1   Introduction

> Every Communist must grasp the truth, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party. Yet, having guns, we can create Party organizations, as witness the powerful Party organizations which the Eighth Route Army has created in northern China. We can also create cadres, create schools, create culture, create mass movements. Everything in Yenan has been created by having guns. All things grow out of the barrel of a gun.   Mao Tse-Tung (2011, loc. 135)

Why do some rebel groups knowingly undertake costly, burdensome governing projects that undermine their popularity and legitimacy, or even trigger civilian resistance that could imperil their own cadres, while other rebel groups do not? Since March 2012, Raqqa, a city perceived to be a peripheral backwater by the Assad regime (Khalaf 2015, 56), has succumbed to the control of three different rebel groups. The first rebel organization to take control of the city was the Free Syrian Army (FSA) – a heterogeneous and decentralized collection of fighters composed of a large number of defected soldiers (Lister 2016a, 4–6) – which enjoyed military, financial, and political support from several foreign backers, including the United States, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia (Lister 2016a, 8). The Islamic State came next, a radical, revolutionary jihadist rebel organization that spread from Iraq into Syria, attracted legions of foreign fighters from a vast array of countries, amassed great financial wealth, and became infamous for its brutality (Laub and Masters 2016).[2] The third rebel group was the Syrian Democratic Front (SDF). Although the SDF is a heterogeneous assemblage of militias from various ethnic backgrounds (Mellon 2019), the key powerholders within the organization are the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG, Yacoubian 2017, 5), a revolutionary leftist (if not socialist) rebel group

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[1] The Chinese Communist Party made Yenan its wartime capital and introduced a number of intensive governance projects there. See, e.g., Selden (1995).
[2] See also Revkin (2020).

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composed primarily of Syrian Kurds and also supported by the United States (Mellon 2019). All three organizations were strong and organized enough to control territory, all organizations controlled the same place (Raqqa) and population, and all organizations were well resourced. But the three organizations' approaches to governance in Raqqa varied or converged in surprising ways.

When Raqqa first slipped out of the control of the Syrian state, the FSA's approach to governance was minimal (Khalaf 2015, 57; Lister 2016a, 9) and the group had a "preoccupation" with "battles up the field" (Syria Untold 2018). Raqqa, however, was far from ungoverned and civilians spearheaded initiatives to shape the daily life of the city. Civil society boomed, and nearly thirty-five different organizations unconnected to the FSA formed within a few months to execute the administration of Raqqa (Khalaf 2015, 57). These groups focused on "[creating] awareness on [sic] and [promoting] elections, human rights, citizenship, democracy, women's political participation, etc.," and civil society members, through relatively more democratic processes, elected a local council to administrate the daily activities in the city (Khalaf 2015, 57). The governance of Raqqa in the early months of its fall from the Syrian regime could not be characterized as rebel-dominated, but rather decidedly civilian-led, and as a result, "seemingly more progressive, peaceful and secular with much better focused strategies and plans, than many civil society groups elsewhere in Syria" (Khalaf 2015, 57).

The heyday of civil society's governance of Raqqa, however, was short-lived, and months later the revolutionary jihadist[3] Islamic State rebel group wrested control of the city from the FSA. The Islamic State quickly began imposing a new order throughout Raqqa:

Within three months, water, electricity, and bread were readily available; schools and universities had been reopened; and the private sector began to function once again. A key component of ISIL's efforts in Raqqah to drive this rapid recovery was the establishment of civil institutions to manage public services for Raqqah. This included a consumer protection office and civil judiciary; an electricity office, responsible for monitoring consumption, setting prices, and repairing electricity infrastructure; a post office; an office charged with receiving complaints about services in the city, and institutions for managing health care provision, education, and job matching, among others. (Robinson et al. 2017, 107)

The Islamic State stripped the school curriculum of secular thought (Khalil 2014), convened Shariah courts, and created a police force to implement its oppressive rule (Khalaf 2015, 58–9). Elsewhere, the

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[3] See, e.g., Kalyvas (2018); Whiteside (2016) for a similar interpretation.

organization would even confiscate land from Christians, before renting it to Muslims (Callimachi and Rossback 2018). Although the Islamic State offered a far more comprehensive and wide-ranging portfolio of governance institutions than the FSA, and the group even made Raqqa the capital of its caliphate, many of its governance interventions were deeply unpopular, provoking local violent and nonviolent resistance (Khalaf 2015, 58) as well as widespread perceptions of illegitimacy (Khalaf 2015, 59).

