

Recruiting Rebels: Introducing the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID)

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Abstract:

There is an extensive body of literature examining how rebel groups recruit civilians. Much of this scholarly work focuses on the role of material and ideological appeals in mobilizing recruits. However, despite expectations about the importance of recruitment processes, there is currently a lack of data on the persuasive recruitment practices of a large cross-section of groups, making it difficult to test a variety of implications stemming from theories about armed group recruitment. To remedy this, I developed original data—the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID)—which contains information on 232 militant groups for the period 1989 to 2011. RAID details not only the specific types of recruitment appeals groups make, but the degree to which they rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment. To demonstrate the value of the dataset, I employ RAID to test two hypotheses about rebel recruitment and wartime rape derived from existing literature.

Armed rebellion is a dangerous endeavor for participants. An extensive body of literature examines how armed non-state actors recruit civilians into their ranks, despite these risks. Much of this scholarship focuses on two predominant types of *persuasive* recruitment offerings: ideological appeals and material incentives. The latter constitutes the provision of selective incentives, such as salaries or access to battlefield loot, which can only be acquired through direct participation in the organization (e.g., Lichbach 1994; Collier and Hoeffler 1998, 2004; Weinstein 2005, 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, 2008). The former involves calls to address political, economic, and/or social grievances (e.g., Lichbach 1994; Weinstein 2005, 2007; Denny and Walter 2014).¹ These recruitment strategies have important implications for the behavior, longevity, and success of rebel movements (e.g., Weinstein 2005, 2007).

Despite the rich literature on rebel recruitment, there is a dearth of systematically collected, cross-group data on the persuasive recruitment appeals employed by armed movements. To address this issue, I built the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID), which contains information on the persuasive recruitment tactics of militant organizations.

In the next section, I outline existing literature on rebel recruitment to highlight the important role that recruitment processes play in scholarship on civil wars. I identify empirical gaps in the study of recruitment processes and highlight the need for new data. Next, I present RAID and provide an in-depth explanation of the variables in the dataset and the process by which they were constructed. I then discuss patterns in the data and provide an empirical application to display the utility of these new data. I conclude with a discussion of potential uses for RAID.

What We Know About Rebel Recruitment

Both the causes and consequences of rebel group recruitment practices receive significant attention. Scholars identify a variety of factors that help shape rebel recruitment tactics.

Weinstein (2005, 2007) posits that the initial resources available to groups affect their mobilization strategies. He argues that access to significant funds from natural resources or external aid incentivizes groups to employ material appeals for recruitment to quickly mobilize troops and avoid losing out to competing armed factions. However, Weinstein expects that groups without access to economic endowments for recruitment, instead rely on social endowments, or shared identity or ideological-based ties, to draw in recruits.

Related to initial endowments, other scholars argue that both grievances among civilian populations (Thaler 2022), and the ideologies and politics of militant organizations (Gates 2002; Lewis 2020; Parkinson 2021), shape their recruitment appeals. Indeed, armed groups often mobilize and pursue specific goals to satisfy the civilian constituencies they represent (Sullivan 2012; Acosta 2014, 2019; Abrahms 2018). Lack of economic opportunities, and the corresponding lowered opportunity costs of participating in rebellion, also affect recruitment (Oyefusi 2008; Nillesen and Verwimp 2010).

Characteristics of recruitment pools also shape mobilization strategies. Scholars examine how militants tailor recruitment appeals based on the socioeconomic status of individuals (Lichbach 1994; 1995); appeals made to female combatants (Thomas and Bond 2015; Henshaw 2016); appeals made to international audiences (Gates and Podder 2015); and comparisons of recruitment tactics between child and adult soldiers (Andvig and Gates 2010; Gates and Reich 2010; Gates 2011; Özerdem and Podder 2011). For instance, groups with both material and

ideological resources recruit child soldiers, and forced recruitment plays a vital role in bringing in children as well (Andvig and Gates 2010).

Social networks also influence rebel mobilization efforts (Parkinson 2013; Larson and Lewis 2018). A variety of other factors matter too. These include geographic constraints (Gates 2002), the need for community defense (Özerdem and Podder 2011), accessing the pleasure of agency (Wood 2001, 2003) and a variety of idiosyncratic factors, such as the desire for adventure (e.g., Arjona and Kalyvas 2011). However, much of the literature still focuses on the two most common persuasion-based recruitment strategies: the provision of material incentives and/or ideological appeals.

Choices in recruitment tactics are consequential as well. Ideological appeals draw in more committed and homogenous groups of individuals, while material incentives typically attract larger, more diverse, but less committed, and more profit-seeking, groups of individuals (Weinstein 2005, 2007). Ideologically motivated recruits are less likely to desert or defect (Oppenheim et al. 2015; Altier et al. 2017). This devotion might help increase the longevity and success of rebel movements that rely more heavily on ideological appeals for mobilization (Weinstein 2005, 2007).

Another conventional wisdom is that materially driven recruits are more abusive towards civilians because they care more about pursuing strategies that garner private rewards than benefit their group (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, Weinstein 2007). Ethnic-based mobilization strategies also intensify conflicts (Eck 2009). Recruitment drives can result in mass migration and displacement of those who do not want to be involved (Schaub and Auer 2022).

The Gaps

While previous work provides many important insights on rebel recruitment, notable gaps exist in the empirical evidence. Existing quantitative analysis of rebel recruitment relies mostly on data from one, or a small number of, groups or conflicts (e.g., Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, 2008; Oyefusi 2008; Oppenheim et al. 2015). Instead, studies on rebel mobilization typically employ national (e.g., Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004) or subnational (e.g., Dube and Vargas 2013) indicators, such as economic inequality or ethnic grievances, that are associated with different types of recruitment appeals. Systematically collected, cross-group data exists on the use of forced recruitment by militant movements (e.g., Cohen 2013). However, we lack data on the employment of ideological and material appeals for a large number of rebel organizations.

The dearth of data presents several problems. First, the absence of such data makes it difficult to both produce generalizable results and to test a variety of hypotheses related to the consequences of different types of recruitment tactics. Again, quantitative studies on the subject tend to examine a limited number of groups or conflicts, and often compare individual recruits within the same group or conflict (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Oyefusi 2008; Oppenheim et al. 2015). This makes it challenging to assess differences across groups, which is particularly problematic when investigating the relationship between recruitment tactics and organizational success. Furthermore, the quality and quantity of violence varies significantly across conflicts (e.g., Wood 2009). Thus, to examine the association between recruitment tactics and rebel violence—another commonly theorized relationship (e.g., Weinstein 2005, 2007)—we need data on the recruitment practices of groups that span many different conflicts.

