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The Wartime Roots of Rural Governance: Militias' Evolving Roles in Post-Conflict Peru

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Abstract

Under what conditions can militias enhance governance in post-conflict settings? Drawing on nine months of fieldwork in rural Peru, this paper develops a theoretical framework to explain militias' varied post-civil war trajectories, focusing on their wartime relationships with the military and local communities. I argue that militias with autonomy from the military and strong community ties are more likely to persist and strengthen post-war rural governance. By protecting communities from civil war violence, these militias earn social legitimacy and become institutionalized, prompting their members and local villagers to repurpose them for post-conflict governance roles—an overlooked yet essential trajectory for militias in post-conflict settings. To substantiate my argument, I conduct a comparative historical analysis in Peru's rural periphery using multiple site-intensive methods, including interviews, archival work, and participant observation. The paper offers insights into the historical legacies of violence, institutional change, and governance in areas with minimal state presence.

Keywords

militias, post-civil war, rural governance, site-intensive methods, Peru

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Data Availability Statement included at the end of the article

Introduction

Militias are widespread during civil wars.[1] Defined as "groups or organizations that are not part of the official security forces of a state but are organized in armed self-defense against insurgent groups" (Schubiger, 2021, p. 1385), they have appeared in 81% of all civil wars between 1981 and 2007, operating in both democratic and authoritarian contexts.[2] Examples include Nigeria's Civilian Join Task Forces, civil defense forces in Sierra Leone, paramilitaries in Colombia, the Syrian National Defence Forces, and Peru's *comités de autodefensa* (Osorio et al., 2021). Despite their recognized importance for the internal dynamics, resolution, and legacies of civil war, militias remain surprisingly understudied, especially regarding their post-conflict trajectories (Carey & Mitchell, 2017; Jentzsch et al., 2015).[3]

Some militias disband once the fighting stops; others persist in post-conflict settings (Aliyev, 2019; Daly, 2011). Existing research predominantly associates the post-conflict persistence of militias with obstacles to political stability, socio-economic development, and governance (Acemoglu et al., 2013; Hughes & Tripodi, 2009; López Hernández, 2010). However, a few studies have noted their evolving roles in governing rural peripheries. Contrary to conventional wisdom, militias can become key providers of public goods and services in post-conflict societies, including security, infrastructure, and local justice (Bateson, 2013, 2017; García-Godos, 2006). *Under what conditions do militia organizations transition into post-conflict settings and enhance rural governance?*

To answer this question, I introduce a novel theoretical framework that explains multiple militia pathways in the aftermath of civil wars. The framework focuses on two critical wartime relationships: (i) militia-state relations, specifically with the military,[4] and (ii) militia-community relations. Specifically, I examine whether militias are autonomous from or, alternatively, subjugated to the military and the degree to which they are embedded within local communities during civil wars. Different combinations of these factors explain militias' varied post-conflict paths: *governance strengthening*, *governance weakening*, and *disbandment*.[5]

I find that militias that maintain autonomy from the military *and* are embedded within their local community are more likely to survive and adopt governance-enhancing roles in post-conflict periods. With operational autonomy and strong communal ties, militias tend to protect rather than prey on their communities during civil war (Daly, 2011; Peic, 2014; Yoroms, 2017). Through their protective actions, militias gain social legitimacy and become institutionalized through a process of "value infusion" (Levitsky, 1998; Selznick, 1957). Both militia members and local residents develop a strong commitment and identification with these organizations, thus advocating for their survival and adaptation to improve post-conflict rural governance.

In contrast, militias that operate autonomously from the military but lack embeddedness within their local community can undermine governance after civil wars end. With operational freedom and weak community ties, militias remain unchecked in terms of predatory behavior (Carey & Mitchell, 2021), thereby weakening post-conflict rural governance (Acemoglu et al., 2013; Hughes & Tripodi, 2009; Schlichte, 2010).

Lastly, militias subjugated to the military are prone to disbandment after civil wars. In these cases, the extent to which militias are embedded within local communities becomes less relevant because their relationship with the community is largely defined by their subjugation to the Armed Forces. This subjugation typically involves military repression targeting militia members (Stanton, 2015), as well as militia members preying on local communities following military orders (Downes, 2006; Valentino, 2004). Consequently, neither militia members nor local villagers support the continuation of these organizations, leading to their post-conflict disbandment.

My inductive theory-building is anchored in extensive, multi-sited, and immersive fieldwork conducted in Peru's rural periphery. The Peruvian civil war (1980–2000) resulted in approximately 70,000 casualties, with about 75% speaking one of the country's native languages (*Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación*,[6] 2003a). The Shining Path, a radical Maoist guerrilla group, violently challenged state authority throughout the conflict. After two decades of turmoil, the Armed Forces and militias, known as *comités de autodefensa* (CADs), regained territorial control (CVR, 2003b). While some CADs disbanded post-conflict, others persisted and adapted their roles, offering an excellent opportunity to explore the wartime factors influencing militias' diverse long-term trajectories.

To construct a "grounded" theoretical framework (Yom, 2015), I employed site-intensive methods, including interviews, archival research, and participant observation (Kapiszewski et al., 2015). These methods allowed me to juxtapose my initial theoretical priors, rooted in the political violence scholarship, against empirical observations and insights from the field. The framework is informed by over 115 hours of interviews, the original analysis of more than 3000 formal and informal archival documents, and field notes documenting first-hand observations and participation in militias' post-conflict activities.

Within the Ayacucho department, the epicenter of Peru's internal armed conflict, my qualitative case study of Llochegua district explores the post-conflict outcome of militias contributing to *governance strengthening*. While the literature has extensively documented cases of "governance weakening" (Acemoglu et al., 2013; Carey & González, 2021; Flint & De Waal, 2008; Hristov, 2009; Hughes & Tripodi, 2009; Schlichte, 2010), I shift the focus to the lesser-studied yet intriguing phenomenon of militias enhancing governance following civil war termination. Through process tracing, I contrast

Llochegua with Los Morochucos, another district in Ayacucho where militias disbanded post-conflict. My comparative historical analysis shows how variation in militia-military and militia-community wartime relationships explains why militias disband or, alternatively, survive post-civil war and bolster governance.

The paper sheds light on the historical legacies of violence (Balcells, 2012; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017; Weintraub et al., 2015), institutional change and critical juncture frameworks (Collier & Munck, 2022; Mahoney & Thelen, 2009), and rural governance (Baldwin, 2016; Logan, 2013). The concept of *governance* emphasizes the role of non-state actors in providing government-like services, complementing or substituting state institutions (Boyer, 1990; Fukuyama, 2016). Characterized by weak or absent state bureaucracies, such as police stations or local courts, and lacking basic services like sanitary water or street lightning, post-conflict rural areas—spanning North and sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia—demand collaboration between states and non-state actors to provide security, social order, and welfare (Cammett & MacLean, 2014; Goodwin, 1998). Repurposing wartime institutions like militias to enhance rural governance can improve the quality of life for historically marginalized populations. This paper examines the wartime conditions that facilitate such repurposing efforts.

What Do We Know About Militias During and After Civil Wars?

Militias play a pivotal role in civil wars. Often employed by states to counter insurgent forces, their effectiveness is widely recognized (Linn, 2000; Richards, 1996; Estancona et al., 2019). Such effectiveness stems from their deep local knowledge, which enables them to provide valuable intelligence to the military about insurgents, thereby addressing the "identification problem" that plagues irregular warfare (Kalyvas, 2006; Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). Militias also aid states in deflecting responsibility for human rights abuses during counterinsurgency campaigns (Ahram, 2011; Cohen, 2001) and bolster weak regular Armed Forces, especially in regions destabilized by rebellions or military purges (Eck, 2015).

Existing research has predominantly focused on militias within civil war, rather than on their post-conflict fortunes. This body of work has explored their origins (Blocq, 2014; Jentzsch, 2022; Schubiger, 2021), recruitment practices (Forney, 2015; Cohen & Nordås, 2015), relation to violence (Clayton & Thomson, 2016; Stanton, 2015), and roles or functions (Cohen, 2001; Eck, 2015; Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). Crucially for this paper, prior studies have also examined militias' interactions with both the state and society during wartime (Carey et al., 2015; Jentzsch et al., 2015; Eastin & Zech, 2022; Estancona & Reid, 2022).