In 2017, the SDF, dominated by the revolutionary leftist YPG, retook Raqqa. As opposed to adopting the FSA's popularly light-handed governance strategy, the SDF's approach in many ways more closely mirrored the Islamic State's. The SDF selected a Raqqa Civilian Council (RCC) and tasked the council with a governance mandate (Haid 2017) that included almost the same portfolio of institutions that the Islamic State did. According to articles published on the SDF's English-language website, the SDF's RCC has opened hospitals (Syrian Democratic Forces 2019a), created a new court system (Syrian Democratic Forces 2017a), controlled water (Syrian Democratic Forces 2019b) and electricity (Syrian Democratic Forces 2018a), introduced market regulations on food (Syrian Democratic Forces 2018b) and medical prices (Syrian Democratic Forces 2019c), created new political institutions (Syrian Democratic Forces 2017b), built and reopened schools (Syrian Democratic Forces 2020b), altered the role of women in political and social life (Syrian Democratic Forces 2018c), and regulated the use of agricultural land (Syrian Democratic Forces 2020a). While the nature and content of these institutions of course differed from the Islamic State – for instance, the Islamic State installed cabals of emirs from its ranks (Reuter 2015), while the SDF introduced communal councils (van Wilgenburg 2017) – both groups controlled, rebuilt, or created the same set of governance institutions.

Like the Islamic State's governance, not all of the SDF's changes were popular. The content of the education curriculum is just one example. In the same way that the Islamic State changed the curriculum of schools, so too did the SDF. Whereas the Islamic State purged Raqqa's curriculum of secular teaching (Khalil 2014), the SDF sought to create new, Kurdish-language classes in addition to the Arabic, English, and French courses already provided (Davison 2017). The idea of offering Kurdish-language instruction in schools, however, provoked local "resentment" and "[made] local officials bristle," and Raqqa officials noted that if such a policy were "imposed" then "there would be problems" (Davison 2017). In Raqqa and elsewhere, men balked at women's new-found leadership roles and relative equality (van Wilgenburg 2017).

The citizens of Raqqa even took to the streets in a mass demonstration against the SDF, including accusations of atrocities and forced recruitment of children (@3z0ooz [Abdalaziz Alhamza] 2018b). Activists from Raqqa have even directly compared the SDF to the Islamic State (@3z0ooz [Abdalaziz Alhamza] 2018a).

Not only did the FSA initiate and control the *least* governing projects, but the FSA's light-handed approach to governing was undoubtedly the *most* popular. Furthermore, the two most ideologically distinct groups, the Islamic State (jihadist) and the SDF (leftist), engaged in the most comprehensive restructuring of almost the same set of governing institutions.[4] Yet, rather than win over the civilian population by increased governing schemes, some of the initiatives the SDF and Islamic State introduced were deeply unpopular, provoked civilians' ire, and even ignited resistance (sometimes violent) against the rebel groups that introduced them. Despite civilian resistance to their governing projects, certainly undesired by rebel groups in the midst of a military conflict, both the SDF and the Islamic State nevertheless continued to pursue their governance interventions.

The Puzzle of Raqqa: Existing Research on Rebel Governance

What explains the FSA's divergence from the SDF and Islamic State, despite all three groups being relatively well resourced, operating in the same place, and doing so within less than a decade of each other? Why did the SDF's and the Islamic State's governance converge despite ideological differences? Why did the SDF and the Islamic State introduce and enforce governance programs that provoked resistance and sometimes even violence? The existing literature on rebel governance has difficulty answering these questions.

Arjona et al. (2015, 3) define rebel governance as "the set of actions insurgents engage in to regulate the social, political, and economic life of non-combatants during war." Most research on rebel governance locates its importance in the debate about how rebel groups win domestic conflicts. Governance requires initial upfront costs in the construction of institutions, but once rebels construct these institutions they are generally assumed to be quite popular and desirable. Because governance is popular and desirable, rebels generate legitimacy, and create or maintain support among civilians who benefit from rebels' governance

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[4] This accounting of the processes of governance and the formation of social orders is consistent with Baczko et al. (2018, 38).

activities (Migdal 1975/2015; Wickham-Crowley 1987; Grynkewich 2008; Mampilly 2011; Arjona 2016; Huang 2016b). The consequence of civilian perceptions of rebel legitimacy and support is civilian collaboration, with non-combatants providing information, resources, and recruits to rebels.[5] Indeed, rebels are assumed to endeavor to maximize their governance interventions because the more they govern, the more legitimacy and support they generate for the organization, in turn expanding resources available to rebel groups and deepening civilian–rebel collaboration (Arjona 2016, 9).[6]