A related issue is that case studies focus primarily on groups that rely either on almost exclusively ideological appeals or material incentives (e.g., Weinstein 2005, 2007). However, as will be shown with the data below, groups frequently employ various combinations of ideological and material appeals. Thus, it is important to gather information for many rebel organizations, as their recruitment tactics differ significantly.

Additionally, employing national or subnational indicators of grievances or presence of economic resources as proxies for recruitment practices risks conflating structural factors with mobilization strategies, as it ignores rebel movements' agency in formulating their own recruitment tactics (Eck 2009). Prior work largely assumes direct association between variation in these proxy variables and mobilization strategies. Indeed, scholars link a variety of factors, including economic downturn (e.g., Dal Bó and Dal Bó 2011; Dube and Vargas 2013) and ethnic discrimination (e.g., Denny and Walter 2014), to increased violence, positing that such conditions increase the number of aggrieved individuals willing to take up arms.

However, even when such conditions exist, it is not always clear what specific grievances or incentives motivate civilians. Take, for example, a country suffering from significant economic inequality. Resentment about current class structures and distributions of wealth could make left-wing, ideological appeals salient. However, material recruitment incentives could also be effective as poor individuals may join groups to escape poverty. Another possibility is that poor economic conditions lower the opportunity costs of fighting, making any type of persuasive recruitment tactic more effective. Recruitment could also be driven by a combination of some or all these factors. Thus, because rebel groups employ different recruitment strategies even under the same broader conditions, it is vital to have data specific to groups' recruitment practices.

Weinstein (2005, 2007) argues that the resources available to groups during their formation substantially shape how they recruit. While high quality data exists on the material resources (Stewart 2018; Walsh et al. 2018) and ideologies of armed groups (e.g., Wood and Thomas 2017; Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020), such data should not be conflated with recruitment tactics. While access to economic resources increases groups' reliance on material recruitment incentives (Weinstein 2005, 2007), their availability does not guarantee that groups utilize such wealth for recruitment. For instance, groups such as the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) in Senegal and Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), have access to significant economic resources, but many of their individual recruits do not have (equal) access to them, and both groups still rely predominantly on ideological appeals for recruitment (Humphreys and Mohamed 2005; Bahney et al. 2013).

Conversely, just because a rebel group has a clearly defined and publicly stated ideology, does not mean that it employs exclusively ideological appeals. For instance, the Islamist group Boko Haram in Nigeria offers financial loans and employment opportunities in exchange for participation (Campbell 2013; Inks et al. 2016; BBC 2017). Al-Shabab likewise offers payment to potential recruits (West 2016).

Finally, quantitative research typically classifies groups as left-wing, right-wing, anti-government, ethnonationalist, Islamist and/or generally religious (e.g., Polo and Gleditsch 2016; Wood and Thomas 2017). However, groups that fall within these broad ideological categorizations still sometimes make other types of ideological recruitment appeals. For example, while Boko Haram and Al-Shabab both have broader Islamist ideologies, and make related recruitment appeals, the former also mobilizes individuals around appeals related to violent government repression (Campbell 2013), while the latter mobilized around fighting

Ethiopian military occupation (Wise 2011). Again, we should not conflate other country or group-level characteristics with rebel recruitment practices. Thus, I now turn to discussing new data I have gathered on the persuasive recruitment tactics of militant organizations.

The Variables

I gathered information on a variety of aspects of rebel groups' persuasive recruitment strategies, including the types of appeals organizations make, and the extent to which they rely on them. In this section, I discuss the sample of rebel movements considered, the process for collecting the data, and the variables gathered.

Sample

RAID contains a sample of 232 rebel groups, from across the world, that operated at least at some point between 1989 and 2011. Actors are taken from the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009, 2013), which is based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD).² Organizations enter RAID the first year of their conflicts that involve at least one battle-related death. Groups enter RAID in these years, rather than the first year of their conflicts that meet the 25 battle-related death threshold, because the quality of recruits brought in before fighting escalates still affects these movements. Groups exit RAID after the last year they appear in the UCDP-ACD (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Pettersson et al. 2021).³ The data are not left nor right-censored, meaning that a group can enter the dataset before 1989 or leave after 2011. It simply must have been active at some point during this time to be present in RAID.

The main version of the dataset contains a time-invariant cross-section of the 232 organizations.⁴ While some groups shifted their persuasive recruitment strategies over time, I was able to capture relatively little variation over time, *within* groups. Indeed, I was only able to code changes over time in the recruitment practices of nine organizations (approximately 3.88% of the sample). Thus, due to the lack of temporal variation, the primary version of the dataset is cross-sectional.⁵ For the small number of groups that I found changes over time for, I coded their recruitment tactics based on the strategy they employed for the greatest number of years over their existence. In all nine cases, this also corresponded to the initial recruitment appeals these groups made.

However, as an additional resource for researchers, I also created a time-series cross-sectional version of the dataset, which includes the changes over time in recruitment practices, where detected.⁶ Specifically, the variable that I captured temporal variation for is a measure of the extent to which groups rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, which is introduced below.⁷ The other variables that are introduced do not vary temporally due to information availability. Scholars should use the version of RAID that best fits their theoretical argument and structure of their data.

The list of actors in the NSA dataset is a non-random sample of all rebel groups. Indeed, a significant number of armed groups that form cannot mobilize effectively enough to reach the level of fighting that meets that battle-death threshold for rebel organizations to enter the UCDP. Thus, there is a selection bias in many quantitative studies of rebel organizations, as they tend to work with the same samples of larger, more powerful groups (Lewis 2020). This is particularly a concern for work on recruitment, as the mobilization strategies militant groups employ from their outset affect their size and strength (Weinstein 2005, 2007; Eck 2010).

Thus, when researchers use RAID, it is important for them to keep the scope of their findings in mind, as the data cover only rebel groups that had at least somewhat successful mobilization strategies. However, these data can still generate important insights on the causes and consequences of rebel recruitment strategies. Relatedly, RAID is compatible with many other datasets that use the same or similar samples of rebel groups (e.g., Wood and Thomas 2017; Stewart 2018; Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020; Albert 2022; Acosta, Huang, and Silverman 2022; Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin 2022). RAID focuses exclusively on groups in the NSA dataset because of information availability and compatibility with other datasets.

