilla hills in Bastar by setting up mining and steel companies. The reason for setting up the

¹⁵ District Collector’s Work Proposal for Salwa Judum, 2005, District South Bastar, Dantewada, Chhattisgarh

Salwa Judum camps is not only to provide security and protection to tribals from Maoists, but also to permanently displace them (Sundar 2006, PUDR 2006).

In an interview, the human rights activist Sudha Bhardwaj, mentioned that village clearing and forceful displacement into camps served the purpose of making land easily available for steel plants and mining projects by Essar, Tata and other private companies who were interested in the rich iron ore resources in the Dantewada area.¹⁶ Even the Director General of Police of Chhattisgarh, Vishwaranjan, in interviews admitted that the real reason for the Salwa Judum counter insurgency campaign was to control and access the rich iron ore and bauxite natural resources of the Bastar region.¹⁷ The Maoist journal *People's March* also mentions that “The Chhattisgarh government has signed MoUs worth Rs. 60,000 crores. In Bastar alone MoUs for investment of Rs. 17,000 crores have been signed this summer for the proposed Tata and Essar steel plant.”¹⁸ There were many instances of villagers protesting against land acquisition in Bhansi and Dhurli, since the permission of the Gram Sabha (Village Council) for acquisition of land for Essar Steel Plant was obtained “fraudulently and coercively” by the local administration (CAVOW Report, p. 8). So, the involvement of the government in supporting the Salwa Judum vigilante movement, needs to be seen within the overall trajectory of neo-liberal economic policies of the Indian state, and the desire to exploit natural resources in mineral rich areas and hilly areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa states.

By gaining control of this valuable land in the forested hills of Bastar, the government was able to intervene in the land market and exploit it for profitable exploitation of natural resources, which is a form of economic governance that benefit the landed elites and the rich industrial classes. Similar to the case of the Rondas Campesinas in Peru, and the AUC paramilitaries in Colombia, the Salwa Judum militias also helped to reverse the land redistribution by the Maoists, and reclaim land for the tribal landed elites.

➤ Service provision in the refugee camps

The Salwa Judum campaign led to widespread displacement of tribal civilians into camps like Errabore, Dornapal, Konta, and Injaram. According to the District Collector, there were 17 camps, with 15,000 people living in them in Bhairamgarh and Bijapur tehsils alone. The camps include five types of people: (1) sarpanches and traditional elites who support the government and are worried of Maoist attacks; (2) ordinary villagers who have been forced by the Salwa Judum to leave their villages; (3) those who fled their homes because of fear or retaliatory attacks from Maoists; (4) SPOs and families (5) surrendered sangham members and families (PUDR et al. 2006, p. 24).

The displacement of civilians obviously led to disruption of their livelihood and ability to do farming, and had severe negative consequences. It led to disruption in education and school

¹⁶ Interview with human rights leader and PUCL activist Sudha Bharadwaj, Bhilai, 2009.

¹⁷ Interview with Chhattisgarh Director General of Police, Vishwaranjan, 2009.

¹⁸ “Massive Mining contracts demands Ruthless attacks on Naxalites”, *People's March*, Vol, 6, No. 11, Nov-Dec, 2005, www.peoplemarch.com

attendance by children, with the Maoist rebels destroying several school buildings, since they were often occupied by security forces or used for Salwa Judum meetings (PUDR et al, p. 24). However, it also led to some minimal forms of service provision within these camps, since the government made attempts to provide alternate means of livelihood, which the Salwa Judum cadres supervised. Some people were allowed to trek to their villages during the day to keep working in their farms. Others in these camps worked in earth-works under the Food for Work programme of the Central government. Some people were getting Rs. 55-60 a day for PWD work and Rs. 60 for forest work, and some of the roads built through this effort was linked to police stations, so it would be helpful in counter insurgency. At Meertur, one of the largest camps, apparently food for the camp's population was provided for free by the government, though people living in other camps told the PUDR/ PUCL activists that the government had provided free rations only for a few months. (PUCL/ PUDR, p. 24) In a way, these camps were attempts to control and extract labor and services from tribal citizens.

There were also some minimal attempts at providing health services. The PUCL/ PUDR team writes: "Sanitation and health conditions in the camps are very poor. Though we did see two health workers in Bhairamgarh camp, reports of Medicin Sans Frontiers suggest that health conditions in the camps are at crisis levels." (PUDR, p. 25). The CAVOW fact finding team's report also mentions that in these camps "... There are weekly mobile clinics in the newer campus, namely Dornapal, Errabore, Injaram and Konta ... but given the distances and the logistics of transport, these clinics function at best sub-optimally." ¹⁹ These Human Rights Reports suggest poor provision of basic services like food and health care in these camps by the government or by Salwa Judum leaders.