The relationship with the state is a key feature of militias. Carey and Mitchell (2017) discuss how states may create and officially recognize militias by law or, alternatively, establish informal links with existing militia groups to pursue common goals. While they focus on the legal (*de jure*) aspects of militia-state relations, distinguishing between semi-official and informal arrangements, I concentrate instead on the de facto interactions between these actors, particularly on the level of autonomy militias maintain relative to the state. By examining how these interactions unfold "on the ground" rather than on paper, I seek to provide a more thorough understanding of militia-state relations.

Relatedly, Jentzsch and colleagues (2015) distinguish between militias that are state-sponsored and those formed by local communities. However, they caution that militia origins alone are not a reliable predictor of how militia-state relationships will evolve over time. Although community-formed militias might be expected to operate with greater autonomy than those imposed by the state, this is not always the case. For instance, community-initiated militias can be co-opted by the state and lose their independence, while state-imposed militias may achieve operational autonomy via conquest or deliberate disengagement by the Armed Forces (Jentzsch et al., 2015). My theoretical framework builds on this insight by moving beyond militia origins per se to examine how militia-state relationships evolve in practice, focusing on the level of autonomy that militias maintain or may (or may not) come to develop.

Research suggests that the nature of the militia-state relationships significantly influences how militias interact with society. When states control militias, they often direct or tacitly approve their use of violence against civilians as part of counterinsurgency strategies (Downes, 2006; Stanton, 2015; Valentino, 2004). But without state oversight, militias' behavior towards society depends on their community ties (Carey & Mitchell, 2021). Militias deeply integrated within local communities face informal accountability mechanisms, often leading them to protect civilians and limit predatory violence (Jentzsch, 2022; Yoroms, 2017). In contrast, militias disconnected from the communities in which they operate lack local-level monitoring, increasing the likelihood to engage in looting or other predatory behaviors (Daly, 2011; Peic, 2014; Schuberth, 2015).

Existing accounts of militia-state and militia-society relations have advanced our understanding of militia behavior during civil wars. However, the impact of these relationships on militias' *post-conflict trajectories* remains underexplored. This paper builds on and extends the existing literature by linking militias' wartime interactions with the state (specifically, the military) and society (the local community) to their post-conflict fortunes.

Only a few scholars have explored militias' transitions into post-conflict environments. For instance, Bolte and colleagues (2021) explore why

governments terminate or integrate militias into military structures, focusing on post-conflict factors like ethnic ties with ruling elites and the military's organizational capacity. While this approach sheds light on state-led processes of militia incorporation, it overlooks the influence of local communities on militia trajectories, as well as the broader governance roles these organizations might adopt beyond boosting military capabilities. Moreover, Bolte et al. (2021) do not explore the conditions under which militias persist in ways that can weaken state authority. By shifting attention to militia-military and militia-community wartime relations, my framework provides a more comprehensive explanation of the causes and implications for governance of militia's varied post-conflict pathways.

Other studies have highlighted the potential threats to governance posed by militias' post-conflict persistence. In this view, governments or elite societal groups may use militias as instruments to violate laws of war and human rights (Carey & González, 2021; Hughes & Tripodi, 2009), perpetuate their dominance (Schlichte, 2010), or engage in illegal activities to influence electoral politics (Acemoglu et al., 2013). These actions not only undermine state authority but also threaten civil society and overall governance, potentially reigniting violent conflict. However, this strand of research fails to identify and trace the mechanisms driving these outcomes—mechanisms that my framework seeks to uncover.

An alternative line of investigation suggests that militias, rather than weakening the state in post-conflict settings, can actually enhance rural governance (Bateson, 2013, 2017; García-Godos, 2006). In historically underserved regions referred to as "brown areas" (O'Donnell, 1993), where state bureaucracies struggle to provide essential public goods and services, militias can engage in governance practices that reinforce or complement state-enforced systems of order (Biddle, 2008). In her research on Guatemala, Bateson (2013, 2017) shows how militias (civil patrols) formed during the civil war evolved into enforcers of vigilante justice in the post-war period, improving rural security.

Building on Bateson (2013, 2017), I examine how militias' wartime experiences shape their evolving post-conflict roles. While Bateson's work focuses on vigilante politics, I broaden the scope of militias' post-conflict activities, illustrating the diverse governance roles undertaken by the *comités de autodefensa* in rural Peru. These roles encompass security provision (CVR, 2003c), collaboration with judicial authorities, and organization of community fundraisers, among other local development initiatives.[7] Additionally, my framework considers a spectrum of potential post-conflict trajectories for militias, ranging from disbandment to outcomes of governance weakening and strengthening.

The Wartime Factors Shaping Militias' Post-Conflict Fortunes

Figure 1 introduces a novel theoretical framework that explains the varied post-conflict fortunes of militias in terms of two critical wartime relationships: militia-military (autonomy vs. subjugation) and militia-community (embedded vs. disembedded) relations. Depending on the nature of these relationships, militias follow three different post-conflict paths: *governance strengthening*, *governance weakening*, or *disbandment*.

To build this theory, I draw from ethnographic fieldwork within Peru.[8] Through a process of inductive iteration (Yom, 2015), I developed a framework grounded in empirical research rather than preconceived hypotheses, integrating theories and findings from the existing scholarship on political violence with my own field research insights.[9]

Governance Strengthening

Militias exhibit varying degrees of independence from the military, leading to two primary opposing scenarios: "autonomy" or "subjugation."[10] Contrary to prevalent perspectives, which often depict militias as mere "puppets" or extensions of the Armed Forces (Staniland, 2015), my framework

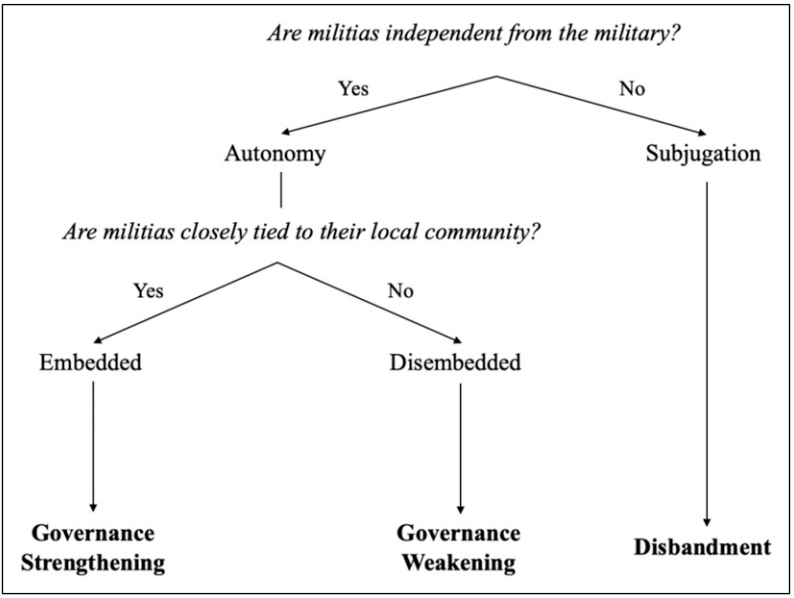

Figure 1. Wartime determinants of militias' post-conflict paths.

acknowledges the existence of autonomous militias. In fact, during civil wars, civilians often establish community-led militias independently of the state to safeguard their lives, families, and assets from violence (Blocq, 2014; Jentzsch, 2022; Schubiger, 2021). These grassroots militias typically draw members from the local population and may strategically collaborate with the Armed Forces to combat insurgents while preserving operational autonomy. As observed by Jentzsch and colleagues (2015, p. 759), "a state's strategic collaboration with or tolerance of militias does not mean that it necessarily has complete control over their formation and activities."

I argue that grassroots militias, deeply embedded within their local communities during civil wars, exhibit protective conduct towards their community when they maintain operational autonomy from the military. Rooted within their community, militias are subject to informal mechanisms of accountability and social control, which shape their behavior toward civilians (Clayton & Thomson, 2016; Daly, 2011; Peic, 2014; Schuberth, 2015). Accountable to their fellow rural citizens, such militias tend to adopt a selective and targeted approach to violence, prioritizing the protection of the local community over predatory actions (Yoroms, 2017). As described by Spires (2011, p. 11), grassroots organizations "are providing a much-needed service to people like themselves." Importantly, as these militias are not subjugated to the military, they can refrain from using indiscriminate violence against civilians following military orders, a practice often observed during warfare (Stanton, 2015).