Data Collection Procedure

I consulted a variety of sources to collect information for RAID. Using this information, research assistants and I wrote detailed, qualitative narratives on the recruitment strategies of each group. I then used these narratives to code the variables in RAID.

A detailed procedure was used to construct each narrative. Before writing the narrative, research assistants were trained and provided (1) a document detailing the information that needed to be gathered and reputable sources that could be consulted; (2) a document explaining how to conduct queries in Nexis-Uni to find news stories about the recruitment tactics of groups, including a search string to use to find this information; and (3) examples of narratives that I had already completed. To assess consistency across authors, I wrote a narrative for the first group they produced one for, to ensure that we found similar information. These narratives were different than the sample narratives provided to the research assistants. The information across these narratives was consistent. I now turn to detailing the process by which these narratives were constructed.

We began by consulting a variety of existing narratives about militant organizations, including those in the Big, Allied and Dangerous (BAAD) dataset (Asal and Rethemeyer 2015), the Mapping Militant Organizations profiles, case notes from the NSA dataset (Gleditsch, Cunningham, and Salehyan 2009, 2013), and the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia.

Second, we conducted searches in Google Scholar to find case studies of armed groups in academic journal articles and books. We also conducted standard Google searches, which generated a variety of news stories and reports from the Combating Terrorism Center, Congressional Research Service, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, RAND Corporation, the South Asia Terrorism Portal, various governments, and a variety of other sources. These searches often provided detailed case studies on the recruitment strategies of groups and/or surveys of former members about their participation. Finally, we conducted queries in Nexis-Uni to discover news stories that had not been readily available in Google searches.⁸

Using this information, we constructed qualitative narratives for each group. First, we detailed the specific types of ideological and material recruitment appeals groups employed. Next, we evaluated the relative frequency at which groups employed ideological and material incentives. Using this information, I built variables measuring the extent to which rebel movements rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for their recruitment tactics, as well as indicators of the specific types of ideological appeals groups employed. These variables are described in the next section.

Persuasive Appeals

Reliance on Ideological Appeals

Armed groups frequently employ multiple types of recruitment appeals, and individual recruits are often motivated by multiple factors (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). However, some groups still have more ideologically pure recruitment strategies than others (Weinstein 2007). Put another way, some groups rely more heavily on ideological appeals, relative to other types of persuasive recruitment tactics. Indeed, a rebel group could employ exclusively ideological appeals, only material incentives, or various combinations of the two.

To capture this dynamic, I built a five-point ordinal indicator measuring the extent to which groups rely on ideological appeals for recruitment, relative to material incentives. Higher levels of this variable correspond to greater reliance on ideological appeals, lower values capture greater reliance on material incentives, and middling values indicate a mixed approach. Put another way, higher values of this variable capture groups that employ a higher percentage of ideological appeals as part of their overall persuasive recruitment strategy. The variable measures whether a group relies exclusively on material, mostly on material (and some ideological), a relatively even reliance on the two (mixed approach), mostly ideological (and some material), or exclusively ideological appeals.

Based on the evidence that greater reliance on material incentives attracts uncommitted recruits (Weinstein 2005, 2007; Oppenheim et al. 2015; Hanson 2021), lower values of this indicator should capture groups with a higher percentage of uncommitted recruits. In contrast, higher values of this variable should correspond to a higher percentage of committed recruits.

It is important to establish how material and ideological appeals are defined in this context. Material incentives are club or private goods that are contingent on direct participation

in the organization. Examples of “selective incentives” include salaries, loot, and land (Lichbach 1994, 1995). I also include promises of personal protection for individuals as a type of material incentive. These are distinct from appeals to protect the interests or safety of specific religious and/or ethnic groups. However, only a handful of groups in RAID make appeals to personal protection, and almost all of them also offer other forms of material compensation as well.

Weinstein (2005, 2007) describes how social endowments (i.e., the resources used for ideological appeals) can mobilize recruits, strengthen bonds among recruits, and make the promises of future rewards more credible. These include shared identities (e.g., religious and/or ethnic identities) and common ideological causes. Based on this, I define ideological appeals as the promotion of one or more ideological-based issues to directly encourage individuals to join. Such appeals include fighting discrimination against specific ethnic groups, calls for the redistribution of land and other forms of wealth, promoting democratic governance, and a variety of other issues.

To code this variable, I relied on evidence in the qualitative narratives, which contain the assessment of expert opinion as well as reports on the behavior of these groups. Rebel organizations on the furthest ends of the ordinal scale were often the easiest to identify. There was evidence of these groups making ideological or material appeals, but either an absence of evidence of them making the other type of appeal, or direct evidence stating that they did not.

For instance, the Bundu dia Kongo in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) made a variety of ideological recruitment appeals, including mobilizing around ethnic grievances and religious rhetoric. However, there was an absence of evidence of the group employing material recruitment incentives. On the other end of the ordinal scale, also in the DRC, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda recruited with the promise of employment in

mines, while the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo frequently offered money and food to children in exchange for participation. There was no evidence of either of these groups explicitly mobilizing recruits around ideological issues.

Many groups employed various combinations of material and ideological appeals. However, a subset of these organizations still clearly relied more heavily on one of these broad categories of appeals than the other. For instance, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) primarily mobilizes individuals around the perception that Islam is under threat, shared religious identity, and local political grievances. However, experts still found that salaries are used to directly attract *some* members to AQIM, as the group offers higher wages than many employers in the region. Thus, a group such as AQIM is classified as relying mostly on ideological appeals when there is evidence that it employs both ideological and material incentives, but that it still relies on ideological appeals as its predominant recruitment tactic.

Mirroring the category directly above, groups are coded as relying mostly on material incentives when evidence indicates that they use both ideological and material appeals, but that they depend much more heavily on material incentives. For instance, survey evidence from former participants in the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia shows that a handful of individuals joined the group because of its political goals, while most were motivated by economic incentives.

Finally, some groups employ material and ideological recruitment tactics at approximately the same frequency, and do not rely on one type as their predominant recruitment strategy. Evidence from case studies and surveys indicates that most recruits who joined Boko Haram did so for revenge against government violence and because of offers of salaries and business loans.⁹

Below is the summary of the coding rules for this variable. The distribution of the variable for the cross-section of groups is shown in **Figure 1**.

