

IGA-677 / RusNatSecPol / Lecture 9

Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency

Yuri M. Zhukov
Visiting Associate Professor of Public Policy
Harvard Kennedy School

October 3, 2023

Today's objectives

1. *Define*: what insurgency and counter-insurgency are
2. *Consider*: why counter-insurgency is so difficult
3. *Examine*: case studies of Chechnya and Western Ukraine

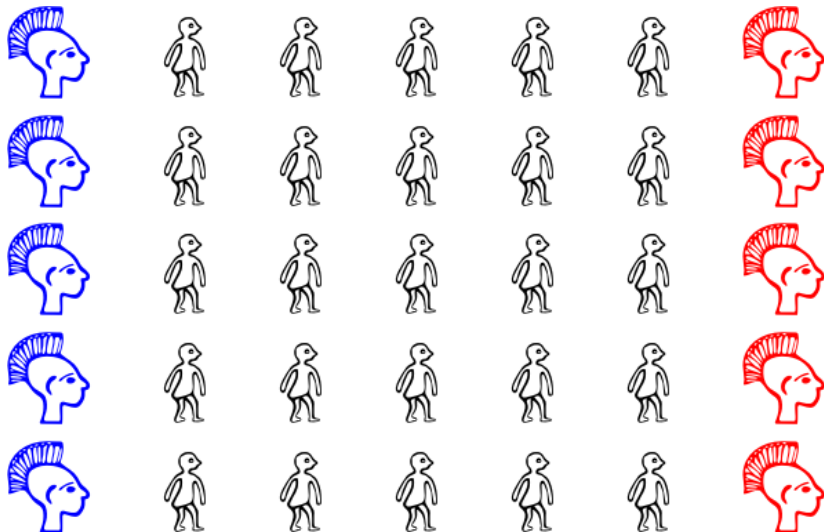


Figure 1: Conventional war. Clear front lines, combatants easy to identify.



Figure 2: Irregular war. Combatants hide among civilians, hard to identify.



Figure 3: Asymmetric irregular war. One side easier to identify than other.

Introduction to insurgency

Definitions

Irregular war: armed contestation of sovereignty between state and non-state actors, where

1. there are no front lines
2. there is uncertainty over who is combatant or civilian

Insurgency: organized political violence by sub-state or non-state groups, directed against agents of incumbent government

- *includes:* anti-occupational uprisings, secessionist and revolutionary movements, terrorist groups
- *excludes:* unorganized political violence (lone wolves), organized crime, riots and protests

Counter-insurgency: efforts by agents of incumbent government to contain or defeat an insurgency

- *includes:* army, police, foreign military forces, pro-government militia, contractors, non-military agencies
- *excludes:* deposed regime, mutineers and coup plotters

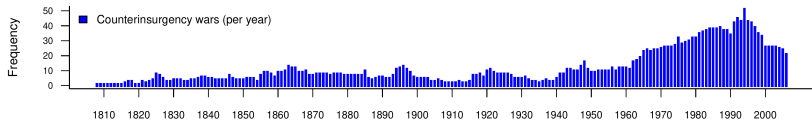


Figure 4: Frequency of counter-insurgency wars.



Figure 5: Success rate of counter-insurgency wars.

Puzzle: Insurgencies becoming more frequent, but harder to defeat. Why?

Common explanations: balance of power, structure of international system (polarity, institutions, treaties), regime type, force employment, technology.

Information problems

Irregular war is a collective action problem

1. sovereignty is contested between two (or more) combatants
 - a) government (counter-insurgents)
 - b) rebels (insurgents)
2. victory requires popular support (e.g. taxes, military service)
3. but support is costly for civilians to provide
4. combatants use *coercion* to deter support for rivals
 - a) punish suspected collaborators, informants
 - b) demonstrate strength, intimidate civilians

Coercion vs. brute force

1. Coercion: increase costs of unwanted behavior
2. Brute force: limit opportunities for unwanted behavior

Information problems in counter-insurgency

1. Indistinguishability of combatants and civilians
2. Unwillingness of civilians to volunteer information

Discussion:

- Why do information problems make coercion more difficult?
- Why do information problems create incentives for brute force?



