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Alliances between civilians and combatants in civil wars

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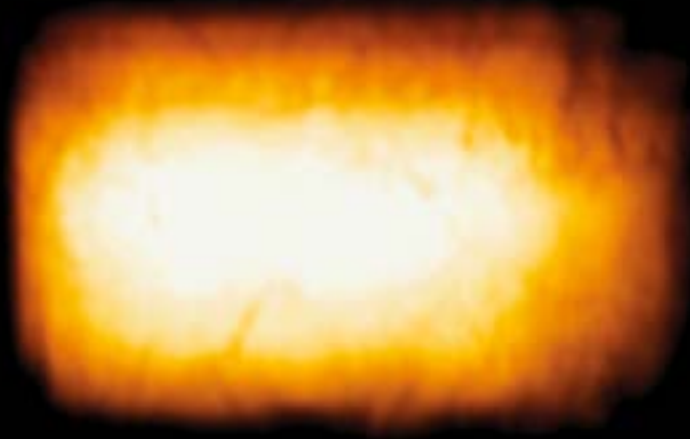
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Alliances between Civilians and Combatants in War Zones

This dissertation project describes, documents and explains alliances between civilians and combatants in irregular civil wars. I build upon the importance of civilian agency and propose alliance as the core concept to understand agreements between autonomous civilian communities and armed groups for the exchange of material and strategic benefits. I offer a descriptive typology of alliances that vary in two dimensions: the level of cooperation (low or high) and the duration (short or long). The combination of these two dimensions leads to three different types of alliances: engagement, opportunism and concession. This dissertation offers a theoretical framework to explain alliance variation. I argue that the type of territory –controlled or contested– and the civilian position –status quo or revisionist– shape the forms that alliances take, affecting how alliances’ characteristics –cooperation and duration– vary. To test this theory, I conducted extensive fieldwork in war zones of Colombia. I draw on original empirical material from three rural communities that lived in rebel and paramilitary territories to document the behaviours that constitute the different types of alliances; and the driving forces that explain alliance variation across time and space. Using three methods of data collection -- memory workshops, interviews and archival research -- I provide evidence for 1) when and where civilians and combatants establish alliances; 2) the different civilian positions in war zones that constitute them as status quo or revisionists; and 3) how civilians’ status, in combination with whether armed groups control or contest territories, lead to different types of alliances.