- (0) Fully Material: There is only evidence of the group offering material incentives for recruitment. Evidence either explicitly indicates that the group did not mobilize around any ideological issue or there is an absence of information indicating that the group did such.
- (1) Mostly Material: There is evidence of the group employing both material incentives and ideological appeals for recruitment. However, there is evidence of the group relying more on material incentives than ideological appeals. The evidence suggests that the group more frequently employs material appeals and that most recruits are offered these incentives, rather than ideological appeals. Put another way, the evidence suggests that most recruits were directly offered material goods, or the promise of such goods, in exchange for participation, while calls to address grievances were used only for a small proportion of recruits. The use of ideological appeals by the group is rare or idiosyncratic.
- (2) Mixed: There is evidence of the group employing both material incentives and ideological appeals for recruitment. The evidence suggests that the group frequently uses both appeals and does not rely substantially on one more than the other. These types of appeals are often used together and recruits might be drawn-in by both. While it is not plausible to determine an exact 50-50 split, a group in this category is defined by using both types of appeals at the same relative frequency, rather than employing one far more frequently than the other.
- (3) Mostly Ideological: There is evidence of the group employing both material incentives and ideological appeals for recruitment. However, there is evidence of the group relying more on ideological appeals than material incentives. The evidence suggests that the group more frequently employs ideological appeals and that most recruits are mobilized around rhetoric addressing specific grievances. Put another way, the evidence suggests that most recruits were targeted with the idea of joining the group as a means of addressing grievances, while offers of material goods in exchange for participation were used only for a small proportion of recruits. The use of material incentives by the group is rare or idiosyncratic.
- (4) Fully Ideological: There is only evidence of the group mobilizing recruits around shared grievances. Evidence either explicitly indicates that the group did not offer material incentives in exchange for participation or there is an absence of information indicating that the group did such.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

Figure 1 shows that the majority of groups rely at least mostly ideological appeals. Employing exclusively material recruitment incentives is the least common strategy. This suggests that it might be difficult to challenge a government without articulating and mobilizing around at least some grievances.

It is also important to clarify why I did not measure the use of ideological and material appeals separately. First, from a theoretical standpoint, much of the focus in the literature has been between groups with more ideologically motivated recruits versus those with more materially driven individuals. Weinstein (2007) notes that some groups have more ideologically pure recruitment strategies than others and posits that this dynamic is consequential for rebel group behavior and longevity. Thus, many theoretical arguments focus on groups' reliance on ideological appeals *relative* to material incentives, suggesting the importance of a measurement that capture this dynamic.

Empirically, as revealed by **Figure 1**, these appeals are used in various combinations, sometimes as substitutes, and sometimes as compliments. The current measure captures these different dynamics. One advantage of the current coding scheme is that if scholars have a theoretical expectation that treats ideological and material appeals separately, the variable can be easily transformed to do such. Specifically, scholars could create binary indicators of whether groups make any ideological appeals or any material incentives. Thus, this variable can be used in a variety of ways.

Subjectivity

There is, of course, some subjectivity in this coding scheme. However, RAID offers solutions to try to mitigate this issue. First, the dataset includes a transformed, simplified, three-point ordinal measure of reliance on ideological appeals, where the three levels are: exclusively material incentives, any combination (collapsing the three mixed categories into one), and exclusively ideological appeals. While this simplified indicator loses some of the nuance of the five-point ordinal variable, it does cut down on the subjectivity in determining the difference between a group that recruits with a mostly material/ideological or mixed approach.

Second, RAID contains a variable measuring the certainty or confidence of the coding. While some of the rebel movements present in RAID have a high quality and quantity of information available about them, little information exists about others, and sometimes provides only ambiguous or indirect information. To remedy this, I have built a three-point ordinal measure of the degree of certainty in the coding of the five-point indicator of reliance on ideological appeals for each group.

I determined the certainty of coding for each group based on the ambiguity of existing evidence, how directly the evidence addressed the recruitment practices, and whether there were any major contradictions across sources. I intentionally did not include the number of sources used to code each group, because one, in-depth report can often provide higher quality information for a group than multiple, more disparate, and less in-depth sources. The coding criteria are laid out below.

(3) *High Certainty*: The evidence directly addresses specific groups and their recruitment tactics. The evidence is unambiguous and there are not major contradictions in existing source material. If groups use both material and ideological appeals, the extent to which they rely on one more than the other (if at all) is clear.

(2) *Moderate Certainty*: The evidence directly addresses specific groups, but the discussion of their recruitment tactics is more indirect. Such ambiguities include discussions of the motives of the recruits without mention of specific recruitment tactics, or anecdotal examples from one, or a small number of recruits, without broader discussion of the groups' recruitment tactics.

(1) *Low Certainty*: The groups' recruitment tactics are never explicitly mentioned or alluded to in any of the source material. Instead, the coding relies on evidence of general practices in the region in which the group operates. This goes beyond contradictions and ambiguities in the source material as the recruitment practices of these groups and/or the motives of their recruits are never explicitly discussed.

144 groups (~62% of the sample) received a high certainty, 75 were coded as having a moderate certainty (~32% of the sample), and 13 as having a low certainty (~6% of the sample). Thus, as robustness checks, researchers can use the simplified measure of groups' reliance on ideological appeals and/or drop groups from the analysis that receive a low certainty for their coding.

Types of Ideological Appeals

RAID also contains variables measuring the specific types of ideological recruitment appeals made by groups. These are dichotomous indicators of whether groups made these specific types of appeals. RAID does not have variables that disaggregate different types of material incentives, as I found very little variation in the types of material incentives offered (i.e., offers of salary are by far the most common).

Unlike the variable described in the prior section, the measures of ideological appeals were not constructed based on an existing coding scheme. Instead, the categories are based on

the types of ideological appeals made by groups in RAID. Based on information in the qualitative narratives, I was able to identify ten dominant types of ideological appeals.

