

Burma

(BurmaRN1.2)

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This is one of a set of “random narratives” to complement our statistical findings in regard to civil war onsets. This is a draft completed on July 7, 2006; comments welcome.

Burma has the most continuous set of post World War II civil wars in our dataset. Its long history of insurgency is revealed in Figure 1. Figure 1 also raises three general issues for our narrative:

* Burma had one of the highest probabilities for civil war at point of independence, and indeed there was a civil war. Most experts account for the post-independence civil wars through attention to rampant violence in the countryside, the organization of the opposition, the availability of arms, and the assassination of Aung, the only nationalist leader who had credibility in all camps. Our model coded for none of these factors, yet we got it “right”. But was it for the right reasons?

* After this initial period of a wave of civil war onsets, Burma’s probability of a new onset has in general been about the world average. [IS THIS ALSO THE RESULT OF THE NEGATIVE COEFFICIENT ON PRIOR WAR?] To be sure, Burma’s mountainous terrain makes it more vulnerable to onset. However, its lack of oil, its relatively low population, and its “stable” autocracy have kept probabilities low for new onsets after the initial period of independence. Yet in reality, there were periods of lulls and then re-onsets for the Communists, for the Mons, the Karens, the Chins, and others. Our narrative should therefore ask how these wars re-ignited with such low probabilities for new onsets.

* In the mid-1960s, during Burma’s only period of instability by our coding rules, the probability of onset increased. Is there anything from the narratives showing this as a signal, due to state weakness, to insurgents that they should re-invigorate their insurgencies? Or more generally, does our variable “instability” have the signaling effect we claim it has?

After we address some background issues in section I, we address each of these issues in sections II-IV.

I. Historical and Ethnographic Background

Burmans arrived in the Irrawaddy plains from the Tibetan plateau in the 9th-11th centuries. In the 11th century, the Burmans defeated the Mons, but it took centuries (until 1857) before the last Mon kingdom was conquered. The Burmese monarchy's imperial center was at Ava and Mandalay, and was regionally dominant. However, in the 19th century, to protect trade from India to the Far East, the British fought three wars with Burma (getting the coastal strips in 1824-26; the Irrawaddy delta in 1852; and deposing the king Thibaw in 1885). After the final campaign, King Thibaw was compelled to abdicate, and a system of direct rule through power to individual headmen for each village was instituted.

Ethnically, Burma is fractionalized to a moderate extent. The great majority (some 68 percent of the population) is Burman, living in the plains of the Irrawaddy delta. Sharing the lowlands are the Karens, with about eight percent of the population. In the northeast, on the border with Thailand, are the Shan peoples, as well as many other groups of mountain tribes. To the west there is the Arakan area, which is separated from Burma proper by a densely forested mountain range, and the people in the Arakan, known as the Rohingyas, speak a variety of Bengali. Arakanese contacts were with the Muslim west (as they abut the Chittagong Hills of today's Bangladesh), with trade contact (by sea, as the Arakan abuts the Bay of Bengal) with Moors, Bengalis and Persians from the 9th century. They maintained their independence until the late 18th century, when the Burmese invaded in 1784. While diverse in cultures, Burma is not excessively fractionalized ethnically. It is in the sixtieth percentile of the observations in our dataset (i.e. 40 percent of the observations are more fractionalized) on ethnic fractionalization.

II. After Independence, the Deluge

Independence from UK was achieved on January 4, 1948, and within six months the Union of Burma was wracked by several insurgencies. One was of the communists (denied a place in the new government), and four were "inspired by racial antagonisms": Muslim Arakanese, Karens, Kachins, and Mons. Later insurgencies began among the Shans and Chins (Selth 1986, 484).

A leading commentator in fact writes of a "kaleidoscope of insurgencies" (Smith 1991, 28). In his listing of insurgent groups, he reports on thirty organizations, claiming to represent twenty-two distinct ethnic groups: Burman, Mon, Rakhine, Chin, Marung, Rohingya Muslim, Chin, Jinghpaw, Maru, Kashi, Lisu, Sgaw, Pwo, Pao, Kayah, Kayan, Bre, Shan, Lahu, Naga, Palaung, and Wa. Alliances formed and re-formed in the fifty years Smith recorded. He presents a listing of thirteen of the most important United Fronts that go from 1949 through 1989. Two of the fronts were connected to the Communist Party of Burma (the CPB). Three of the fronts were non-communist but All-Burma in that they sought to maintain central authority in Rangoon. Seven of the fronts were "ethnic nationalist" and sought sovereignty in particular regions. In the tables reporting these results, Smith listed seventy-two parties or organizations (some of them listed in different fronts in different periods) participating in twelve fronts, so there was an average of six parties per front (Smith 1979, xiii, xiv). In the first two years of the

insurrections that began in 1948, 60,000 deaths were estimated to have been the direct result of insurrectionary wars, clearly classifying Burma as having a civil war onset.