Overall, there seems to have been some basic level of provision of health and rations, with the goal being not to serve the tribal civilians but to further the purpose of counter insurgency and control of land and natural resources. Following from Reno (2015), it would be helpful to see these in the context of coercive governance and control over citizens and land, to benefit the richer, landed elites of tribal society at the expense of the poorer tribals who were perceived as Maoist sympathizers.

6. Conclusion

There is an expanding literature on rebel and criminal governance, but few studies have developed a theoretical framework to explain how different militia groups provide services, governance and public goods to citizens. This paper brings in the importance of ideology which has been ignored by scholarship on militias, and develops a typology of how right-wing conservative militias fighting against leftist rebels provides *coercive governance* to civilians. The typology combines the two dimensions of *Militia-State operational linkages* and *Militia-Society ideological linkages* to predict patterns of violence and governance by right-wing militias, such as AUC paramilitaries in Colombia, and CAD militias in Peru. I also conduct a plausibility probe

¹⁹ Committee Against Violence on Women (CAVOW)—*Salwa Judum and Violence on Women in Dantewara, Chhattisgarh*, December 2006; p. 13-14.

though a detailed case study of the Salwa Judum militias in India. This case cannot be easily explained by existing typologies on militia violence like Carey & Mitchell (2017) and could be considered a *deviant case*. However, process tracing and analysis of the Salwa Judum case reveals that by incorporating the role of militia ideology which was ignored by previous studies, it is possible to explain patterns of violence and governance by such right-wing militias.

This study offers several distinct contributions. First, it integrates the often-neglected variables of ideology and class conflict into the study of militia governance, thus contributing to the literature on Non-State Armed Governance (NSAG). Second, it introduces an original typology mapping how militia-state linkages and militia's ideological alignment with local society shapes patterns of violence and governance. Third, the theoretical insights derived from the Salwa Judum extend beyond South Asia, offering a comparative framework applicable to similar right-wing militias fighting against leftist rebellions in Peru, Colombia, Guatemala, Nepal, and the Philippines. Fourth, it also contributes to the literature on political violence in South Asia, which has studied ethnic riots (Brass 1997, Wilkinson 2004), insurgency (Staniland 2021, Mukherjee 2021), and Hindutva vigilantism (Jaffrelot 2019, Jaffrey 2021), but has not studied militias and governance. Fifth, it contributes to the literature of comparative politics more broadly, by challenging the idea that states are the only actors that have legitimate right to use violence and provide order (Tilly 1978), and showing that Non State Armed Actors like militias, often provide governance and services to civilians.

Future studies could apply insights gained from the Salwa Judum case to find other similar cases of right-wing militias fighting against leftist insurgency, and test the theory and typology developed in this paper. This follows scholars who suggest that the "causal processes within the deviant case will illustrate some causal factor that is applicable to other (deviant) cases." (Gerring 2007a, p. 106). One possibility would be to explore the Carey & Mitchell (2013, 2015) dataset of militias to find all cases of right-wing, conservative militias like the AUC in Colombia, Ranvir Sena in India, Rondas Campesinas in Peru, CAFGU in Philippines, ORDEN in El Salvador and Civil Defense Patrols in Guatemala, and do statistical analysis to see if these are different from ethnic militias. A qualitative approach would be to take some cases of right-wing militias and check if these cases fit within the cells of the typology presented in this article.

It is also possible to generalize the project and extend the theoretical typology to think of different types of right-wing militias, like religious, class, caste, anti-immigrant militias. For example, it would be fruitful to extend the analysis to study religious right-wing militias like the Hindu nationalist mobs that carry out lynching of Muslim ethnic minorities in India on suspicion of selling cow meat (Jaffrelot 2019, Jaffrey 2021) and anti-immigrant Operation Dudula militias in South Africa (Landau & Misago 2022). Another direction for future research would be to compare governance strategies of Maoist rebel groups with that of right-wing militias like the Salwa Judum and Ranvir Sena in India. This would be similar to Sanin (2008)'s comparison of the leftist FARC rebels and the right-wing AUC paramilitaries in Colombia, and contribute to the comparison of governance by different types of Non State Armed Governance.

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