Through their protective conduct, militias gain widespread acceptance and social legitimacy within their communities. This legitimacy means that militias' actions are perceived as appropriate or desirable within the community's norms and values.[11] As a result, these militias become more established and institutionalized through a process known as "value infusion" (Selznick, 1957), positively influencing their internal workings, social cohesion, and long-term survival. Value infusion institutionalization involves a focus on "self-maintenance," transforming organizations from disposable tools into sources of personal satisfaction (Selznick, 1957). Consequently, militia members develop a personal stake in the organization's survival, motivating them to preserve it even if their original goals have been achieved or evolved. As militia organizations institutionalize, they develop a strong sense of purpose, thereby enhancing their flexibility, adaptation, and resilience in new environments (Huntington, 1968; Levitsky, 1998).

The acquired legitimacy of militias not only motivates their members but also prompts the local community to repurpose them for new tasks in the post-conflict era. Militias' legitimacy grants them significant popular support, allowing them to establish community-wide ties or horizontal linkages within the social landscape where they operate (Lu & Tao, 2017). These connections, spanning militia members, their families, friends, and broader social networks

at the local level, foster a profound identification and support from the community towards these organizations. This symbiotic relationship between militias and the local community facilitates their adaptation to changing environments (Jennings & Seaman, 1994; Sarta et al., 2021).

In rural areas where militias typically emerge, the absence or weakness of the state compels local communities to take proactive measures to improve their well-being (World Bank, 2000). Past experiences with armed mobilizations help communities overcome collective action challenges, build intergenerational trust networks, and preserve wartime institutions for pursuing new long-term objectives (Osorio et al., 2021). Instances of militias' "institutional conversion" (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009) across diverse contexts, such as Mexico (Osorio et al., 2021), Guatemala (Bateson, 2013), and parts of Asia (Ahram, 2011), demonstrate their capacity to repurpose skills gained during armed mobilization for purposes beyond violent conflict, including, but not limited to, patrolling or surveillance. Moreover, when states' bureaucratic infrastructure is underdeveloped, they have incentives to leverage militias to extend their authority (Staniland, 2015), complementing or supplementing government functions in remote rural areas.

Governance Weakening

As depicted in Figure 1, I argue that militias that operate autonomously from the military but lack strong ties to local communities can pose significant threats to rural governance in post-conflict settings. In this scenario, militias operate without oversight: the Armed Forces cannot exert control over their actions, and the local community cannot hold them accountable through informal mechanisms of social sanctioning (Clayton & Thomson, 2016; Peic, 2014). Consequently, militias' behavior goes unchecked, increasing the likelihood of predation towards civilians during the conflict and paving the way for post-conflict activities detrimental to governance, such as forging alliances with or transforming into criminal gangs or drug cartels (Aliyev, 2019).

Militias can attain operational autonomy from the state in several ways, including unauthorized control over territories, strategic disengagement by military forces, or organic emergence with minimal interaction with the government (Stanton, 2015). In either case, autonomous militias often resort to indiscriminate violence when they lack strong community ties or operate beyond their immediate communities. This detachment from the local populace is critical because militias with limited or no community embeddedness often prioritize their own agendas over community safety (Schuberth, 2015). Furthermore, militia members might belong to a different ethno-religious group than the rest of their community, or they may be deployed with no oversight by the state or their own leaders to other regions or even countries

(Clayton & Thomson, 2016). This lack of accountability to local populations, exemplified by the Mai-Mai militia groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Human Rights Watch, 2008), enables these organizations to engage in predatory conduct such as extortion or looting for personal gain.

Despite their contextual differences, the Janjaweed militias in Sudan and paramilitary forces in Colombia illustrate how militias with operational autonomy and disconnected from local communities can weaken post-conflict rural governance. Both groups maintained significant autonomy from their respective Armed Forces and were notorious for committing atrocities, especially outside their recruitment areas (Amnesty International, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2010). For instance, the Janjaweed militias targeted non-Arabic communities, with whom they lacked ethnic and cultural ties, leading to mass displacement and humanitarian crises (Flint & De Waal, 2008). Similarly, various paramilitary groups coalesced into the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, extending their influence beyond their immediate communities and asserting territorial control through violence and intimidation (Hristov, 2009).

Despite state efforts to demobilize or integrate these militias into government-aligned roles after civil war termination, their remnants remained active, posing numerous challenges to governance in rural areas, including influencing electoral politics through violent means, becoming involved in drug trafficking, violating human rights, and obstructing humanitarian aid (Acemoglu et al., 2013; Flint & De Waal, 2008; Hristov, 2009). Ultimately, their presence may increase the likelihood of violent conflict reemergence (Carey & González, 2021).

Disbandment

Lastly, I argue that militias subjugated to the military during civil wars are prone to post-conflict disbandment. Examples include the Southwestern Militias in Cote d'Ivoire, El Salvador's Civil Defence Patrols, Special Force Vigilante groups in Uganda, People's Militias in Mozambique, Government of Liberia militias, and Burundi's Guardians of Peace, among others (Carey & Mitchell, 2021).[12]

State-orchestrated militias, typically created by the military to counter insurgents,[13] operate under tight supervision (Carey et al., 2013; Hedman, 2000). They exhibit low independence, serving as extensions of the Armed Forces to address tactical challenges during warfare. Military oversight encompasses control over militias' internal operations, firearm possession, and mandatory reporting to military barracks (Stanton, 2015). Coercive recruitment ensures participation, with non-compliance resulting in repression by the military (Jentzsch et al., 2015). Evidence from civil wars in Guatemala (Stoll, 2018), Mozambique (Cann, 1997), and Uganda (Stanton, 2015) also portray

these militias as a form of unpaid (*corvée*) labor, entailing repression of militia members by military officers.

When the military controls militias, they frequently direct them to inflict violence on civilians as part of broader counterinsurgency strategies. As Stanton shows (2015), governments tend to repress civilians during civil wars, with militias under military command mirroring these repressive tactics. Following directives from the Army, militias such as Uganda's Special Force Vigilante and Burundi's Guardians of Peace engaged in indiscriminate violence in the countryside, targeting civilians suspected of collaborating with rebels (Carey & Mitchell, 2021). This use of militias enables governments to reap the benefits from harsh counterinsurgency campaigns while disavowing responsibility for resulting human rights abuses (Carey et al., 2015). Consequently, when militias are subjugated to the military, their interactions with the community often become predatory (Downes, 2006; Valentino, 2004).

This cycle of repression, originating from military officers and transmitted through militia members onto civilians, hinders value infusion institutionalization (Selznick, 1957), thereby contributing to militias' post-war disbandment. Forced participation, absence of decision-making autonomy, and the reality and constant threat of repression prevent militia members from developing a sense of belonging or personal satisfaction within the organization (Huntington, 1968). When militias lack intrinsic value, members are inclined to abandon them after achieving their military-imposed goal of countering insurgents.

Moreover, militias' predatory actions delegitimize them in the eyes of local communities, which perceive them as externally-imposed agents of repression. For instance, in Burundi, the Guardians of Peace terrorized communities under the pretext of rooting out rebel collaborators. Likewise, the Government of Liberia militias have been accused of killings, beatings, and acts of sexual violence against civilians, cementing their reputation as agents of oppression rather than protection (Carey & Mitchell, 2021). As a result, local residents show no interest in repurposing these militias in the post-conflict phase; instead, they welcome their disbandment. After militias fulfill their repressive mission during the conflict, the Armed Forces often deactivate them by withdrawing logistical and material support (Aliyev, 2019; Schubiger, 2021).