Many factors conjoined to turn independent Burma into a blood bath – but the historiography of the period all point to factors that impinged on the commitment problem faced by the newly independent government of Burma. In this sense, modern Burmese history points to factors that facilitated the opportunities for civil war rather than grievances that might have fueled it or cultural differences that might have inflamed inter-group tensions. To lay out this commitment logic, we start with the foundation of imperial governing structures, and this leads naturally to the alliances formed in the face of the Japanese offensive in World War II. After Japan's defeat, however, the UK was only a shadow of its former colonial self in re-establishing order, especially in light of the massive supply of weapons and impressive supply of unemployed soldiers. A new government of whatever stripe, under these conditions, could not credibly commit to any armed group that their long-term security would lay in support of the new government. The lack of a legitimate figure (a King representing all potential combatants, or a national leader with broad credibility) to mollify potential insurgents exacerbated the commitment problem and left the fledgling government in tatters.

An oft-cited counter to the commitment problem focuses on ethnic diversity. Analysts could point to Burma's leading ethnic group, the Burmese, who make up sixty-eight percent of the population and the second largest group, the Karens, who constitute about eight percent of the population, and see this as a recipe for disaster. However, the historical record shows that every conceivable group rebelled in the wake of independence, so it would be difficult to sustain an argument pointing to the particular demographics of Burmese and Karens. It is also the case that groups that were virtually assimilated into the Burmese culture (the Mons and the Karens) as well as those that were religiously (the Rohingya) and linguistically (the Shans) different were equally quick to engage in insurgency combat. And the Communists, made up of Burmese and minority peoples, were the first to take up arms against the state.

One ethnically based account is more credible, and that focuses not on cultural difference but on internal migration and assimilation, turning regionally concentrated groups into "sons of the soil". Given the migrations under the *pax Britannica* the indigenous Mons and Karens were swamped. An 1856 census for Henzada district in the Irrawaddy delta, for example, had calculated that nearly half the population was ethnic Mon. In comparison, in the 1911 census, out of a total population of 532,357, only 1,224 described themselves as Mon. It was the lowland peoples, whose contacts with Burmese led to rapid assimilation, that were most threatened culturally by Burmese domination. But again, since it was not only the Mons and Karens, but a kaleidoscope of ethnicities and communists that challenged militarily the new state, even a modified sons of the soil argument would be radically incomplete.

There is therefore no ethnic story to tell, showing why a particular demography or a particular cultural trait induced a group to sacrifice its young men in a war against the

newly independent Burmese state. We are thus invited to develop an argument that focuses on opportunities, not culture.

1. Colonial Structures

After 1885 Britain ruled the Burmans directly, but in the hill areas, indirectly through chiefs and tribal councils. These “scheduled areas” were not under jurisdiction of the Legislative Council that was created by the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. The Shan areas, for example, became British protectorates, with the British recognizing the authority of the Shan *saohpas*, like Indian princely rulers (Lintner 1994, 48). In 1922 the British created the Federated Shan States, with its own Council, one that long remained isolated from nationalist activity taking place in Rangoon. In the 1923 constitution, all the scheduled areas were put under the direct control of the Lt. Governor, and administered through a separate Frontier Service. This continued through 1935, when Burma was separated from India, and the Governor was given the assignment to protect the interests of the minorities. There was a British White Paper in May 1945 that formally articulated a “two Burma” solution, an idea that had long been assumed administratively during the high colonial period. And Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, the incumbent Governor at the time of the Japanese invasion, in his war memos from exile in Simla (India), envisioned two postwar Burmas – an Upper Burma made up of Karens, Indians, and Anglo-Burmans; and a British Burma, with a capital in Rangoon, of the peripheral peoples who would in due time declare their allegiance (Callahan 2003, 92). In this way, Selth (1986, 485-6) concludes, imperial institutions fostered national disunity.

Colonial processes helped foster disunity, and to set the state up for the postcolonial commitment problem. The Burmese nationalist movement was initially ethnic Burmese, and influenced by nationalist monks, Buddhist in character. But in the 1930s, the lay folk took control of the movement and were open to all ethnic groups. They were able to attract some Indians, Mons and Arakanese, but remained overwhelmingly Burman, with the minorities fearing (Selth 1986, 487) being “swamped by the inevitable Burman majority that would follow independence.” Yet the minorities were not without resources. “Of all the ethnic minorities,” Selth (1986, 488) continues, “it was the Karens... who welcomed the advent of the British, seeing in colonial rule the means of gaining protection from the majority race and of getting opportunities previously denied them.” As animists, Karens were quickly adopted by Christian missionaries who began promoting them to elite positions in the British administration. Karens were recruited to help overthrow the Burmese King in 1885, and were seen by the British, along with the Chins and Kachins, as a “martial race.” The Burma Parliament denounced the military recruitment only of hill peoples, but the Governor controlled defense and the Burman MPs had no authority to remedy this. At the outbreak of World War II, there were only four Burman officers (Burmans plus Mons and Shans), and seventy-five from the martial minorities.