Figure 6: Selective violence

- targets chosen individually
- (e.g. arrests, assassinations)



Figure 7: Indiscriminate violence

- targets chosen collectively
- (e.g. artillery, area bombing)

Case Studies

Russian-Chechen War

Background: Caucasus Wars

1. 1816:
Aleksy Yermolov becomes viceroy,
begins conquest of N. Caucasus
2. 1817-1864:
Caucasian Imamate vs. Russia
→ mass resettlement, genocide
3. 1921-1926:
Akushinskiy insurgency vs. Bolsheviks
→ forcible disarmament
4. 1940-1944:
Israilov insurgency vs. Soviets
→ mass deportation to Central Asia
5. 1989: Chechens return home



Figure 8: Map of Caucasus

1st Chechen War, 1994-96

1. Prelude

- 1991: Chechnya declares independence
- Yeltsin ignores this at first
- low-level Chechen civil war

2. Main phase

- 1994: troops sent to restore order
- catastrophic Russian losses
- poor intelligence, heavy air power, indiscriminate artillery shelling

3. Settlement

- 1996: separatists recapture Grozny
- Russia signs peace agreement
- Chechnya becomes de facto independent



Figure 9: Restoring order



Figure 10: And leaving

2nd Chechen War, 1999-2011

1. Prelude

- 1997: Chechen leadership splits
- rise of Salafi-Jihadis
- 1999: Basayev, Khattab invade Dagestan to create Islamic state

2. Main phase

- 1999: Russia invades Chechnya
- 2000: Russia takes Grozny, cities
- 2000-2011: guerrilla war in forests, Russian indiscriminate reprisals

3. No settlement

- Russia enlists former rebels (Akhmat and Ramzan Kadyrov)
- "Chechenization" of conflict
- violence becomes more selective
- Chechnya becomes police state



Figure 11: Old friends

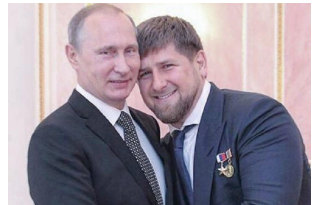


Figure 12: New friends

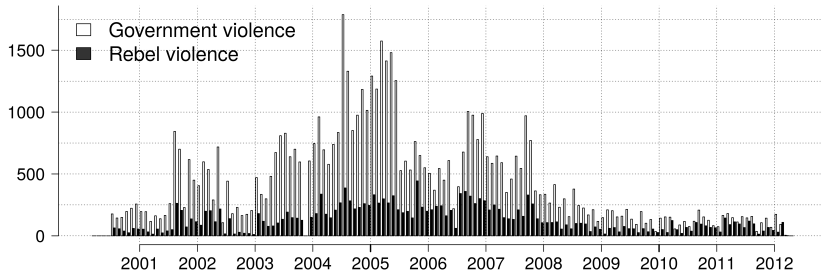


Figure 13: Government and rebel violence over time

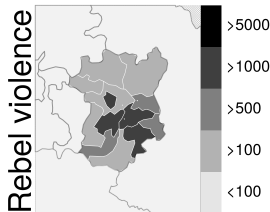


Figure 14: Insurgency

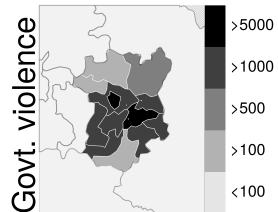


Figure 15: Counterinsurgency

What do the data tell us?

1. Threshold effect exists
 - government violence alienates at low levels, deters at high levels
2. Reaching the threshold is hard
 - in most cases, Russian violence was below the threshold level
3. Threshold level depends on tactics
 - selective tactics: lower threshold
 - indiscriminate: high threshold

What does finding #3 suggest about effectiveness of “Chechenization”?

How does corruption complicate this picture?