Research Design

National and Subnational Case Selection

Peru's civil war spanned from 1980 to 2000, resulting in nearly 70,000 casualties. Of those killed, 75% were speakers of an indigenous language, with 40% among the country's poorest and most rural populations (CVR, 2003a). On May 17, 1980, the Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*), the main insurgent

group,[14] declared war on the Peruvian state by igniting ballot boxes in Chuschi, Ayacucho, obstructing the country's transition to democracy after over a decade of military dictatorship (Soifer & Vergara, 2019). Rooted in Maoist ideology, *Sendero Luminoso* aimed for a social revolution through widespread violence (Gorriti, 2000). By 1992, after heightened violence in the mid-1980s, the capture of the Shining Path's leader, Abimael Guzmán, symbolized the defeat of the insurgents. Violence subsided, and the state gradually regained control, reclaiming territory in the Ayacucho highlands and neighboring regions (Degregori, 1998; Degregori et al., 1996).

Because the Peruvian internal armed conflict ended over two decades ago, it offers researchers a valuable opportunity to examine its enduring legacies, including militias' post-conflict trajectories. Historical documents[15] and political magazines[16] underscore militias' contribution to defeating the Shining Path. During the conflict, some militias (*comités de autodefensa*, CADs) were community-led, maintaining autonomy from the military, while others were created in a "top-down" manner and subjugated by the Armed Forces (Schubiger, 2021). The Peruvian case thus also provides fruitful material for developing a theory of how wartime factors influence militias' post-conflict paths.

The Peruvian civil war remains understudied in comparative politics, especially compared to Colombia and Central American cases. Except for Soifer and Vergara (2019), there has been limited research on the legacies of violence from Peru's civil war. Moreover, research on Peruvian rural politics is scarce and dominated by prescriptive studies with a clear ideological approach (Seligman, 2008). Within this literature, mining conflicts have received disproportionate attention, overshadowing other medium and long-term dynamics in the Peruvian countryside (Asensio, 2019), including the fate of the *comités de autodefensa*.

As violence declined throughout the 1990s, concerns about the CADs' future emerged (Del Pino, 1992) and intensified in the post-conflict period of the 2000s. Over time, the Peruvian government initiated a disarmament process, deactivating them in various regions. By 2019, CADs were registered in 24% of all Peruvian districts (453 out of 1874) (RENAMU, 2019).[17] They are still operative in zones under a state of emergency; their current mission is, on paper, to support the state in countering "narcoterrorism," a security threat stemming from the alliance between Shining Path remnants and drug cartels (Willems, 2020).

While some advocated against CADs' continuation, favoring exclusive state control over force and governance, others recognized that their fate depended on diverse local realities (CVR, 2003b). Despite the central government's interests, the post-conflict fortunes of CADs are influenced by historical and context-specific factors. In rural areas, local organizations often operate independently of central government directives. Some CADs stopped

functioning before official dismantlement; others continued to operate informally in defiance of disbandment orders. Understanding why some CADs continue to exist, as well as their current roles in rural governance, often undocumented, requires immersion within their local communities.

I purposefully selected the case of Llochegua, a district within the Ayacucho department—the epicenter of violence during Peru's civil war—for intensive subnational analysis. Llochegua serves as a "paradigmatic case" for understanding *governance strengthening*, the paper's primary focus concerning militias' post-conflict paths (Ermakoff, 2014). Los Morochucos, another district within Ayacucho where the CADs disbanded post-conflict, serves as a "shadow case study" (Soifer, 2020).[18] My level of analysis is the *district* because CADs' wartime relationships with the military and the community—the framework's two key variables of interest—and their evolving roles "on the ground" are better captured at a smaller territorial scale (Snyder, 2001).[19]

My comparative historical analysis focuses on two districts within the same department that share several important characteristics, including minimal state presence, the timing and intensity of violence, and the ethnic and cultural background of the local population (CVR, 2003b). Furthermore, both districts belong to the south-central conflict region, locally referred to as "Ayacucho's regional space" or the "emergency zone," and were shaped by specific conflict dynamics distinct from those in other parts of the country (Smith, 1992). In the early 1980s, both experienced a strong Shining Path presence as the insurgent group sought to consolidate and expand its power, followed by military interventions in the mid-1980s aimed at regaining territorial control. These overlapping dynamics left the local population caught in a "crossfire" (CVR, 2003b). Together, these shared characteristics establish a robust foundation for comparison, while variations in militia-military and militia-community relationships during warfare provide insights into divergent long-term outcomes.

Still, like all comparative studies relying on observational data, this is not a perfectly controlled experiment where every aspect of Llochegua and Los Morochucos is held constant except for the critical wartime relationships. For instance, geographical differences—Llochegua is located in a more economically dynamic jungle region, while Los Morochucos is in the highlands—may influence the contrasting outcomes, as geography can shape militias' access to financial resources and durability. However, militias in both contexts have operated—and continue to operate in Llochegua—under highly precarious economic conditions, relying on minimal funds or *ad honorem* work.[20] This evidence does not support the argument that economic differences driven by geography are a significant confounding factor.[21]

Data and Methods

I conducted a comparative historical analysis utilizing process tracing[22] to uncover the causal mechanisms[23] linking CADs' operational autonomy from the military and deep integration within their local community during the civil war to their survival and adaptation for governance roles in post-war Llochegua. Because process tracing depends on accessing fine-grained diagnostic data (Beach & Pedersen, 2019), I employed site intensive-methods during nine months of field research.[24] I collected evidence through multiple qualitative techniques such as interviews, archival research, and participant observation in search of "causal process observations" (CPOs).[25]

To mitigate bias while conducting interviews, I collected evidence both from *various interviewees of the same type* (e.g., multiple CAD members) and from *different types of interviewees* (former and current CAD members, public officials, civil society leaders, and key informants). I conducted two kinds of interviews: (i) in-depth, semi-structured interviews and (ii) "life story" interviews (Kapiszewski et al., 2015). In-depth interviews revealed the unique perspective of each interviewee, who shared detailed information about different aspects of my theory. "Life story" interviews helped me reconstruct the *comités de autodefensa*'s trajectories in Llochegua (*governance strengthening*) and Los Morochucos (*disbandment*). These interviews explore not only individual biographies but also *organizations' life stories*, offering valuable insights into historical causal processes (Kapiszewski et al., 2015).

I consulted four types of archival sources. First, I examined historical documents from archives in Lima, specifically from the *Archivo Central de la CVR* and the *Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social* (LUM).[26] Second, I referenced written press, including political magazines such as *Oiga* (found at LUM) and *Caretas* (found at *Casa Matteo Ricci*, a cultural center in Ayacucho). Third, I consulted Llochegua's Municipality Archives (2010-2022).[27] Fourth, I gained access to informal archives—unmapped, non-systematized collections of materials kept by individuals and groups in the areas under study (Auerbach, 2018, p. 345).[28] Among these, the most prominent was the Llochegua's CAD Internal Records (2017-2022). To complement my analysis of archival sources, I thoroughly reviewed Peruvian scholarship on the topic, gathering information from secondary sources (Lustick, 1996).

During my fieldwork, I also actively participated in and documented specific events that deepened my understanding of CADs' evolving governance roles in Llochegua. These events included CADs' anniversary celebrations (a soccer tournament and a parade), an informal lunch with the organization's leaders, an "urgent" meeting at the CAD central headquarters, and a day spent collecting crops with a historical CAD leader and former district mayor.

I use diagnostic pieces of evidence to make descriptive and causal inferences throughout the empirical analysis. Careful description is integral to process tracing (Collier, 2011), forming the basis for analyzing the processes under study. For example, I carefully describe CADs' interactions with the military. After providing "thick descriptions" of specific phenomena, I draw causal inferences connecting CADs' wartime experiences to their post-conflict paths.

Governance Strengthening: Insights From Llochegua

This section traces how militias' wartime relationships with the military and local communities shape their post-conflict paths. It focuses on the case of Llochegua, where the *comités de autodefensa* have transitioned into the post-conflict period and enhance rural governance. Figure 2 delineates the specific mechanisms or chain of events driving this outcome. Throughout, I contrast this case with Los Morochucos, where the CADs disbanded after the conflict.