2. World War II Alliances

With their ignominious defeat in colonial Burma, with the militias of the ethnic Burmans initially fought on the side of the Japanese, Britain (and then the US) relied on the minorities to regain the colony. In 1941 after the British retreat from Burma, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in London sent teams to Asia to forestall future Japanese advances through recruitment of guerillas among locals. By the time of the Japanese invasion, the SOE had recruited 2,000 Karens in the East. Many of these Karens were recruited to the Burma section of Force 136, Allied-led Special Forces that went behind Japanese lines in dangerous missions. Also recruited were Kachins and Lahu (related to the Shans) further north. There was especial US/UK reliance on Kachin “detachment 101”, a guerrilla force of about 11,000, that hunted down and murdered some 10,000 Japanese agents and soldiers. There were no ethnic Burmans recruited for these efforts. When the British retreated to the north, they abandoned these units, but instructed them to lay low until the British returned. The Japanese were brutal to suppress these levies, making the Kachins pay a heavy cost for their past alliance to the British cause (Lintner 1994, 8, 60; Selth 1986, 496).

The British set up a Civil Affairs Service (Burma) in Simla (on the Indian side of the border) as a shadow government. The Governor, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith received active help from the hill tribes, and argued to London that these allies should not be left to Burmese control after the war against their will. He wanted to encourage the hill peoples to continue volunteering to fight the Japanese and to threaten the Burmans from excessive nationalism. Thus the Karens (among others) had strong reason to believe, and this was encouraged by British authorities, that for their efforts against the Japanese, they would be rewarded with their own state.

But the loyal minorities were betrayed when the armies of the ethnic Burmans, disgusted with Japanese plans for a virtual enslavement of the southeast Asian nations, turned coat and supported the Allies. When the Burmese National Army turned against the Japanese, Lord Mountbatten, who was Supreme Commander of civil and military affairs in the Southeast Asian theatre, saw them as capable of governing Burma, and thus abandoned the hill people, as they had no source of independent political power. Many British civil servants therefore thought the Karens were betrayed. The delegation that Aung San took to London in 1947 to discuss independence, in an ultimate tactic of betrayal, did not bring any representatives of the hill people (Selth 1986, 499-505).

In the period after re-colonization but before independence, the British military inspector tried to promote Karen officers in the regular army as fast as possible, hoping to give them a stake in a future independent Burma. This was a rather successful attempt to undermine British government policy through bureaucratic action from below. At the moment of independence, as a result of this policy, Karens were chief of staff of the army, chief of the air force, chief of operations, and quartermaster general, who controlled three-quarters of the military budget (Callahan 2003, 105-06, 119).

3. The Second British Withdrawal from Burma

The frail colonial state (with a dual structure for lowlanders and frontier) collapsed quickly in the early months of 1942, and in the period of Japanese rule, Burma became “a series of little republics.” Upon British return, “the most basic tools of colonial rule were lacking.” Salaries for officials were so low that rice couldn’t be adequately purchased. In August 1946 the police went on a nationwide general strike. Under conditions of anarchy, Dorman-Smith was fired and replaced with Hubert Rance. Under conditions of British fear that they could not contain an uprising by Aung San’s army, British Prime Minister Clement Atlee agreed to a peaceful transfer of power with Aung (Callahan 2003, 16-17).

But Atlee could not manage a peaceful transition. In February 1947 at a conference at Panglong, the British accepted Aung San’s claim that he could cut a deal with the hill peoples in a future Union. In that conference, twenty-three representatives from the Shan states, the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills agreed to cooperate with the interim Burmese government (in a statement that accepted in principle full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas). However, despite the visionary tone, there were no representatives of the Karen and the Karenni; nor were there Arakanese or Mon delegates, or elected representatives of smaller minority peoples of the Frontier Areas. Meanwhile, the Karens of the KCO (Karen Central Organization) made up of “liberated” Karens in Rangoon, pressed the Atlee government for recognition as a political entity (with indications that they needed British protection against the increasingly centralizing Burmese), but they received no replies “from a Labour administration...preoccupied with the ... the rather more turbulent events in several other of Britain’s overseas colonies” (Smith 1991, 72, 78-79).

To be sure, the 1947 Constitution gave some support to autonomy for the Karennis and Shans with a right (after ten years) to secede. The Kachins gave up their demand for independence in return for inclusion of two historic towns into their region. The Karen situation was to be resolved at a later date. But to assure security, in an annex to the treaty promulgating the new constitution, the British were permitted to remain in Burma for several years in some form of a military alliance (Smith 1991, 79, 103). But these were paper agreements with no colonial muscle. Smith aptly summarizes the strategic situation of the transition: “It was a sorry end to British rule in Burma, for ... the clock could not be put back by a Great Britain weakened by the war” (Smith 1991, 15).

4. Availability of Weapons and Militiamen

World War II was bloody in Burma. The war in Burma was unlike that in Italy and Normandy, where casualties were inflicted by long-range weapons – the brutal “hand to hand” combat in Burma led to more Victoria Crosses won there than in Italy or Normandy. The final battle for Burma, fought in Imphal and Kohima, from March to July 1944 on the border with Bengal, in Naga country, took tens of thousands of lives. It was fought in the interests of the Chinese nationalists, and the logistic support they needed for supplies through the Burma Road. Victory over the Chinese communists, rather than the lives of Burmese soldiers, was for U.S. General Joseph Stilwell the higher priority issue (Smith 1979, 23).