Civilian *collaboration*,[7] the ultimate by-product of rebel governance efforts, is so greatly desired because civilian collaboration is argued to be the lynchpin for victory in civil war (Wickham-Crowley 1992, 8; Galula 2006, loc. 805–13; US Army 2006, 1 §1, 1 §8; Trinquier 2006/1964, 6). A version of the US *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* even clarifies that "[a]chieving victory still depends upon a group's ability to

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[5] For instance, Migdal (1975/2015, 241) argues that rebels use both selective and collective governance as recruitment tools. Mampilly (2011, 54) argues that "the ability to provide a modicum of stability can be a powerful lure to civilians seeking refuge. And the provision of other benefits, including but not limited to the establishment of schools and hospitals, can provide a powerful incentive for civilians to support insurgent rule, even if only passively. From the perspective of the insurgent organization, reaching out to the larger noncombatant population makes tactical sense." Wickham-Crowley (1987, 482) notes that rebels' social services generated a "perceived 'good-ness' combined with their perceived 'strength' generated legitimate authority" in the territories they control. Grynkewich (2008, 353) explains that "non-state social welfare organizations offer the population an alternative entity in which to place their loyalty. Third, a group that gains the loyalty of the populace commands a steady stream of resources with which it can wage battle against the regime." Weinstein (2006, 163) writes that "[c]ivilians are thought to be central players in insurgency: access to food, shelter, labor, and information depends on their compliance. For this reason, rebel groups often build governing structures that mobilize political support from noncombatants and enable the extraction of key resources." Huang (2016b, 74) explains that "rebel statebuilding is a form of control, and enables rebel groups to elicit voluntary or coerced collaboration from the people under their authority." See note 6 for how Arjona (2016, 9) conceives of the benefits of governance.

[6] Arjona (2016, 9) writes: "I assume that rebels aim to control territories as a means of pressuring the incumbent and increasing their strength. I also assume that a secondary goal is to maximize the byproducts of that control – such as obtaining material resources, attracting recruits, and expanding their networks – which help rebels build their organizational capacity. Given these two goals, I argue that rebels prefer order to disorder and, among the possible types of order, they prefer rebelocracy [more comprehensive governance] to aliocracy [less comprehensive governance]."

[7] Although many might assume governance creates positive sentiments among civilians such that collaborative behavior is a reflection of support for the organization, Kalyvas (2006, 91–104) presents an extensive review of how some researchers approach *collaboration* as attitudinal and dispositional and strongly cautions against the notion of assuming that observed collaborative behaviors are necessarily expressions of popular support for rebel organizations. Thus, collaboration achieved through rebel governance could also be reflective of rebel coercion.

mobilize support for its political interests" (US Army 2006, 1 §1). In other words, rebel governance is thought to be popular and generate civilian legitimacy and support, which in turn facilitates civilian collaboration with rebels, which is ultimately necessary for rebel victory.

Given a framework that typically assumes that rebel governance confers benefits despite initial upfront costs, existing works typically frame answers to puzzles related to variation in rebel governance as a product of group-level characteristics that hinder governance, or features of the operational environment that accelerate or impede governance efforts. Because governance is generally assumed to be beneficial, variation in rebel governance is therefore not a *choice* but a response to these sets of features.[8] For instance, in terms of group-level explanations for variation in governance, Weinstein (2006, 163) argues that rebels "often build governing structures that mobilize political support from noncombatants and enable the extraction of key resources," unless they have access to economic endowments such as lootable natural resources or narcotics that obviate the need for governance (Weinstein 2006, 103). Likewise, Huang (2016b; see Table 3.3) assesses the extent to which rebels are economically reliant on the civilian population: when rebels tax and rely on civilians, they are more likely to provide governance to facilitate consistent revenue streams. Similarly, Baczko et al. (2018, 38) note that key differences in rebel governance in Syria emerged because of organizational and experiential differences across rebel groups.

Rebels also encounter local-structural conditions that could inhibit governance. Limitations to or enhancers of governance arise in the form of operational realities such as prewar state penetration (Mampilly 2011, 210–1–1), competition (Mampilly 2011, 227), the presence of humanitarian organizations (Mampilly 2011, 225), and conflict intensity (Mampilly 2011, 223). By contrast, Arjona (2016, 9–11) argues that in the absence of armed competition and internal indiscipline, rebel groups will pursue governance to the greatest extent possible, unless they encounter local resistance caused by preexisting political institutions, which makes civilians better able to rebuff rebel incursions. Finally, Ahmad (2017, 4–9) argues that the success of Islamist rebels' protostates relies on the identity and support of preexisting business communities working at the local level.