Rooted in Community: The Organic Genesis of the 'Defensa Civil'

In 1978, the Shining Path began seizing territorial control in Llochegua.[29] In Llochegua's jungle heights (known as "*la parte alta*"), including the *centros poblados* of Corazón Pata, Periavente Baja, Puerto Amargura, and Villa Mejorada, insurgents forcefully entered homes at night, posing a menacing choice to residents: "Are you with us or not?" They resorted to theft, physical violence, or killings if met with resistance. Early in 1982, *Sendero Luminoso* controlled most of Llochegua's highland communities.[30] The state attempted to regain control through indiscriminate military assaults, with officers pressuring locals for information about the insurgents, often leading to illegal killings and disappearances.[31] Rural villagers, caught in the crossfire and accused of being informants (*soplones*) by both sides, lived in deep

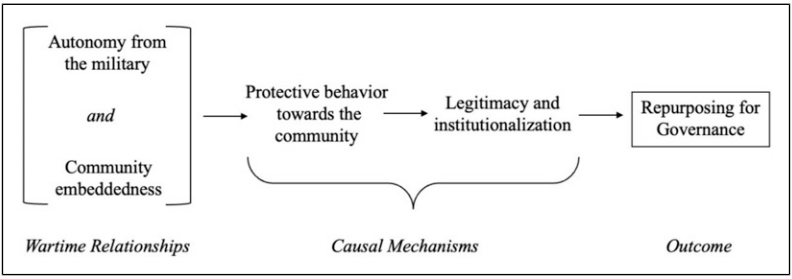

Figure 2. Mechanisms leading to militias' repurposing for governance.

uncertainty and fear. In this context, they had strong incentives to form grassroots militias.

By mid-1982, grassroots militias emerged in Llochegua, known locally as "civil defense" (*defensa civil*) or "*montoneras*."[32] These organizations operated informally and unofficially, without any legal status, and were entirely independent, lacking state coordination or oversight.[33] As Jorge Quispe, also known as "*Comando Choque*," a former militia leader, noted, "The local community came together autonomously and spontaneously, forming a third-party force to protect ourselves from the relentless abuses of both insurgents and the state."[34] Originating as a community-driven effort independent of the Armed Forces, Llochegua militias aimed at shielding the local community, in part, from state violence. Pedro Lette, another militia leader from the area, further explained that they recruited trusted members from the local population, such as their brothers, cousins, nephews, or close friends, to join in protecting their loved ones and the community from harm in the crossfire.[35]

In contrast, in Los Morochucos, militias were imposed by the military in 1986 to combat *Sendero Luminoso*.[36] Those who failed to assemble were considered Shining Path members or sympathizers and executed, making recruitment mandatory.[37] While the military drew militia members from the local populace, rural citizens did not organically unite to protect their community from civil war violence. Instead, militias in Los Morochucos were forcefully organized by the Armed Forces specifically to counter the Shining Path insurgency.[38]

Preserved Autonomy: Militia-Military Alliance against Sendero Luminoso

From 1982 to 1984, Llochegua militias served as "warning systems," guarding the district's perimeter with around fifteen men using coded signals like "dog barking" (*perro ladrando*) to alert the community in case of danger.[39] They relied on self-made weapons for defense, including spears, machetes, *cocobolos*, *hechizos*, and *hondas*.[40]

In 1984, Llochegua militias partnered with the Armed Forces to combat insurgents. Their leader, Vicente Kitazono, explained that militias could no longer remain caught in the crossfire between the state and insurgents, and that the Army' superior power and organization led them to seek their collaboration. After approaching military barracks, the militias registered community residents, marking safe zones to shield them from military attacks.[41] Under Lieutenant León's leadership, the Army and militia leaders engaged in collaborative decision-making, particularly regarding militia actions within counterinsurgency tactics.[42]

Crucially, this alliance did not curtail militias' operational autonomy. While patrols initially included both Army and militia members (known as

"mixed patrols"), as the conflict progressed, the militias continued conducting independent patrols.[43] Another indicator of their autonomy was the establishment of a separate headquarters, distinct from the military barracks. Between 1987 and 1988, militia leaders acquired vacant plots and constructed their own headquarters. This headquarters served as a multifunctional space for the organization, facilitating regular meetings, record-keeping, weapon storage, accommodations during rest periods between patrols, and the detention of insurgents.[44] On a daily basis, militia members gathered at their headquarters to coordinate activities independently, without Army involvement.

Conversely, in Los Morochucos, militias lacked operational autonomy. These militias were prohibited from patrolling on their own and had no independent headquarters.[45] The military controlled their operations, mandating regular meetings at the barracks to dictate their schedules. Punishments for non-compliance included public humiliation and physical abuse.[46]

Legitimacy Through Protection: Militias' Route to Institutionalization

From their early role as "alarm systems" (1982–1984) to proactive patrols after joining forces with the military (1984-onwards), Llochegua militias protected the local community from civil war violence. Initially, they defended residents from insurgent and state attacks by surveilling the district's entry points and signaling them to take cover when necessary. Over time, they also targeted Shining Path remnants through patrolling, leveraging their close familiarity with the rugged jungle terrain.[47]

Militias' autonomy from the Armed Forces, combined with their strong communal ties, significantly influenced their selective use of violence within the community, engaging in protective rather than predatory behavior. First, because Llochegua militias were not subjugated to the military, they could refrain from using indiscriminate violence against civilians following military orders, as occurred in Los Morochucos. Second, their deep familiarity with one another in the community—knowing where each neighbor lives, the locations of their small farms, and their family connections—instilled a profound sense of moral obligation to protect each other, as explained by Américo Ludeña, a central figure in militia formation and deployment in Llochegua. This embeddedness between militias and local community acted as a potent mechanism to deter the misuse of power within the organization, particularly among leaders or higher-ranking members (referred to as *comandos*). As Ludeña emphasized, "if you misused your power today, the community knows who you are and would either ostracize you, causing you to walk with your 'head down' in shame, or even take revenge against you." Moreover, the entire community, encompassing men and women above the age of twelve, participated in rotating patrol duties by shifts, ensuring that

everyone contributed to militia activities serving as lower-ranking members (*patrulleros de base*).[48]

Thanks to their protective conduct during the civil war, militias in Llochegua earned substantial social legitimacy and popular support, fostering a strong sense of belonging among militia members. Testimonies like "this organization was our life," "we were either patrolling or at the headquarters all day," "the *comités de autodefensa* was the difference between life or death," and "we became the most important organization in the district" were shared by both higher and lower-ranking members.[49] These accounts underscore the profound institutionalization experienced by militias through their members' identification with and commitment to the organization's values.

Among the local community, public officials, civil society leaders, and key informants, there was widespread agreement that the CADs significantly reduced uncertainty, fear, and overall violence in Llochegua.[50] Before their formation, Llochegua's community was caught in the crossfire between the Armed Forces and the Shining Path. However, after militias were established, local civil society leader Rebecca Paredes observed, "Life returned to the district, and we were able to resume a relatively normal way of life."[51] In Llochegua, militias are perceived as community-rooted actors who played a vital role in de-escalating violence and restoring peace.

In contrast, militias in Los Morochucos preyed on the local community. Coerced by military officers, militias resorted to widespread violence, committing crimes like robberies, cattle rustling (*abigeato*), and physical and psychological abuses.[52] Past communal narratives depict the organization as a repressive "extended arm" of the Armed Forces, exacerbating violence within the district. Celedonio Ludeña, a former lower-ranking militiaman from the district, remarked, "The state orchestrated militias to massacre the peasant society."[53] Dionisia Calderón, a local civil society leader, added that "the militiamen caused significant harm when the military used them, turning against their own community."[54] These sentiments were consistent not only among local public officials and civil society leaders but also among militia members themselves, who described the organization as "a curse," "a place of abuse," and "a means for the military to torment peasants."[55] This lack of legitimacy resulted in neither the community nor militia members showing any inclination to repurpose the CADs for alternative roles in the post-conflict era.

Legacies of Conflict: CADs' Adaptation and Persistence

In the mid-1990s, political violence in Peru began to subside, and the Shining Path became less of a threat.[56] As the official end of the conflict approached in 2000, a critical question arose: What should be done with the *comités de autodefensa*? In 2002, a meeting was held in Ayacucho's main military

headquarters (known as *Los Cabitos*), involving government officials, professionals from Lima (such as doctors and psychologists), and CAD leaders, including representatives from Llochegua. The main agenda was to discuss the possibility of disbanding the CADs in favor of "development committees" (*comités de desarrollo*).[57]

During the meeting, "Comandante Huayhuaco," a prominent CAD leader, removed his shirt to reveal numerous bullet wounds on his body. He declared, "These scars won't be erased by a 'development committee'." He further emphasized, "The *comités de autodefensa* will never die; we have protected our families and the community from death, prevented the rape of women, and even located 'disappeared' individuals." At that moment, other CAD leaders created noise by rattling the cartridges inside their guns, demonstrating their support for the organization's continuity.[58] CAD leaders unanimously agreed that if there was a desire to establish these new development committees, they should coexist alongside the *comités de autodefensa*, rather than replace them. These expressions and actions underscore the profound commitment and personal attachment that CAD members felt towards the organization, thereby facilitating its preservation.