Compounding the difficulty of the transition to independence, when the war ended, Burma was left as a powder keg. There were an estimated 100,000 armed soldiers and guerrillas in Burma in Spring/Summer 1945 (Callahan 2003, 92). Most levies did not turn over weapons when ordered to do so by civil affairs personnel in mid-1945, and some 30-50,000 war-weapons were hidden during this period (Callahan 2003, 106-07). As the war wound down, Lord Montbatten and Aung San met in Kandy (Ceylon) to work out many details of a postwar army. Many soldiers in the Burmese army had been rejected for re-enlistment by the British inspector. Aung pointed out that these disgruntled soldiers who had no place to return were obvious recruits for anti-government militias, but this issue was not resolved, and at independence Aung's worst dreams were realized (Callahan 2003, 100).

The nationalist movement, to assure their cadres that Britain would not reverse the tide toward independence, created a private army, the People's Volunteer Organization (PVO). Aung San organized the PVO after he resigned from the army in October 1945, originally as a "welfare organization" to provide assistance to demobilized soldiers of his World War II militia; but it became an alternative militia of thousands of former Patriotic Burmese Forces (PBF) soldiers and also youths leaving other private militias, many of whom wanted to use PVO as an anti-colonial army. The PVO was therefore the first in a series of well-armed, nonstate and at times anti-state armies made up mainly of those kicked out of the newly forming army. Once the PVO's political program – independence – was achieved in 1948, the Union government tried to disarm PVO units, but it failed, and PVO members again were reincorporated into new paramilitary organizations" (Callahan 2003, pp. 109-11).

The early moments of independence were from this point of view inauspicious. In February 1948 CPB-led strikes by the All Burma Trade Union Congress (ABTUC) gripped Rangoon, in oil, in steel, timber, the docks and many small companies; meanwhile guerrilla action was getting under way in the countryside by the so-called Red Flag communists. Prime Minister U Nu ordered arrests, but the communist leadership went into hiding. They were joined by deserters from the government army and from Aung San's former private army, the PVO, that had about 100,000 mostly wartime veterans who had not yet been integrated into the government security forces. Even though they were scheduled to be demobilized at independence, the PVO district leaders refused to disband or hand in their weapons. And the government army had faced massive desertion. For example, in mid-June 1948 a battalion from the Sixth Burma Rifles went over to the communist side in Pegu district, and in August two other battalions followed suit, and these units were led by experienced army officers (Smith 1991, 106, 109).

Times were inauspicious in the provinces as well. In the Arakan insurrection, there was a "campaign for the non-payment of rent, loans and taxes. Feelings were running especially high amongst wartime veterans... From their wartime experience came the military and organizational skills that later led most to choose armed struggle as the main means of fighting for their political beliefs." There were attacks on police stations,

granaries, and warehouses. The returned British colonial authorities brought in Gurkhas, Punjabis and Burmese police to quell this revolt, but this only implicated Aung San with British repression (Smith 1991, 81-9). When independence came, militias and weapons were ubiquitous, facilitating insurgency.

5. The Commitment Problem

With the transfer of legitimate domination from the crippled British colonial apparatus to the government of Prime Minister U Nu, well-armed militias that were under the guidance of political elites who feared for their prosperity under the new regime, were in a strategically excellent position to challenge state power. U Nu could not make a credible offer to these insurgent leaders that they would share in the rewards of independence. There are two points to this argument: first to show that the U Nu government sent clear signals of weakness to potential insurgents; and second to show that groups that challenged the Burmese government had at least a speck of doubt for their security under a new regime, therefore leading them to pay the extraordinary up-front costs of insurgency.

U Nu inherited a shadow state. He had no army loyal to the newly independent government. His government faced an early rebellion by the communists. The then communist leader Thakin Than Tun called the Prime Minister a “fascist”, and threatened to murder him. U Nu ordered his arrest but Thakin Nu was defiant. He mooted the possibility of civil war, and gave no response to a government ultimatum. The Prime Minister then instructed his Home Minister to raid the CPB headquarters in Rangoon. CPB leaders then instructed their cadres to repair to the rural areas in order to organize for armed struggle. The Karens then announced a contemporaneous rebellion (Smith 1991, 103). In this anarchical moment, more than half of government troops mutinied, and about half of its equipment was stolen. As Callahan portrays that period, “the tatmadaw [state army] collapsed during the early months of political independence and could barely be distinguished from the dizzying array of other quasi-state and private armies...” By February 1949, Callahan continues, the “tatmadaw was decimated... Army field commanders slapped together patchworks of barely trained soldiers... to launch uncoordinated counterinsurgency campaigns.” Battalion commanders issued orders that soldiers had tax collection duties to get from local populations whatever they could in order to buy rice, guns, and information, and to recruit among the local populations. Under these conditions of peril for the central state, Prime Minister of India Nehru responded to his Burmese counterpart’s pleas, and gave U Nu weapons that allowed him in 1948 to secure his own capital city (Lintner, 1994, 17).