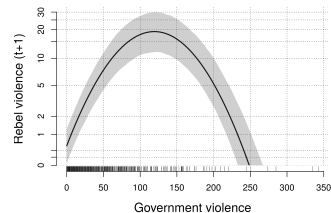


Figure 16: \cap -shaped curve

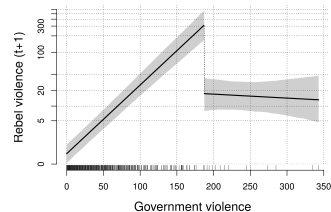


Figure 17: \wedge -shaped curve

Soviet Counter-Insurgency in Western Ukraine

Background: Western Ukraine

1. 1919-1921:
Ukraine split between Poland (Galicia, Volhynia), Soviet Union (center, east)
2. 1929:
Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) forms in Poland
3. 1939-1941:
Soviets occupy West Ukraine, OUN splits into moderate (OUN-m) and militant (OUN-b) factions
4. 1941:
OUN-b declares Ukraine independence, Germans crack down on OUN-b
5. 1942:
OUN-b forms Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) to counter Soviet partisans
6. 1944-1955:
Soviets re-occupy Ukraine, start long counter-insurgency vs. UPA



Figure 18: Glory to Heroes?

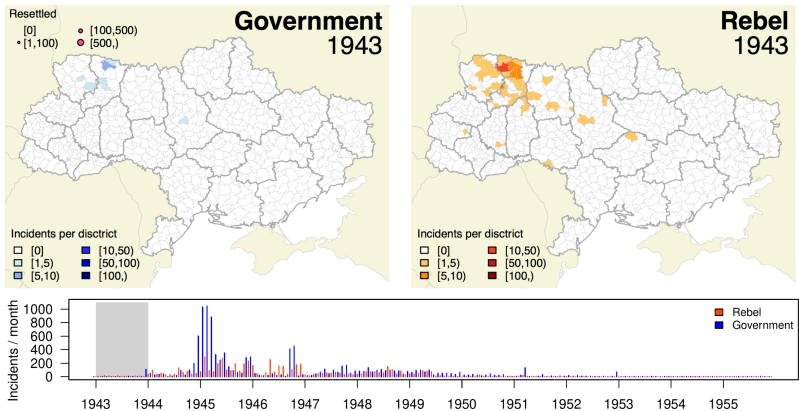


Figure 19: 1943

- Fighting starts when country still under German occupation.
- UPA launches campaign vs. suspected Soviet collaborators.

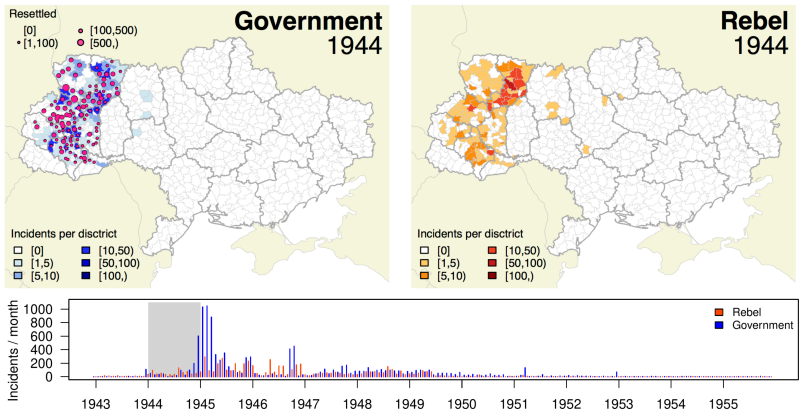


Figure 20: 1944

- Campaign reaches peak in 1944-1945, when Soviets return.
- Soviets, starved of intelligence, rely on indiscriminate violence.

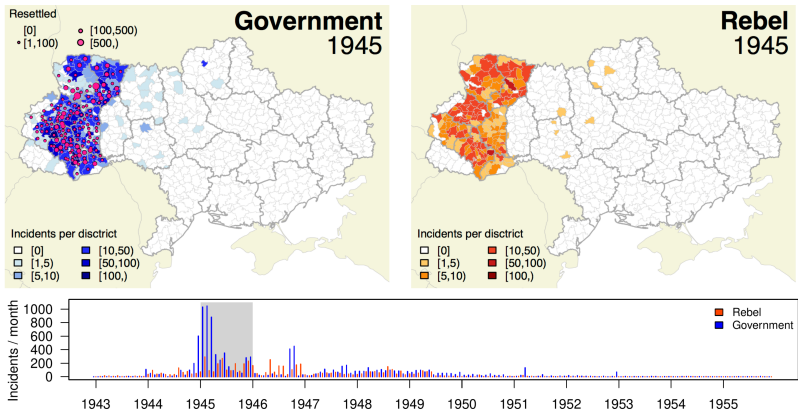


Figure 21: 1945

- NKVD begins campaign of mass population resettlement.
- Resettlement ostensibly targets families, supporters of UPA members.