Many of the key figures in the early days of Llochegua's CAD, such as Vicente Kitazono, Mauro Araujo, Grovi Soto, and Pedro Lette, assumed leadership roles in their late teens or early 20s.[59] Importantly, these leaders continued to rotate through various high-ranking positions in the post-conflict period, ensuring the organization's continuity.[60] Over time, their children, younger family members, and trusted neighbors also joined the CADs, reflecting an intergenerational and communal transmission of values and responsibilities that has both sustained and revitalized the organization's membership.

In the early 2000s, the post-conflict period in Llochegua saw the resurgence of various security threats, including *abigeato*, house burglaries, and street robberies. Faced with these challenges, the local community turned to the CADs for help. Community members would visit the homes of the organization's leaders or go directly to the CAD headquarters seeking assistance.[61] CADs' social legitimacy, earned through their protection of the community during the conflict, prompted local villagers to rely on them again. A local merchant, Rory Quintanilla, emphasized this sentiment by stating: "The CADs brought an end to the internal armed conflict. Now, we need them to address common delinquency (*delincuencia común*) and the everyday needs that arise in our community."[62] Nélida Aguirre, one of Llochegua's most prominent civil society leaders, reinforced this by saying, "The CADs are an organization created by the people and for the people. They always know how to serve us."[63] These testimonies highlight how militias' essential role in protecting rural citizens during the civil war earned them trust and a strong

sense of belonging in the community, facilitating their repurposing for post-conflict governance roles.

As in Llochegua, common delinquency also resurged in Los Morochucos after the civil war, with both districts lacking a strong state capable of providing effective governance. However, CAD members and the local community showed no interest in repurposing the organization post-conflict. Indeed, due to CADs' predatory conduct during the conflict, they welcomed their disbandment.[64] Alfredo Mendoza de la Cruz, a former military officer from Los Morochucos, revealed that by mid-1990s, although the CADs had not been officially dismantled, *they were inactive in practice*.[65] Militia members disengaged since they were no longer summoned by the military for patrols or other activities, indicating their involvement in the organization was solely due to military orders.[66] Local testimonies affirm that the CADs were formally disbanded in the early 2000s, mirroring their formation over a decade earlier. Military officials orchestrated this process, directing militia members to return home with their families and livestock.[67]

CADs' Governance Roles in Post-Civil War Llochegua

In post-war Llochegua, CADs play a multifaceted role in rural governance. Their established legitimacy during the civil war has positioned them as a significant political actor within the district, with local authorities and villagers seeking their assistance for various governmental tasks. CADs' contributions to governance include providing security, participating in policy design and implementation, engaging in political brokering in *centros poblados*, collaborating with judicial authorities, organizing community fundraisers, hosting social events, cooperating with civil society organizations, and managing health crises (e.g., COVID-19).

Initially, CADs informally addressed common crime on an ad hoc basis. Testimonies from CAD members and public officials suggest that around 2004-2005, these new security tasks were formalized through official contracts with the local government.[68] These contracts have been renewed annually since then.[69] In recognition of their contributions, the local government provides the organization with a monthly equivalent of 1000 Peruvian *soles* in-kind, mainly consisting of food supplies like rice, milk, fruits, vegetables, potatoes, and chicken.[70]

CAD' Internal Records (2017-2022) offer invaluable insights into the common delinquency issues they address, including apprehending suspects involved in thefts, intervening in domestic violence cases, and handling minor offenses.[71] In the realm of thefts, motorcycle robbery and cattle rustling are frequent occurrences.[72] Cases of domestic violence are often linked to husbands' alcohol consumption and mistreatment of their wives.[73] Minor offenses typically involve children referred to as "spoiled" (*malcriados*) who

display disrespect towards their parents,[74] as well as cases of marriage infidelity,[75] reflecting Llochegua's traditional values.

Until the establishment of a police station in 2017, CADs were the only security provider in Llochegua, compensating for the lack of a state security apparatus. They remain the primary security provider, with residents holding a more favorable view of the CADs compared to the police.[76] They find CADs more efficient, responsive, and community-oriented. Indeed, many households display CADs' logo stickers and contact numbers for direct communication in case of emergencies.[77] Honorato Cabezas, the local justice of peace (*juez de paz*), emphasized that CADs respond promptly at any hour, unlike the police, who are reluctant to venture out after 6 pm.[78] Police presence is confined to the urban area, leading rural communities underserved. Besides responding to immediate security threats, CADs conduct proactive patrols to deter criminal activities.[79]

Llochegua's Municipality Archives (2010-2022) reveal CADs' engagement multiple governance activities beyond security provision. They are integral members of the district's "leadership circle," alongside the mayor, district governor, justice of peace, and presidents of prominent civil society organizations.[80] Together, they design and implement local policies. For example, mayors have convened CADs to organize social initiatives, including street cleaning campaigns to promote a "hygienic culture" in the community.[81] They also participate in workshops addressing security and development issues such as traffic accidents and child malnutrition.[82] Additionally, they have contributed to symbolic governance initiatives by serving on juries to determine the district's logo[83] and anthem,[84] thus shaping the community's cultural identity.

At the *centro poblado* level, CADs representatives serve as political brokers, mediating disputes with the municipality.[85] Their earned respect and authority make them trusted intermediaries, channeling local demands to enhance governance. For example, they have requested a road-paving machine to prevent floods in Periavente Baja;[86] water tubes for drainage repairs in Villa Mejorada;[87] and assistance in addressing land usurpation in Puerto Amargura.[88]

Another facet of CADs' governance roles is supporting the local justice system by delivering trial notifications, ensuring legal documents reach their intended recipients. CADs personally deliver notifications, collect signatures, and return signed documents to the magistrate's court, performing administrative tasks in the absence of sufficient state resources. Additionally, they participate in control inspections of businesses, restaurants, and agricultural properties. For example, when inspecting a farming property to ensure protocol compliance,[89] the justice of peace coordinates with the CAD President via phone calls or WhatsApp. These inspections are typically informal and do not involve paperwork.

Moreover, CADs organize fundraising events (*colectas populares*) to aid community members facing health problems or financial hardships.[90] Mario Salinas, the organization's President, explained that they raise funds for essential medications, food, and housing items, complementing state and NGO efforts to improve community well-being.[91]

CADs also contribute to the community's social fabric by organizing events like soccer tournaments and civic parades to commemorate their anniversary. Every year, Llochegua's community gathers at the central square on the first weekend of August for these activities.[92] On Saturday, celebrations kick off with an all-day soccer tournament, followed by a traditional parade on Sunday morning. After the national anthem and raising of the Peruvian flag, speeches by the CAD President and mayor highlight CADs' historical significance in defeating the Shining Path and their continued importance in governance. The speeches conclude with three resounding cheers in Quechua and Spanish: "Long live the *comités de autodefensa*!" "Long live Llochegua!" "Long live Peru!"[93]

Another vital governance role that *comités de autodefensa* take on is assisting civil society organizations, such as the "Mothers' Club" (*Club de Madres*) and the "Parents Association" (*Asociación de Padres de Familia*), which rely on them due to limited state support. For example, CADs assist the *Club de Madres* by unloading weekly food deliveries to their soup kitchens (*comedores populares*).[94] They also collaborate with the *Asociación de Padres de Familia*, which oversees local education, to ensure safety at school events. This includes implementing measures like placing ropes to restrict vehicular traffic at the Pedro Ruiz Gallo school, adjacent to the CAD headquarters. On weekends, CADs secure the school premises, preventing unauthorized access.[95]

Finally, CADs played a crucial role in complementing government efforts to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. Civil society leaders and public officials remark on their essential role in enforcing quarantines, especially in *centros poblados* with minimal state presence.[96] They controlled vehicular movement and worked alongside local authorities to distribute food and medical supplies. Former district mayor Adrián Gotzme la Fuente (2019–2022) emphasized CADs' effectiveness in containing the virus, praising their commitment during this crisis.[97]

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper has examined the varied trajectories that militias, often overlooked yet crucial actors in civil wars, can follow in the aftermath of violent conflicts. It advances a novel theoretical framework that explains how wartime dynamics impact militias' post-conflict pathways. Developed through inductive theory-building, the framework focuses on two critical wartime relationships:

(i) militia-military (autonomy vs. subjugation) and (ii) militia-community (embedded vs. disembedded) relations. The interplay of these factors leads to three distinct post-conflict paths for militias: *governance strengthening*, *governance weakening*, and *disbandment*. The paper focuses on the governance strengthening path, frequently disregarded in prevailing narratives concerning militias' post conflict trajectories.