U Nu quickly (to assure early survival) supported a levy by his socialists to have special police reserves, and these rag-tag soldiers became the Sitwundan, that turned out to be another party army that found space to operate inside state institutions. Defense Minister Bo Let Ya resigned in opposition to this move, arguing that these were a bunch of criminals. By 1949, there were 13,000 Sitwundan troops, but about ten percent of them defected (Callahan 2003, 115, 127-8).

Virtually all factions in the country not included in U Nu's socialist party feared future marginalization by a strengthened Burmese state. In a meeting in 1946 in Panglong among the frontier peoples, there was a common plan for rebuilding the frontier areas, and they set up the Supreme Council of United Hill Peoples (SCOUHP) to "safeguard their interests against the Burmans." In response, a British commission of enquiry (Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry) investigated the situation. A Karen spokesman was asked, "Do you think if Burma severs her connection from the British you will suffer?" He answered "Certainly". The committee not unexpectedly recommended federalism. The security situation intensified as independence approached. The minority Kerenni militias "were collecting arms and ammunition to prepare of the 'defence' of their 'independent nation.'" The Karens were adamant of not being 'handed over' to "their traditional enemies, the Burmans, without adequate safeguards." And the Kachins, with their leader Naw Seng, now had a "dream of an independent country" (Lintner 1994, 35-6, 67-75). There was more than a seed of fear among those outside of the ruling junta that it would be too risky for their own future security to allow U Nu's government and the *tatmadaw* to strengthen themselves without immediate challenge.

6. Lack of a Legitimate Figure to Help Make a Commitment

The three Burmese wars suggest, as with Tilly, that wars should have made for a strong state, one that would be able to fend off such insurgencies as were experienced by the new state. The history of Burmese state building suggests why the new state was such a failure. The Frontier Areas to the north, covering 40 percent of the total land area of colonial Burma, were loosely independent mini-states and not part of the historic Burma Kingdom. Thus the land of the Burmese monarchy was considerably smaller than the state that inherited its name. This situation supports a conjecture that where a pre-colonial monarchy matches the boundaries of the post-independence state, civil war is less likely to occur at the moment of political independence, if the monarch is in some way constitutionally acknowledged.

And Burma lacked at the moment of independence a national leader who could successfully assure all potential insurgent groups that they would not be excessively harmed by the new national state, once it recovered. General Aung San, the Prime Minister-designate, was assassinated along with half his cabinet on July 19, 1947 on the eve of independence. Aung was a remarkable figure with a keen ability to bridge difference. Although Aung with his Burmese National Army fought along side the Japanese, he sought to ally with Britain at the end. Field Marshall of Burmcorp William Slim fought against Aung, yet in a late-in-the-war meeting with him there was mutual respect, and they agreed (having gotten Moutbatten's acceptance) to conjoin the Burmese irregulars with the British and Indian formations in the final battles against the Japanese. With the assassination of Aung San, several tenuous alliances collapsed. The confrontation between the Socialists and Communists escalated, "and the minorities lost perhaps the only Burman political leader they had ever trusted." This induced, in the views of many observers, the power struggles and resultant insurgencies at the moment of independence (South 2003, 9; Lintner 1994, xv; Smith 1979, 160).

A weak state, newly independent, and a plethora of well-armed militias that attached themselves to groups that had reasonable fears that they would suffer under rule by Socialists with a Burmese-centered state army represented for the leadership of that state a commitment problem. U Nu was insufficiently savvy politically (or legitimate through a history of national struggle) to make any such commitment credible, and each defensive move by his government added to the fears of those out of power about their own futures. In focusing on state weakness at the point of independence, our model gave Burma a relatively high probability of a civil war onset in 1947-1948 for the right reasons.

III. Civil War Persists Even Through Periods of Low Probability for Civil War Onset

The persistence of civil wars is a phenomenon that is somewhat distinct from onset. Yet still, given a half century of average probability for a new onset, and given the fact that many of the Burmese civil wars were dormant for several years and restarted, it seems natural to ask why these wars continued to erupt like the trick birthday candles that cannot be blown out completely, and whether our model has anything useful to say about the continued reemergence of onsets. The case of persistence in Burma is especially relevant for our theoretical concerns because after many years of military chaos, the *tatmadaw*, under the command of General Ne Win, became a major military organization. In government reports for the campaign of 1958-60 in the delta area there were 450 military engagements in which 331 Communist (CPB) and Karen (KNU) troops were killed. The total insurgent deaths were estimated at 1,800, and the total number of insurgents dropped from somewhere between 9,000 and 15,000 to 5,485. *Tatmadaw* losses, meanwhile, were only 520 (Smith 1991, 120, 182). And strategy got more sophisticated as well. By the mid 1950s, counter insurgency involved inter alia massive relocation of rural communities into camps. While, refugee camps were semi-autonomous and provided support to the insurgencies (South 2003, 15), the herding of potential insurgents into cities made them easier to control. Nonetheless insurgencies kept propping up in the face of an ever-strengthening state.