Ultimately, because governance is beneficial to rebels, limitations to governing initiatives are a reaction to local, organizational, or wartime conditions that hinder or obviate the need for governance (Weinstein

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[8] See, e.g., Revkin (2020) for an exception.

2006; Mampilly 2011; Arjona 2016; Huang 2016b; Ahmad 2017; Baczko et al. 2018). This existing research, however, and the assumptions upon which this research is based, have difficulty explaining rebels' governing behavior in Raqqa over the course of the Syrian Civil War.

Contrary to existing assumptions, the FSA's light-handed and minimalist approach to governance enjoyed the highest levels of local support, while the Islamic State and SDF sowed the rancor (and occasionally violent resistance) of civilian populations. Furthermore, all three rebel groups controlled the same city (Raqqa) and the same population at about the same time, so explanations that suggest local-level characteristics (Mampilly 2011; Arjona 2016; Ahmad 2017) determine rebel governance cannot alone explain rebel governance in the city of Raqqa. As described above, three groups either enjoyed external patronage or access to natural resources, so explanations of rebel governance that focus on the origins of rebels resources and support (Weinstein 2006; Huang 2016b) cannot alone explain rebel governance in Raqqa. All three groups were sufficiently consolidated and organized such that they were not able to pursue their longer-term aims, and all three groups had experienced soldiers of some kind, so explanations about time horizons (Arjona 2016, 9–11), better organization, or soldiering experience (Baczko et al. 2018, 38) cannot explain governance. Because of the similarities in the circumstances of all three groups, and because of the strategic benefits associated with governing, current scholarship predicts that all three rebel groups should have undertaken governing projects in similar ways. Yet, the FSA, Islamic State, and SDF did not.

In the next section I present a different conceptualization of governance that problematizes the assumption about the generally uniform benefits of rebel governance decisions. Instead, I conceive of governance as a politicized process beset by trade-offs and costs beyond initial investments. This new framework helps explain dynamics of governance in Raqqa and highlights the importance of rebel leader decision-making with respect to governance behaviors.

An Alternative Approach

Although I approach governance in a broadly similar way to the works above, I relax the assumptions about the consistent military benefits of governance to rebel groups. Instead, researchers have increasingly found that rebel governance programs vary in their costs and benefits: some forms of governance yield recruits and resources, while others not only require initial investments, but also entail enforcement and political costs, the bill for which is not always paid in full with material and

personnel gleaned from civilians (Stewart 2020). Specifically, I conceive of rebel governance as the process of creating or controlling a constellation of interlocking institutions and programs beyond the provision of security, intended to regulate the social, political, or economic landscape during war. Such governance varies across two dimensions – "intensiveness" and "extensiveness" – which is consistent with at least the ways some rebel leaders themselves conceive of their governance decisions (Yakhontoff 1934, 138–9; Eritrean People's Liberation Front 1982).

Intensiveness of Governance

Intensiveness measures the potential political and coercive costs associated with the implementation of certain governance institutions (Yakhontoff 1934, 138–9). I take as given that rebel organizations will provide security, at a minimum. But beyond security, rebel governance institutions range from the provision of food or dispute resolution mechanisms, to full-scale land reform and elections. Many institutions are typically popular and well-received institutional forms that address basic human needs and provide some sense of order and normalcy to quotidian activities. Other institutions, however, unsettle preexisting ways of life and redistribute resources in ways that occasionally provoke anger and resentment, if not resistance, in turn imposing political if not also enforcement costs on rebel groups. By implementing these programs, rebels not only absorb initial investment burdens but they also face reputational and coercive costs associated with the execution of these programs. What's more is that all of these governance initiatives could be postponed until *after* the war concludes, but some rebel groups still undertake governance of this kind during war.