Through the case of Llochegua, I have shown that militias can bolster post-conflict rural governance when they preserve autonomy from the military and are embedded within their local community during civil wars. Strong communal ties, along with autonomy from the Armed Forces, prompt militias to protect the local community. This earns them substantial social legitimacy and facilitates their institutionalization, where militia and community members come to value the organization for its intrinsic worth rather than its original purpose. As a result, they advocate for the persistence of militias, adapting them to strengthen rural governance in post-conflict periods.

In contrast, militias can weaken post-conflict rural governance when they maintain autonomy from the military but are disembedded from local communities during civil wars. The combination of autonomy from the Armed Forces and weak community ties allows militias to act without restraint, leading to predatory behavior that may persist into post-conflict environments, yielding unfavorable governance outcomes.

Lastly, as evidenced in Los Morochucos, militias subjugated by the military typically disband after civil wars, regardless of their degree of community embeddedness. Military officers tend to repress these militia members and force them to victimize civilians, making militias illegitimate actors in the eyes of the community. Consequently, neither militia members nor local villagers seek to repurpose these organizations, leading to their post-conflict disbandment.

Although my inductive theory-building is rooted in the Peruvian case, it aims for broader generalizability. Thus, investigating whether my theoretical framework can "travel" beyond Peru is a fruitful avenue of research. To ensure clarity and rigor in this pursuit, it is essential to define the framework's scope conditions, which set the boundaries of its applicability. The overarching "macro scope" condition is *rural settings with weak state presence*, as opposed to urban areas where state authority is typically stronger. This condition is central to understanding the paper's primary outcome: militias' post-conflict contributions to governance by addressing gaps left by absent or inadequate state institutions. Since civil wars predominantly occur in rural areas historically neglected by the state (Blattman & Miguel, 2010), and militias frequently arise in precisely these settings, this scope condition provides a strong foundation for applying the framework to cases beyond Peru.

In addition to the "macro scope" condition, two *specific* scope conditions further refine the framework's generalizability. First, the framework assumes a

relatively cohesive local community, not divided by significant socio-economic or ethnic cleavages that could lead to severe fragmentation. This condition is critical because fragmentation may compel militias to align with specific segments of the population, undermining their capacity to maintain broad-based ties to the community. For example, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia were formed by local elites to protect resources like cattle, frequently to the detriment of non-elite groups. While no community is entirely free from divisions, the framework applies where societal cleavages do not decisively shape militia-community relations. Even in regions with moderate socio-economic or ethnic fragmentation, the theory holds as long as militias are embedded in and serve the interests of the community at large. However, in cases of acute fragmentation—such as entrenched ethnic or class divides—militias may protect one segment of the population while preying on others, complicating the mechanisms of embeddedness explored in this paper.

Second, the framework assumes that the military possesses both the capacity and intent to supervise the militias they create in a "top-down" manner during civil war, orchestrating their behavior and minimizing their operational autonomy. This assumption is critical because tight state control over militias underpins the post-conflict disbandment pathway, which involves the military's withdrawal of logistical and material support from militias and the termination of their conflict-specific repressive roles. While this assumption holds in many cases, as states often seek to mitigate the risks of militia autonomy, Thomson and Pankhurst (2022) observe that state-militia relationships frequently fall along a spectrum. For instance, military forces might intentionally maintain detachment to achieve plausible deniability for militias' violent actions or, alternatively, lack the capacity to exert full control over militias, leading to de facto autonomy. In such contexts, where the military is either unwilling or unable to tightly supervise militias, post-conflict disbandment may not occur. Instead, militias may persist, taking on alternative roles such as engaging in organized crime or providing localized security services. My framework offers guidance for explaining varied scenarios such as these: if militias do not disband, the nature of their relationships with local communities should have a pivotal impact on their post-conflict trajectories and, in turn, on their impact on rural governance.

This paper contributes to the study of the historical legacies of violence (Balcells, 2012; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017; Weintraub et al., 2015). While civil wars' destructive consequences across political, socio-economic, and public health domains are well-documented (Chen et al., 2007; Collier et al., 2003; Ghobarah et al., 2003), studies have also identified some favorable long-term outcomes of violent conflict, including increased prosocial behavior, democratic promotion, and income redistribution (Blattman, 2009; Gilligan et al., 2014; Wood, 2003, 2008). By scrutinizing militias' post-conflict paths, this paper adds to both research traditions. Depending on their wartime relations

with the military and local communities, militias can either threaten post-conflict rural governance, exacerbating harmful legacies, or enhance governance and benefit marginalized populations, fostering positive long-term outcomes.

The paper also contributes to theories of institutional change (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009) and critical junctures (Collier & Munck, 2022) by illustrating their applicability to real-world phenomena. It shows how militias, initially created for specific wartime purposes, can adapt their goals to survive in new environments. Through a compelling case of institutional conversion (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009), militias can shift from counterinsurgency roles during civil wars to governance activities post-conflict. Additionally, it demonstrates how militias' wartime state-society relations can operate as historical critical junctures, shaping "big" political developments such as the strengthening or weakening of governance in the long run.

Furthermore, this paper opens new avenues for future research on the comparative politics of civil war, particularly regarding the impact of militias on post-conflict societies. Militias' post-conflict governance roles resonate with a broader array of instances where non-state actors provide public goods and services in rural areas (Cammett & MacLean, 2014). For example, traditional rulers or "chiefs" across Africa collect taxes, allocate land, and, akin to CADs in present-day Llochegua, operate as "development brokers" (Baldwin, 2016; Logan, 2013). Integrating these non-state actors within a unified framework of governance providers could yield valuable insights into rural peripheries worldwide.

Future studies should consider not only historical wartime causes but also contemporary factors that may shape militias' life cycles. Current security threats, shifts in organizational leadership, and domestic or foreign government policies can also affect militia pathways after civil wars. While this paper has advanced a helpful framework for understanding long-term patterns in militia trajectories, it is not deterministic—these patterns remain susceptible to change. Therefore, future comparative research could explore how present-day factors may alter militia trajectories.

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Data Availability Statement

Due to the sensitive nature of the original qualitative data–drawn from interviews, participant observation (including field notes), and informal archives–these materials are not publicly available.Anonymized excerpts may be shared upon request, subject to ethical considerations. Formal archives used in this research are publicly available located in Lima and Ayacucho, Peru.

Notes

1. Understood as "extended armed conflicts within a recognized sovereign state between insurgent and state forces," civil wars have become prevalent, persistent, prone to recurrence, and highly lethal (Blattman & Miguel, 2010).
2. For similar definitions of militias, see Carey et al. (2013) or Clayton and Thomson (2016).
3. Militia groups could also emerge in interstate wars and outside armed conflict; however, this paper focuses on militias during and after civil wars.
4. I focus on the role of the Armed Forces in assessing militia-state relations because they frequently serve as the primary state agency responsible for restoring order during civil wars.
5. In separate work, I explore how different wartime zones (insurgent strongholds, disputed areas, and government strongholds) impact militia-military and militia-community relations during civil wars. However, this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.
6. Henceforth, "CVR." Peru's native languages include Quechua (primarily), Aymara, and Ashaninka, among others.
7. Report on Comités de Autodefensa (code SCO_345_09; pp. 48–52). *Archivo Central de la CVR*, *Defensoría del Pueblo*, Lima, Perú.
8. Bateson (2013) and Forney (2015) advance similar approaches to studying militias in, respectively, Guatemala and Sierra Leone.