The answer seems to be, as our theoretical interpretation of the statistical data emphasizes, the conditions that favor insurgency: a self-perpetuating war economy that is financed through drugs; the existence of mountains for insurgents to hide from state armies; and the influence of foreign powers interested in funding insurgents. These factors made for viable continued insurgency as a way of life, in which there was an equilibrium for many of these years, with insurgents hiding in the mountains and the state not fully wiping them out. There was therefore persistence of these wars even with declining possibility of winning them for the insurgents, given the increased military power of the state.

1. Foreign Support

Both the US and the Thais had an interest in keeping insurgent movements alive in Burma. The defeated Chinese nationalists (the KMT), trained by US intelligence,

began operations from Burma against the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1951, and found supporting the ethnically based rebels to be useful, although some support also went to the Burmese government if they would direct their efforts against the CPB and its patron (the PRC) rather than their ethnic rebels. Under American tutelage, SEATO sponsored in Thailand a Hill Tribe Research Centre at Chiang Mai University that provided the CIA useful information about potential allies in anti-communist rebellions. The tribals from Burma were permitted to live on Thai soil, to buy arms and ammunition, and Thai advisors attached themselves to Mon and Karen units. From early on in the insurgencies until the Carter administration, American intelligence operations were active in support of the rebels. Meanwhile, up until 1995, with full support in the Thai military (who used the Mons as a pawn in their battle with communist Burma), the New Mon State Party (NMSP) along with the Kachins and fourteen other armed groups, were able to operate freely in the border territory between Thailand and Burma (Callahan 2003, p. 17; Lintner 1994, 180, 240-41; South 2003, p. 4).

2. Drugs

The principal funding for the rebel organizations in the 1960s, with the CIA operating in the hills recruiting anti-communist forces with the KMT, and organizing the Hmongs, was in opium. (The CIA regularly paid militias directly in opium). The Shan states were the center of this trade. The Burmese government could not control this trade, and many of its officials took a percentage from the merchants who bought the opium from farmers and paid tax to the rebels. Government troops then provided security for the drug convoys. This war crop transmogrified into a major revenue source for both rebels and the government, all implicated in its persistence. In 1948, in the Burmese sector of the Golden Triangle, annual opium yield was 30 tons. In 1992-93, the annual figure was 2,575 tons (Lintner 1994: pp. vii, 192-3).

3. Mountains

When in 1995 the *tatmadaw* was strong enough to protect the delta, the insurgent bands moved up to the mountains, where they were safe from government harassment and (at Three Pagodas Pass) able to sustain themselves through the drug trade. While some analysts point to the especial military prowess natural to mountain peoples, the Burma case shows no such thing. Take the Karens. They were for centuries a farming society working in the delta zone. By the early 1970s, their insurgent bands were driven to the eastern mountains, having lost the delta. These hills, according to Kintner "were ideal guerrilla country," and they became the new center of a Karen rebel state (Lintner 1994, 239).¹

The Burmese insurgencies broke out in the wake of independence, but they have persisted for a half-century, even though the state has gotten stronger and foreign support has (since the reforms in China in the mid 1990s) virtually disappeared. These insurgencies no longer have any importance for the stability of the government in

¹ . Reading Lintner's description of his trek to rebel country in 1981 (1994, ix-x), it is amazing that any state army was able to penetrate these insurgencies.

Rangoon; rather, they are a nuisance for the army. But they persist because the costs of wiping them out entirely are too high for the government; and the benefits of continuing, with a tax base in the mountains in opium that neither the Thai nor the Burmese state can legitimately regulate, are moderately high. On neither side, then, is there an interest in ending these insurgencies.

III. Implications of “Instability” in the 1960s

In March 1962 General Ne Win announced a military coup, suspending the 1947 constitution, and dissolving the parliament. It was bloodless, and many saw it as no different from the Caretaker period of 1958-60, when Ne Win merely oversaw the quasi-constitutional government. However, as former leaders and politicians began to get arrested, it dawned on many that this was something new. To demonstrate the new order, fifteen students were shot to death (that is the official figure; unofficial figures are much higher) in a protest several days later, and subsequently state security forces dynamited the Students’ Union building. The previously relatively free press was brought immediately put under strict state control. By our measures, this coup represented a new period of political instability.²

On the political front, Ne Win’s new Revolutionary Council suspended discussions of minority states, and insisted on a “unitary state”. Negotiations were only for surrender, and leading Mon opposition politicians were arrested. In the New System of Education, as part of the Burmese Way to Socialism, in 1964, there were no allowances for ethnic minority language instruction.

The *tatmadaw*’s strategy in 1950s and 1960s (especially against the Karens) in the rural areas was scorched earth campaigns, which basically pushed insurgent forces deeper into the mountains and forests. But in the wake of the 1962 instability, a new strategy, “Four Cuts” was developed. It was a counter insurgency program designed to cut off “food, funds, intelligence and recruits” – among insurgents, their families and villagers.³ In public relations, there would be no more negotiations, but treatment of insurgents as bandits and criminals. The countryside was reconstituted with strategic hamlets.