- (1) ***Radical Islamist Appeals***: calls to mobilize individuals around radical, Islamist goals, including fighting for an Islamic state, purification of society, protection of Islam, etc. Appeals related to fighting discrimination against Muslims are also included in this category. Religious rhetoric used to frame other appeals is also included in this category (along with the additional, corresponding category). For instance, the Wahhabi movement of the Buinaksk district called on “Islamic patriots” to help wage jihad against Russian colonialism (this is group was also coded as making anti-colonial appeals).
- (2) ***Other Radical Religious Appeals***: calls to mobilize around radical, non-Islamist religious goals, such as fighting for a state governed by certain religious principles, fighting on behalf of God, messianic principles, etc. Christian, Animist, and Hindu radical groups are included in this category, as only a handful of groups would fit into more disaggregated categories on this dimension. Appeals to fighting discrimination against members of these groups are also included. Religious rhetoric used to frame other appeals is also included in this category (along with the additional, corresponding category). The Ninjas, who operated in the Republic of the Congo, mobilized recruits around messianic beliefs.
- (3) ***(Ethno)nationalist and/or Regional Appeals***: calls to fight discrimination against, or for rights of, specific ethnic or national groups, or against the discrimination faced by a particular region of the country. For instance, the MFDC in Senegal mobilized recruits around perceptions that the Casamance region faced political and economic discrimination.
- (4) ***Left-Wing Appeals***: calls to mobilize around communist, Marxist, Maoist, Leninist, or other left-wing appeals. The Janatha Vimukti Permamuna in Sri Lanka, for example, employed Marxist rhetoric to mobilize recruits.
- (5) ***Appeals Against Violent Government Repression***: calls to mobilize around fighting violent government repression or for taking revenge against governments for such violence. The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist also mobilized around fighting violent government repression.
- (6) ***Appeals to Protect Against External Exploitation of Resources***: calls to mobilize against national governments, foreign governments, or corporations who are perceived to be exploiting natural resources in a particular region, at the expense of local populations. Such calls often involve either expelling the external actor and/or redistributing the wealth gained from the resources. In Niger, the Coordination of the Armed Resistance

fought, in part, due to perceived misappropriation and exploitation of natural resource profits (especially from uranium), in the region.

- (7) ***Appeals Against Foreign Military Intervention, Imperialism, and/or Western Dominance***: calls to mobilize against foreign occupying military forces and/or other types of imperial and/or Western dominance and interference. The Reform and Jihad Front in Iraq mobilized recruits around fighting the occupation of the coalition forces.
- (8) ***Appeals to Women's Rights***: calls to fight for increased rights/equality for women. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam employed rhetoric about gender equality (even though it did not follow through on such appeals), which was one of the factors that helped the group recruit women.
- (9) ***General Anti-Government Appeals***: calls to mobilize around general dissatisfaction with the quality of governance, policies, and/or leadership of local and/or national governments. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's recruitment propaganda addressed general, local political grievances, including perceived failures of the Malian government.
- (10) ***Other Appeals***: a variety of idiosyncratic appeals that do not fall into any particular category. The cult of personality around leader George Habash, for example, served as an important recruitment tool for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

There is overlap with existing data on the ideology, rhetoric, and goals of militant movements (e.g., Thomas and Bond 2015; Wood and Thomas 2017; Acosta 2019; Asal, Avdan, and Shuaibi 2020; Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020) and some of the types of ideological appeals listed above (e.g., gender-based rhetoric, left-wing appeals, etc.). However, RAID provides several advantages in that (1) it provides unique categories, such as fighting violent government repression and external resource exploitation; (2) it provides a large number of categories; and (3) the data are specific to recruitment tactics. **Figure 2** displays the distribution of these variables. These categories are *not* mutually exclusive, and indeed, many groups in the data make two or more types of appeals. The 14 groups that are classified as relying exclusively

on material incentives are coded as missing for all 10 of these variables, as they do not make any ideological appeals.

[Insert Figure 2 Here]

As **Figure 2** shows, some types of recruitment appeals, such as mobilizing around ethnic, national, and/or regional appeals are more common than others. However, there is still substantial variation in the types of ideological appeals employed by groups. The inclusion of these variables in RAID enables researchers to compare differences within ideological recruitment strategies, not just between material and ideological-based tactics.

Application

I now turn to employing an empirical application with data in RAID to highlight its usefulness. I employ the aforementioned indicator of the degree to which groups rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment. Through testing two hypotheses derived from existing literature, I hope to demonstrate the usefulness of this indicator.

An extensive literature discusses the link between rebel recruitment tactics and wartime rape (e.g., Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Wood 2009; Cohen 2013, 2016). This includes work on how forced recruitment (Cohen 2013, 2016) and post-recruitment indoctrination (Hoover Green 2016; 2018) shape patterns of conflict-related sexual violence (henceforth CRSV). Using evidence from the civil war in Sierra Leone, Humphreys and Weinstein (2006) argue that armed factions that rely on material incentives for recruitment are more likely to perpetrate a variety of

abuses against civilians, including rape. Weinstein (2005, 2007) likewise argues that groups that rely more on material incentives, relative to ideological appeals, for recruitment, are more likely to engage in a variety of forms of civilian victimization.

However, Wood (2009) argues that focusing on recruitment obscures the role of socialization in driving violence by individual rebels. She notes that many groups, particularly left-wing organizations, continue indoctrinating members for years after they have been recruited. Indoctrination plays a vital role in aligning the preferences of the rank-and-file with rebel leadership, leading to more disciplined cadres and less CRSV (Hoover Green 2016).

Thus, the association between persuasive recruitment tactics (i.e., ideological appeals and material incentives) and rebel-perpetrated sexual violence is unclear. Most existing studies on this subject tend to rely on qualitative or quantitative evidence from a small number of militant groups or conflicts, making it difficult to produce generalizable results. To highlight the utility of RAID, and to try to provide more clarity to this issue, I analyze how recruitment practices affect patterns of sexual violence. Specifically, I focus on wartime rape, which has been examined in the context of forced recruitment, and which is distinct in important ways from other forms of CRSV (Cohen 2016). Using data from RAID, I test two interrelated hypotheses derived from existing literature.

Rebel Recruitment and Wartime Rape

Scholars expect that the recruitment tactics employed by groups affect their propensity towards perpetrating violence. Recruits that pursue private rewards over collective benefits are more likely to abuse civilians because they value the rewards garnered from such abuses over the benefits their groups receive from showing restraint towards civilians (Humphreys and

Weinstein 2006). Relatedly, ideologically driven recruits are better disciplined and care more about the reputations of their groups, and thus, are less likely to abuse civilians (Weinstein 2005, 2007). Opportunistic recruits are assumed to be ill-disciplined and uncommitted, viewing sexual violence as part of the “spoils of war” (Mueller 2000).