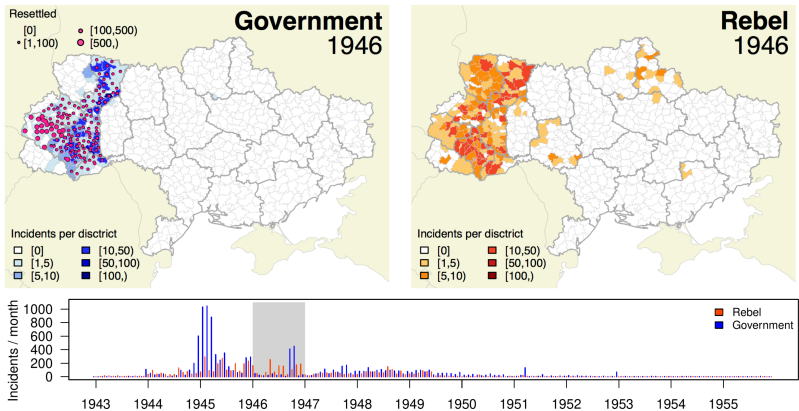


Figure 22: 1946

- To keep up with quotas, resettlement becomes more indiscriminate.
- "Without discrimination, they grab children, women, the elderly..."

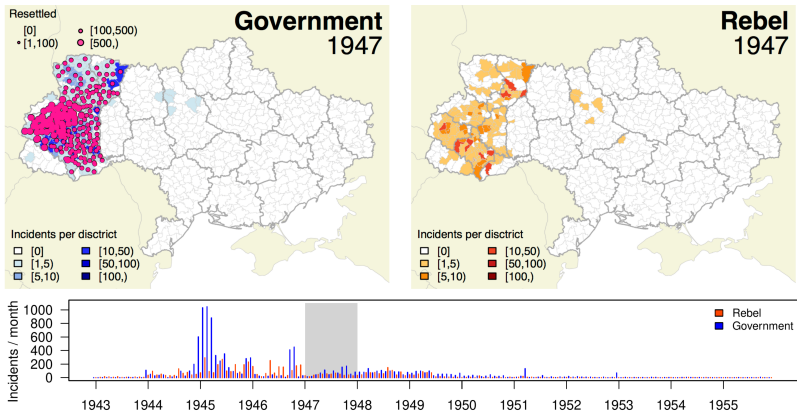


Figure 23: 1947

- Suspected rebels' families represented 32-59% of resettled households in October 1947... Who were the other 41-68%?

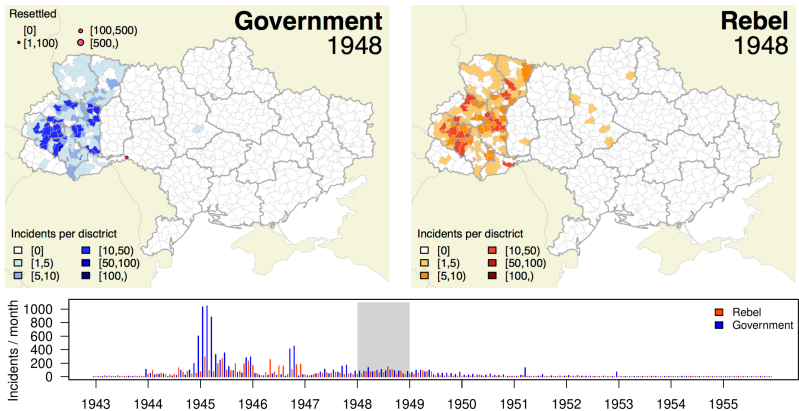


Figure 24: 1948

- UPA insurgency goes on, at lower intensity
- Soviets briefly pause resettlement program.