As we theorized, however, the period of instability yielded renewed insurgency. As Smith (1991, 198-9) reports, in banning above ground opposition, the new authoritarian government actually gave new life to the CPB insurgency, since many students (whose careers were threatened by their previous activism) were driven into the underground, most generally on the side of the communists. It drove the National Democratic United Front (NDUF) a coalition of Karen and Communist forces, back into the jungles. And the attempt to dictate a unitary state drove the ARMA (All Ramanya Mon Association), once a moderate organization, as well into the underground.

² . In 1961, Burma’s Polity2 score was “8”; in 1962 it plummeted to “-6”. By 1963 it was lowered to “-7”. In 1980 it bottomed at “-8”. It has remained in this zone through 1999, when our dataset ends.

³ . Canadian Friends of Burma “Burma’s Ethnic Minorities”, n.d., [<http://www.cfob.org/burmaissue/ethnicGroups/ethnicGroups.shtml>] downloaded July 7, 2006.

These examples suggest an asymmetry with our measure for instability. In cases where the state is democratizing, instability is most probably a signal of state weakness, inducing potential rebels to take greater risks in organizing an insurgency. In cases where the state is moving towards autocracy, instability does not signal state weakness, but rather a continuous road toward greater oppression. Dormant insurgencies in the post 1962 period did not see Ne Win's coup as evidence of opportunity; rather what they saw was a fear that if in 1962 the new dictator was willing to take away basic rights, he would continue down the road towards nastier dictatorship. Thus the mechanism in this case of instability towards autocracy was the fear of increasing reprisals rather than taking advantage of a short moment of state weakness.

V. Conclusion

Our model performed well in accounting for the onset of insurgency in Burma. Statistically, Burma's likelihood of civil war onset in the first years of independence was among the highest in the world, and indeed it experienced a cacophony of civil war onsets in 1948-49. Theoretically, we have explained this high probability due to the commitment problem that new governments face when there are minority populations that fear increasing domination after the state is better able to exert its domination over society. We have noted as well that "new state" implies a period of chaos, especially for those states that received independence from war weary empires in the 1940s and a collapsed empire of the early 1990s. Britain's failure to direct the transition or to commit to the transferred leadership was the key to the new government's failure to maintain security. As for exogenous factors to the political process, Burma's mountains (making it easier for insurgents to hide from state forces) and poverty (making it easier to recruit insurgents) raised the probability for onset in our model, again for the right reasons. In our narrative, we emphasized the resources available to insurgents at the period of independence (demobilized soldiers and weapons), which was broadly facilitating in Burma, and due to the way the World War was fought in Burma, more so than any other state in our dataset. Finally, with the assassination of Aung San and the lack of any traditional leader who had broad legitimacy throughout the country, there was no figure able to resolve the question of trust that lies at the heart of the commitment problem. The factors that make commitment to minorities for new states difficult were all present in post-independence Burma, and far more so than ethnic fractionalization or discrimination, help explain Burma's civil war onsets.

Once the wars were set in motion, despite the fact that the state army strengthened, the wars persisted, and broke out anew. We explain this again by looking at the conditions that favor insurgency: foreign support, exploitable resources for insurgents, and of course the jungles and mountains that continued to protect rebel bands.

Finally, we noted that a coup in 1962 brought Burma into a condition that we have called "instability", as the country became increasingly and rapidly autocratic. As our model predicts, in the wake of instability, there was a renewed effort at insurgency by previously dormant groups. But the historical record from this period suggests that here, unlike the cases of instability where the country moves toward democracy, the

mechanism driving renewed civil war was fear that the autocratic policies would only get worse if not nipped in the bud. Although desperate, the renewed insurgencies after the 1962 coup led by the ruthless leader General Ne Win were more a result of a felt need to challenge early rather than suffer even greater indignities later on. Both democratization and autocratization motivate insurgents – but they are conditioning their behavior on different factors.