Indeed, Humphreys and Weinstein (2006) find that in the civil war in Sierra Leone, armed factions that relied on material incentives for recruitment were less likely to punish cadres for rape. Put another way, groups that mobilize around non-material issues should be less likely to engage in such abuses. Thus, if this logic is generalizable, we should expect that:

H1: Rebel groups that rely more on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, will be less likely to perpetrate rape.

Rebel recruitment tactics are likewise expected to affect the prevalence of multi-perpetrator or gang rape in civil wars. Cohen (2013, 2016) argues that gang rape is a tool used by armed actors to socialize combatants and strengthen group cohesion. She posits that because gang rape fosters a sense of prestige, power, and loyalty among the perpetrators, it is an effective means of forming bonds between forced recruits who typically lack prior connections to each other, are not invested in the goals of their groups, and are initially mistrustful of each other. Such behavior is socially costly for perpetrators, often severing their ties to local communities. However, perpetrators form strong bonds with each other, incentivizing them to stay together.

While Cohen focuses on forced recruitment and unit cohesion, variation within the types of *persuasive appeals* likely matters as well. Indeed, choices in persuasive recruitment tactics affect unit cohesion. Weinstein (2007) posits that militant groups will have greater internal

cohesion when they rely on ideological appeals, as members are connected through shared identities and/or goals.

Other evidence also suggests that ideologically driven rebel organizations are more cohesive. Radical religious organizations are very cohesive because they require costly sacrifices upfront which screen out opportunistic recruits (Berman 2003; Best and Bapat 2018). More generally, social and ideological connections within armed movements reduce desertion (McLauchlin 2015) and fragmentation (Fjelde and Nilsson 2018). Shared ideological ties promote strong horizontal and vertical bonds within rebel organizations in ways that material incentives cannot (Weinstein 2007; Eck 2010; Fjelde and Nilsson 2018). Economic endowments, in contrast, attract recruits who lack strong social connections with each other (Weinstein 2007). These recruits also undermine cohesion through competing for resources (Gutiérrez Sanín 2004).

Thus, groups with strong ideological motives do not need to employ gang rape to increase unit cohesion, so the costs of engaging in such behavior are not worth it (Sawyer, Bond, and Cunningham 2021). Thus, a second hypothesis derived from the literature is that:

H2: Rebel groups that rely more on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, will be less likely to perpetrate gang rape.

Research Design

To test these two hypotheses, I conduct statistical analysis on the patterns of rape perpetrated by all groups in RAID.

Dependent Variables and Estimation Strategies

To test both hypotheses, I use data from the Repertoires of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (RSVAC) data package (Dumaine et al. 2022), which contains information on the prevalence of eight different types of sexual violence perpetrated by rebel groups, governments, and pro-government militias active from 1989 – 2015. These forms of violence include rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and various other abuses. Key to the analysis, RSVAC also includes measures of whether there are multi-perpetrator reports of each of these types of abuses, allowing me to test the second hypothesis.

Similar to the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset (Cohen and Nordås 2014), which it builds off of, RSVAC includes ordinal measures of the prevalence of each type of abuse, ranging from no reports (0), isolated reports (1), numerous reports (2), or massive reports (3). RSVAC contains separate measures for the three different reports that the data were coded from: US State Department, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch.

Due to reporting biases that make it difficult to accurately measure the prevalence of wartime rape, I follow the precedent of previous studies (e.g., Davies and True 2017; Hoover Green 2018) and take the more conservative approach of employing binary indicators of whether a group was reported to have committed any rape and any multi-perpetrator rape during their lifespan across any of the three reports. This approach accounts for biases in reports on the prevalence of sexual violence.

Again, given its uniqueness from other forms of sexual violence and its prevalence in the literature (Cohen 2016), I focus specifically on rape by rebel groups. The shortened definition of rape provided by RSVAC is that it is an act in which the “Perpetrator invaded the body of a person by conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or with any object or any other part of the body” (Dumaine et al. 2022, p. 614). Acts of rape are coded as being by multiple perpetrators when there is clear evidence that two or more individuals were closely involved in the violence (Dumaine et al. 2022).

I construct two different dependent variables. For the first hypothesis, I employ a binary indicator of whether the group was reported to have perpetrated any rape at all. For the second hypothesis, I use a dichotomous measure of whether a group engaged in any multi-perpetrator rape. I employ logistic regression analysis to test both hypotheses because the dependent variables are binary. I cluster the standard errors by rebel group.

Explanatory and Control Variables

The main explanatory variable for both hypotheses is the five-point ordinal indicator of rebel groups’ reliance on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment.

I include a variety of control variables. First, I consider ethnic heterogeneity within rebel ranks, as group identity affects recruitment tactics (Weinstein 2005, 2007) and violence against civilians (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006). To capture this, I construct a binary indicator of whether a group has members from two or more ethnic groups. I consulted a variety of sources to construct this variable, most especially the ACD2EPR dataset, from the Ethnic Power Relations

(EPR) Dataset Family, which links all politically relevant ethnic groups in the EPR dataset to actors in the UCDP-ACD (Wucherpfennig et al. 2012). However, the variable I constructed takes a slightly broader approach, as I looked for evidence of membership from any ethnic group, not just those present for countries within the EPR dataset.

I also include a variety of other control variables. Using existing data (e.g., Cohen 2013, 2016), I include a binary indicator of whether a group employ forced recruitment tactics, as groups that rely more on material incentives often turn to forced recruitment (Weinstein 2007) and groups that use forced recruitment are more likely to perpetrate rape (Cohen 2013). Using data from Polo and Gleditsch (2016), I control for a group has a left-wing ideology, as such organizations are less likely to engage in wartime rape (Hoover Green 2016) and have the social capital to recruit with ideological appeals.