   For instance, in Sri Lanka (Terpstra and Frerks 2017), China (Seybolt 1971, 645–6), Eritrea (Connell 2001, 355; Pool 2001, 127), and Kurdish-controlled Syria today (Nordland 2018), rebel governance initiatives to liberate women were met with angry men, no organizational legitimation (or even a loss thereof), or the need for rebels to intensify their investments in institutions built for the liberation of women to actually achieve their desired results. Rebel governance efforts with collectivization and land reform faced skepticism from civilians, reduced foodstuffs, and even provoked a violent backlash that resulted in catastrophic levels of civilian and rebel loss of life (Opper 2018, 49–50; Pepper 1999, 307–8; Westad 2003, 129, 133–7; Houtart 1980, 103). In Syria (Davison 2017) and China (Seybolt 1971, 656–7), changes to educational curricula stoked civilian malcontent. Knowing that cadres would face skeptical, if not hostile, local elites who could thwart the rebel

Table 1.1 *Intensiveness of governance institutions*

Less intensive	Market/food regulations
	Judicial institutions
	Health care
	Public works
	Education
	Change gender roles
More intensive	Change political institutions
	Land reform and redistribution

organization, Amilcar Cabral, leader of the national liberation movement
the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde
(PAIGC), actually role-played with PAIGC political commissars' inter-
actions with skeptical local elites, before sending them into the field
(Chabal 1983, 64). In fact, some rebel leaders themselves have explicitly
viewed rebels' governance of civilians as potentially challenging for, if not
even rivaling, military efforts, as opposed to accelerating or bolstering
them (Kasfir 2005, 274; Truth and Reconciliation of Timor-Leste
(CAVR) 2006c, 2–3, 21–2).

Together, these anecdotes suggest that across time and space a certain
set of institutions are consistently more likely to provoke civilian back-
lash: the redistribution of land and wealth; the education and inclusion
of women in political, economic, and social life; altering religious, cul-
tural, or political institutions; and certain context-specific school cur-
ricular changes. Beyond simply being unpopular to civilians, the creation
of these institutions can impose political and reputational as well as
coercive costs on rebel groups. As a result, when rebel groups provide
one or more of these programs, they provide more intensive governance.
By contrast, when rebels avoid these programs, they provide less inten-
sive governance. Although some rebel groups provide less intensive
governance exclusively, rebels almost never solely undertake more inten-
sive programs. Thus, if rebels introduce more intensive programs, they
almost always introduce less intensive programs alongside of them
(Table 1.1).

Extensiveness of Governance

Beyond potential political costs, governance can entail resource and
organizational costs that may not be recouped over the long term. One
way in which governance can become consistently more or less costly is
the *extensiveness* of governance.

10   Introduction

Extensiveness refers to the idea of access and addresses who experiences rebels' governance (Yakhontoff 1934, 138–9), meaning not only the absolute numbers of civilians but also the ascriptive and dispositional categories of civilians. Not all civilians will be equally supportive of rebel organizations' ideology, goals, behaviors, and governance programs (Stewart 2018; Revkin 2019). Some civilians can actively support the insurgency by providing resources or information to rebels, but fall short of officially joining the movement themselves. Other civilians tacitly accept the rebel group, neither supporting the movement but doing little to aid the group beyond what they are compelled to do. A third category of civilians may be less likely to support the rebel group but fall short of actively mobilizing against an insurgency: a leftist group may be less likely to gain support from merchants, the upper and middle classes, or clergy, while rebel organizations that mobilize primarily along ethnic lines may be less likely to find support among non-co-ethnics (Larson and Lewis 2018; Stewart 2018).

Given this distribution of civilian dispositional categories, more extensive governance refers to rebels who regulate or build institutions for categories of persons who do not actively support the rebel movement, meaning that they either accept rebels' presence or may be unlikely to support the rebel movement. Less extensive governance therefore refers to rebels allowing only insurgents, active supporters of the rebel group, and/or the families thereof to access their governance. Rebels occasionally undertake a mix of both more and less extensive governance, offering some institutions broadly, while reserving other programs for rebels and supporters.

If rebels provide popular and well-received governance institutions, such governance could cast a wide net for potential recruits. Alternatively, the provision of more extensive, popular governance institutions could also create a free rider problem (Wood 2003, 193; Stewart 2018), meaning that civilians have no need to make costly commitments on behalf of the rebel group because they can receive the benefits of joining the movement (access to popular governance institutions) without any associated sacrifices. As a result, rebels allocate more resources to satisfy a broader population, but may not reap corresponding benefits of greater recruits and resources. In Yemen, for instance, Al-Qaeda operatives noted that the costs of governance in one town was millions of dollars (Callimachi 2015). Extensive governance could also become more costly as the war progresses: the Islamic State governed extensively, but as the war against the organization intensified it needed to raise taxes to continue governing in the way that it did (Revkin 2020).