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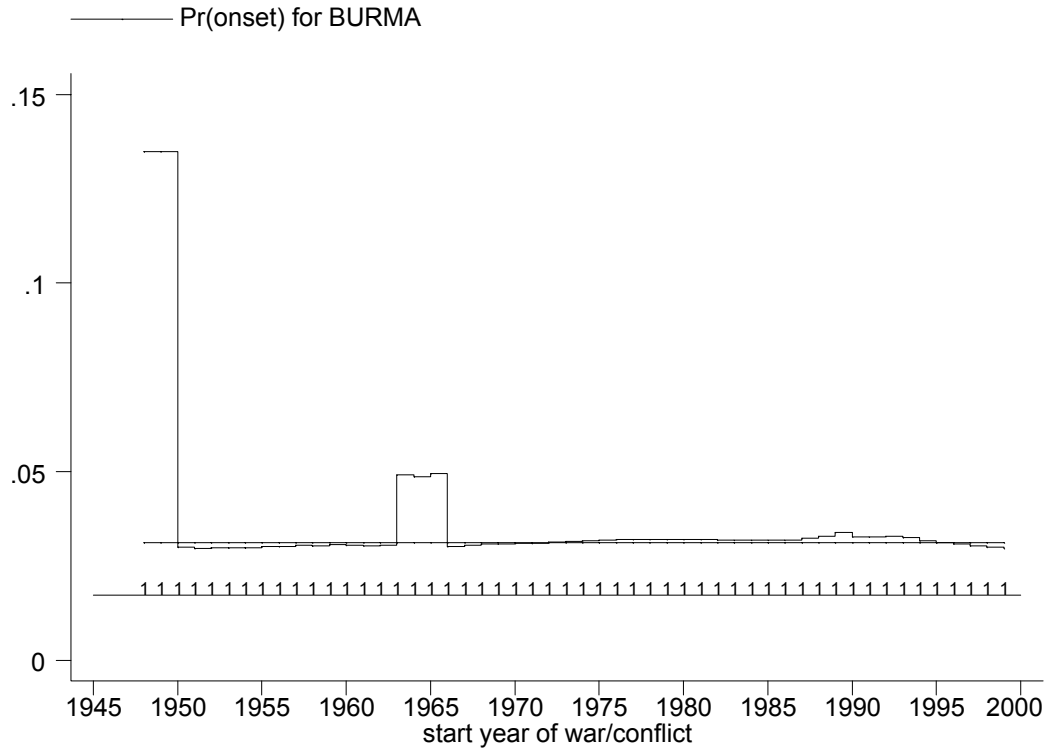
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Figure 1



cname	year	pr	gdp~1	pop	mtn~t	Oil	ins~b	anocl
BURMA	1948	.1458901	.202	18119	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1949	.0655672	.202	18304	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1950	.0125853	.199	18380	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1951	.0124832	.228	18737	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1952	.0125251	.234	19094	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1953	.0125098	.254	19451	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1954	.0125614	.257	19808	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1955	.0126443	.252	20165	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1956	.0126941	.255	20583	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1957	.012823	.241	21001	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1958	.0127747	.27	21418	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1959	.0128849	.26	21836	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1960	.0128131	.294	21780	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1961	.0127143	.316	22253	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1962	.0128017	.313	22736	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1963	.0211403	.373	23230	35.6	0	1	0
BURMA	1964	.0209627	.418	23735	35.6	0	1	0
BURMA	1965	.0213209	.383	24250	35.6	0	1	0
BURMA	1966	.0126858	.415	24802	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1967	.0128134	.403	25366	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1968	.0129919	.379	25943	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1969	.0129971	.397	26533	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1970	.013044	.405	27137	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1971	.0130702	.418	27754	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1972	.0131509	.418	28385	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1973	.0132278	.419	29031	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1974	.0133437	.411	29620	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1975	.013443	.405	30221	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1976	.0134697	.416	30845	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1977	.0134761	.432	31461	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1978	.0134844	.447	32099	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1979	.0134723	.467	32750	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1980	.0134775	.483	33511	35.6	0	0	0

Fearon and Laitin, Random Narratives, Burma, p. 17

BURMA	1981	.0134674	.505	34171	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1982	.0134447	.527	34844	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1983	.0134176	.55	35530	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1984	.013442	.561	36230	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1985	.0134065	.586	36943	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1986	.0134223	.599	37874	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1987	.0136224	.574	38828	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1988	.013852	.543	39807	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1989	.0143169	.461	40810	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1990	.0137402	.611	41675	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1991	.0137444	.628	42561	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1992	.0138414	.624	43670	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1993	.0136745	.684	41898.03	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1994	.01334	.726	42381.29	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1995	.0131529	.78	42877	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1996	.012969	.834	43380.8	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1997	.0127877	.888	43892.85	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1998	.0126253	.938	44413.3	35.6	0	0	0
BURMA	1999	.0124771	.985	.	35.6	0	0	0

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
pr	52	.0171652	.0196688	.0124771	.1458901
gdpenl	52	.4590385	.1943067	.199	.985
pop	51	30041.65	8640.587	18119	44413.3
mtnest	52	35.6	0	35.6	35.6
Oil	52	0	0	0	0
instab	52	.0576923	.2354355	0	1
anocl	52	0	0	0	0

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
pr	1029	.0305529	.039665	.0000676	.5059608
gdpenl	1046	1.796592	2.103526	.188	17.032
pop	1072	99865.83	226940.6	520	1238599
mtnest	1096	26.89261	23.45269	0	94.3
Oil	1096	.0392336	.1942388	0	1
instab	1094	.1819013	.3859396	0	1
anocl	1077	.3073352	.4616039	0	1

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
pr	6327	.0167842	.0232433	3.19e-10	.5059608
gdpenl	6373	3.651117	4.536645	.048	66.735
pop	6433	31786.92	102560.8	222	1238599
mtnest	6610	18.08833	20.96648	0	94.3
Oil	6610	.1295008	.3357787	0	1
instab	6596	.1464524	.353586	0	1
anocl	6541	.2256536	.418044	0	1