With data from the Rebel Contraband Dataset (RCD) (Walsh et al. 2018), I include binary measures of whether groups extort or smuggle natural resources. Smuggling natural resources is associated with lower levels of CRSV, while extortion is linked to higher levels of these abuses (Whitaker, Walsh, and Conrad 2019). Natural resources also affect the recruitment strategies of armed groups (Weinstein 2005, 2007). Relatedly, because rebel strength affects their recruitment tactics, and can shape their patterns of violence (e.g., Polo and Gleditsch 2016), I control for the ordinal measure of relative rebel strength from the Non-State Actor dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009). I also include the logged measure of the group's age, as sexual violence affects conflict termination (Chu and Braithwaite 2018) and recruitment tactics affect militant longevity (Weinstein 2007). Finally, I control for both the Polity5 dataset's 21-point measure of regime type (Marshall and Gurr 2020) as well as the logged per capita GDP (World Bank 2022) of countries in the first year a group enters the dataset.

Results

The results are displayed in **Table 1**. The standard errors are clustered by the rebel groups in each model. The tables begin with naïve, bivariate analyses, and gradually add controls to ensure that the results are not driven by missing observations.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

The results reveal interesting patterns. Reliance on ideological recruitment appeals has a negative association with general perpetration of rape in all three models, but the relationship only achieves statistical significance in the bivariate analysis. However, reliance on ideological appeals has a negative and statistically significant association with the probability of multi-perpetrator rape in all three models ($p. < 0.1$ in the model with all control variables).

These findings present preliminary evidence that ideologically driven recruits might be more likely to refrain from certain types of violence than others. Indeed, ideologically driven recruits might not be less inclined to abuse civilians overall. However, ideologically driven groups tend to be more cohesive (e.g., Weinstein 2005, 2007) and lower levels of cohesion incentivize multi-perpetrator rape (Cohen 2013, 2016). Thus, ideologically driven groups may only refrain from such public displays of brutality, which might be even more costly than individual acts of abuse, because they do not depend on them to foster cohesion among the rank-and-file.

To assess the robustness of these findings, I employ the two approaches discussed earlier for additional analyses. First, I employ the simplified, three-point ordinal measure of reliance on ideological appeals for both hypotheses. Second, using the certainty score available in RAID, I

drop observations that received the lowest level of certainty for coding. Across all models in which the lowest certainty score is dropped, and in all but one of the models in which the narrower ordinal measure of ideological recruitment is used, I continue to find consistent support for the second hypothesis that ideological recruitment reduces multi-perpetrator rape by rebel groups. However, I still do not find consistent evidence in support of the first hypothesis.¹⁰

Future Research

Data in RAID can be employed to examine a variety of causes and consequences of rebel group recruitment strategies. For instance, scholars could use data on natural resource exploitation from the Rebel Contraband Dataset (Walsh et al. 2018) and on the organizational origins of rebel movements from the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (FORGE) dataset (Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020) to examine how groups' social and economic endowments shape their recruitment tactics.

Data in RAID could be paired with existing data on rebel group fragmentation (e.g., Joo and Mukherjee 2021) and civil war reoccurrence (Kretz 2010), to examine how recruitment tactics affect the cohesion of armed groups and the probability that conflicts remain unresolved. RAID could also be employed to study how groups' persuasive recruitment tactics affect their treatment of civilians. While natural resource exploitation affects civilian targeting during civil wars (e.g., Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin 2018; Walsh et al. 2018), RAID could be used to study the effects of recruitment specifically.

Data on rebel governance (e.g., Stewart 2018; Albert 2022) could be coupled with RAID to explore the relationship between rebel governance and recruitment. Relatedly, scholars could study the relationship between international audiences and groups' recruitment tactics, to

determine if groups shape their recruitment strategies based on their desire to gain support from the international community. Finally, given that organizations recruit child soldiers for a variety of reasons, and with a variety of means (Andvig and Gates 2010), researchers could use these data to examine the relationship between general recruitment tactics and the mobilization of child soldiers. There are many other potential uses for RAID as well.

Conclusion

The conventional wisdom is that groups' recruitment practices are consequential for their treatment of civilians, longevity, and success. However, despite these strong expectations, we currently lack systematically collected, cross-group data on the persuasive recruitment tactics of rebel groups. This dearth of data makes it harder to systematically evaluate a variety of hypotheses stemming from theories of rebel recruitment processes.

To remedy this issue, I have introduced the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID), which contains information on the persuasive recruitment tactics of a large cross-section of armed organizations, including the degree to which they rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, and the specific types of ideological appeals they employ.

In addition to highlighting trends in these data, I employed them to test two common hypotheses in the study of rebel recruitment and wartime rape. While I did not find clear evidence that greater reliance on ideological appeals reduces the probability of rebels perpetrating any form of rape, I did find more consistent evidence that such appeals are associated with a lower probability of multi-perpetrator rape. This provides nuance to the notion that ideologically motivated recruits are consistently more restrained in their treatment of civilians but does support the idea that ideologically driven rebel groups are more cohesive

overall. RAID can serve as a tool to evaluate existing theories of rebel recruitment processes as well as to aid in the evaluation of new ones.

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Author's Note

All data and do-files required to replicate the analyses in this manuscript are available via: <https://www.michaelsoules.com/research>

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Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Distribution of Persuasive Appeals by Group