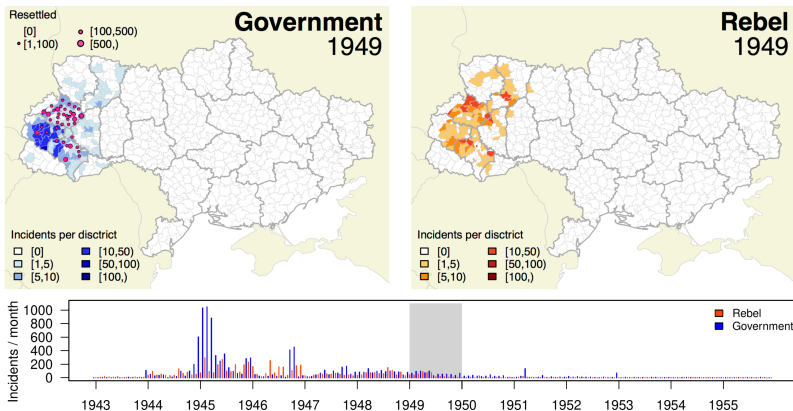


Figure 25: 1949

- Soviets collectivization of local farms sparks renewed resistance, renewed campaign of resettlement.

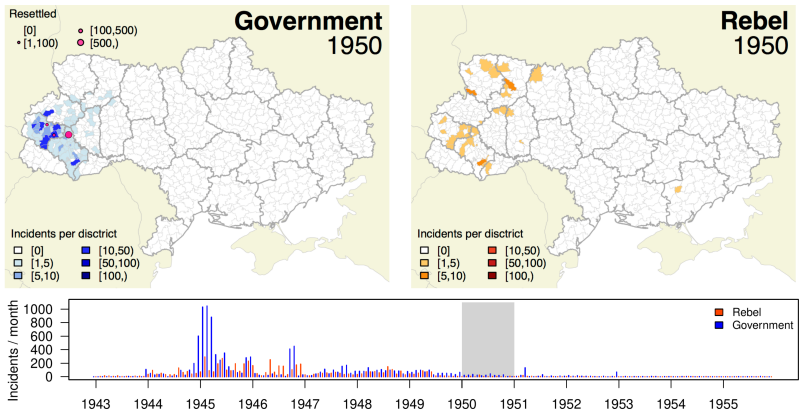


Figure 26: 1950

- By 1950, the conflict had become low-intensity.
- Soviets had mostly established monopoly on use of force.

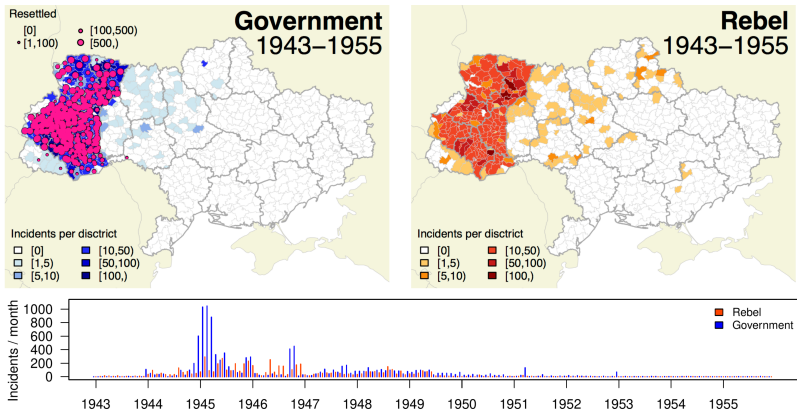


Figure 27: 1943-1955

- How decisive was forcible resettlement in reducing insurgent violence?
- Why is this a difficult empirical question to answer?

Did resettlement work?

1. Yes
 - resettlement had significant suppressive effect on UPA violence
 - expected number of attacks decreased by 47% on average
2. And
 - removal of local popular base (266,000 resettled, 127,000 killed) changed how UPA fought
 - UPA violence became less selective, more indiscriminate



Figure 28: NKVD-VV unit



Figure 29: OUN-UPA cell

Discussion:

Back to the future?

- why didn't the Russians (re-)attempt resettlement in Chechnya?
- but then why has Russia been using these tactics in Ukraine today?
- is there always a trade-off between reducing government violence and preserving civil liberties?

NEXT MEETING

State Security Services (Th, Oct. 5)

- inside the police state
- things to consider:
 - why didn't the secret police care if they were arresting the "right people" under Stalin?
 - is the FSB still capable of state terror on a 1937 scale?