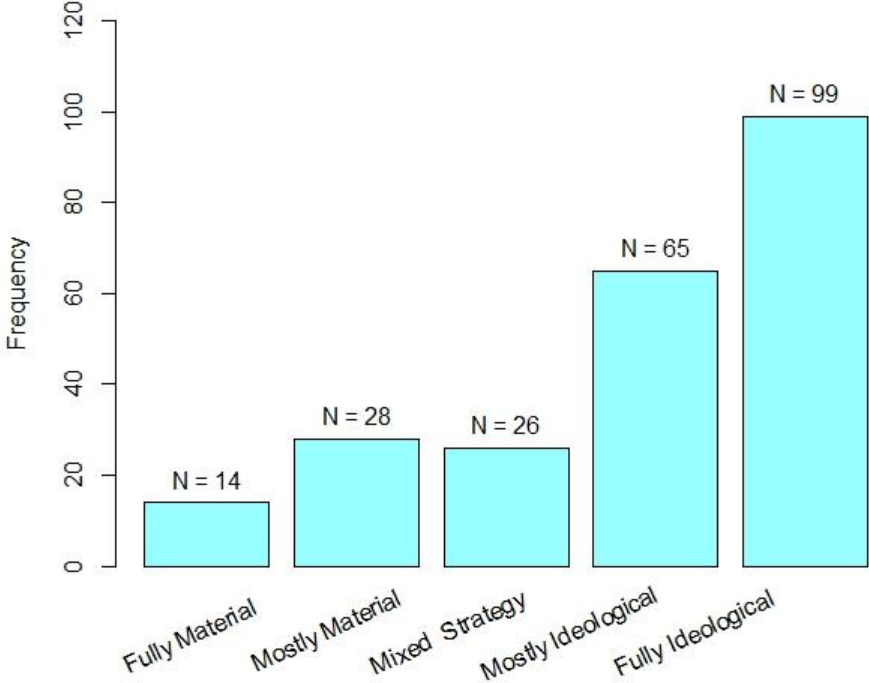


Figure 2: Types of Ideological Appeals by Group

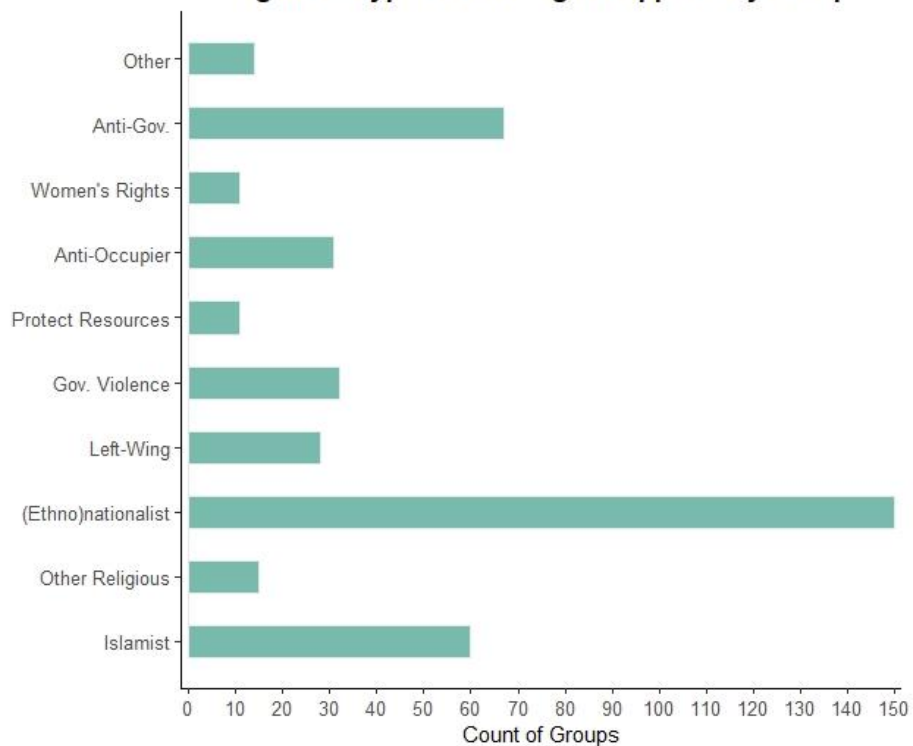


Table 1: Rebel Recruitment Tactics and Patters of Rape

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
		Any Rape			Multi-Perpetrator Rape	
Ideological Recruitment	-0.277* (0.109)	-0.106 (0.127)	-0.157 (0.144)	-0.560*** (0.139)	-0.327* (0.152)	-0.300+ (0.178)
Multi-Ethnic Rebels		0.456 (0.361)	0.671 (0.437)		0.598 (0.577)	1.530+ (0.896)
Forced Recruitment		0.685+ (0.358)	0.835* (0.405)		1.969** (0.695)	2.800** (1.044)
Left-Wing		-0.333 (0.601)	-0.742 (0.758)		-0.344 (1.115)	-0.465 (1.228)
Natural Resource Extortion		1.001* (0.422)	0.954+ (0.505)		1.047 (0.660)	1.679+ (0.994)
Natural Resource Smuggling		0.0524 (0.461)	-0.482 (0.573)		0.299 (0.636)	-0.530 (0.950)
Relative Rebel Strength		0.968*** (0.264)	1.162*** (0.342)		0.0556 (0.355)	0.634 (0.393)
Group Duration (Logged)		0.149 (0.163)	0.281 (0.202)		-0.532* (0.269)	-0.576 (0.443)
Polity2			0.0524 (0.0457)			0.0737 (0.0691)
per capita GDP (Logged)			-0.139 (0.185)			-0.0219 (0.239)
Constant	-0.168 (0.339)	-3.483*** (0.766)	-2.956+ (1.551)	-0.698+ (0.386)	-2.480** (0.854)	-4.853* (1.908)
Observations	232	218	172	232	218	172

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

¹ Social networks are also vital for the mobilization of rebels (e.g., Della Porta 1988; Larson and Lewis 2018). However, these often serve as a tool for connecting individuals to rebel groups, rather than as actual recruitment appeals.

² Coups and related military factions are excluded from RAID because I am interested in the recruitment tactics of rebel groups specifically. This follows the precedent of the Women in Armed Rebellion Dataset (WARD), which also excludes these actors (Wood and Thomas 2017).

³ Similar to WARD (Wood and Thomas 2017) and the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset (Cohen and Nordås 2014), RAID has a group rather than rebel-government dyad structure.

⁴ There were nine organizations that met the inclusion criteria for RAID, but for which I could not find sufficient information on, including Revolutionary Forces of April 1st and the PFNR. Additionally, I was unable to code two other groups—the LRA and the SSPP—because I found evidence of them relying almost exclusively on forced recruitment. However, other than these two organizations, every group with sufficient information could be placed on the ordinal scale.

⁵ Similarly, while the timing by which rebel groups recruit female combatants varies, WARD contains only cross-sectional data, due to the difficulties in fully capturing temporal variation in the characteristics of armed movements (Thomas and Wood 2017).

⁶ Intervening years in which the 25 battle-related death threshold is not reached are still included.

⁷ The groups that are coded as exhibiting temporal variation on this dimension are: UNITA, FLEC-FAC, FMLN, Sendero Luminoso, Mujahideen e Khalq, EPL, Khmer Rouge, Ahlul Sunnah Jamaa, and Abu Sayyaf. In almost every case, groups shift from relying more on ideological appeals to depending more on material incentives. The one exception is Abu Sayyaf, which switches between relying more on ideological or material appeals multiple times.

⁸ The search string and coding documents are available in the Online Appendix.

⁹ See the corresponding qualitative narratives for the recruitment practices of all groups in the sample, including the specific examples cited in this article.

¹⁰ See the Online Appendix for results.