9. As Yom puts it (2015, p. 617), "qualitative scholars conducting immersive fieldwork frequently revise their causal propositions after discarding old assumptions and uncovering new mechanisms from interviews and archives".
10. These categories are Weberian "ideal types." While militias may not be entirely subjugated to or autonomous from the military in every aspect, this distinction is useful because it illuminates different real-world patterns.
11. Suchman (1995, p. 574) defines *social legitimacy* as a "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions".
12. While exceptions like The Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq and the Popular Defence Forces in Sudan exist, state-orchestrated militias generally dissolve once the fighting stops, as documented in the Pro-Government Militias (PGM) guidebook. This guidebook provides information on pro-government militias worldwide from 1981 to 2014, including their origins, purposes, and termination.
13. Originally grassroots militias may also become subjugated to the Armed Forces during the conflict (Jentzsch et al., 2015).
14. The Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement emerged as another left-wing guerrilla that launched war against the Peruvian state in 1984 (Soifer & Vergara, 2019).
15. Compendio de Legislación para Víctimas del Terrorismo (2002). LUM's documentation and research center, Lima, Peru.
16. *Caretas* (November 22, 1982); *Oiga* (March 27, 1985).
17. *Registro Nacional de Municipalidades* (RENAMU) - *Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática* (INEI), 2019.
18. Soifer (2020, p. 11) defines the *shadow case study* as "a component of small-N research that entails the examination of an ancillary or peripheral case, drawing inference from the within-case analysis of that case to shed light on the generality of claims most centrally evaluated in the core case".
19. From higher to lower, Peru's subnational levels of government are: departments, provinces, districts, *centros poblados*, and peasant communities. Llochegua was not a district during the conflict period; it became a district in 2011. However, the absence of formal administrative status had little bearing on the wartime relationships of interest. The military, not civilian authorities, served as the primary state actor in conflict zones (Soifer & Vergara, 2019).
20. Interviews with Adrián Gotzme La Fuente (August 10, 2022), former mayor of Llochegua (2019–2022); Mario Salinas (October 19, 2022), President of Llochegua CAD; Herbert Graciano (October 19, 2022), Vice-president of Llochegua CAD; Alfredo Mendoza de la Cruz (September 22, 2022), ex-military official from Los Morochucos; and Buenaventura de la Cruz Altamirano (September 23, 2022), former mayor of Los Morochucos (1989–1993).
21. Even if geographic variation influences militias' durability in Llochegua, it fails to account for the nature of this durability, that is, why militias transformed into

governance-enhancing actors rather than, for instance, either remaining solely as security providers or undermining governance.

22. Collier (2011, p. 823) defines *process tracing* as the "systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator".
23. Following Falleti and Mahoney (2015), I understand *causal mechanisms* as a temporal sequence of events that, divided into different stages, produce a specific result.
24. The fieldwork was approved by Brown University's Institutional Review Board (Protocol #3239).
25. A *CPO* is "an insight or piece of data that provides information about context, process, or mechanism, and that contributes distinctive leverage in causal inference" (Mahoney, 2010, p. 124).
26. These documents consist of specialized reports on the *comités de autodefensa*. They provide information about their legal framework, testimonies from conflict victims, and reflections from specialists on their post-conflict future.
27. These archives include mayor resolutions, single and multiple correspondence, cooperation agreements, and petitions, among other documents.
28. Informal archives have proven useful sources for historical data in comparative politics, especially when studying informal places where government data is scant or absent (Auerbach, 2018).
29. Interviews with Pedro Lette (August 10, 2022), CAD leader from Llochegua; Juan Chimayco (October 21, 2022), ex-CAD member of Llochegua; and A. Gotzme La Fuente.
30. Interview with Grovi Soto (August 13, 2022), CAD leader of Llochegua.
31. Interview with Sergio Martínez (pseudonym) (June 26, 2022), ex-CAD leader from the area.
32. Report on *Comités de Autodefensa* (code SCO_345_09; p. 4).
33. Interviews with S. Martínez and G. Soto.
34. Interview with Jorge Quispe (June 30, 2022), CAD leader from the area during the conflict.
35. Interview with P. Lette.
36. Interview with A. Mendoza de la Cruz.
37. Interview with B. de la Cruz Altamirano.
38. Interview with Jorge Sáez (June 22, 2022), key informant. These arms are examples of self-made weapons typical of the region.
39. In addition to the main militia organization in Llochegua district, smaller militia groups also emerged organically within each *centro poblado*, at a smaller territorial scale.
40. Interview with Vicente Kitazono (August 7, 2022), CAD leader from Llochegua.
41. Interview with V. Kitazono.

42. While the alliance was generally collaborative, tensions arose as militias requested armament—granted only gradually—and sought military personnel to assist with operations in neighboring areas. Interviews with P. Lette and G. Soto.
43. Interview with J. Chimayco.
44. Interviews with Mauro Araujo (July 25, 2022), CAD leader from Llochegua; and V. Kitazono.
45. Interview with A. Mendoza de la Cruz.
46. Interview with J. Sáez.
47. *Caretas* (February 11, 1985).
48. The CAD was not a monolithic organization. The *comandos* organized and led patrols and guard posts, ensuring effective coverage of key areas and maintaining operational oversight. Interview with A. Gotzme la Fuente.
49. Interviews with P. Lette; G. Soto; and J. Chimayco.
50. Interview with Robert Huamán (August 8, 2022), public official; Rebecca Paredes (August 8, 2022), civil society leader; and Jaime Pacheco (October 14, 2022), key informant. While oral testimonies for reconstructing historical accounts can be shaped by selective memory or the passage of time, their remarkable consistency across diverse first-hand actors and witnesses of the conflict lends credibility to these findings.
51. Interview with R. Paredes. Mrs. Paredes is the current President of the "Mothers' Club," an NGO dedicated to assisting the district's most vulnerable people.
52. Interview with J. Sáez.
53. Interview with Celedonio Ludeña (September 18, 2022), ex-CAD member from Los Morochucos.
54. Interview with Dionisia Calderón (September 19, 2022), civil society leader of Los Morochucos. Mrs. Calderón is the leader of an NGO that fights against the forced sterilization of women.
55. Interviews with Amador Orosco (September 24, 2022), former lower-ranking militiaman from Los Morochucos; and C. Ludeña.
56. Report on *Comités de Autodefensa*, (code SCO_345_09; p. 7).
57. Interview with Américo Ludeña (October 20, 2022), CAD leader from Llochegua in the early 2000s.
58. Interview with A. Ludeña.
59. Other notable historical CAD leaders from the district include Moisés Pérez, Héctor Talavera, Raúl Cárdenas, and Jaime Huarcaya. Interviews with V. Kitazono and M. Araujo.
60. Interviews revealed that Vicente Kitazono served as CAD President from 2000 to 2003; Pedro Lette was treasurer from 2007 to 2010 and Vice-president from 2010 to 2013; Grovi Soto succeeded him as Vice-president from 2014 to 2017; and Mauro Araujo rotated between commander and sub-commander from 2000 to 2010.
61. Interview with Ronald Gamaniel (August 15, 2022), civil society leader from Llochegua.

62. Interview with Rory Quintanilla (August 15, 2022), merchant from Llochegua.
63. Interview with Nélida Aguirre (August 9, 2022), civil society leader from Llochegua. Mrs. Aguirre serves as the President of the *Asociación de Padres de Familia*, an NGO responsible for supervising education in the district.
64. Interviews with Javier Romero (June 23, 2022) and Marcial Berrocal (September 20, 2022), public officials from Los Morochucos.
65. Interview with A. Mendoza de la Cruz.
66. Interviews with Marcelino Arango de la Cruz, former lower-ranking militiaman from Los Morochucos; C. Ludeña; and A. Orosco.
67. Interviews with Marcelino Hinostroza (June 25, 2022) and José Coronel (June 30, 2022), key informants.
68. Interviews with Maribel Salinas (August 17, 2022), public official; P. Lette; and A. Gotzme la Fuente.
69. Archival records from the municipality indicate that such contracts have been consistently renewed since 2010. There are no municipal archives available before 2010. Due to a lack of storage space, the municipality disposed of records.
70. *Convenio de Cooperación Interinstitucional entre la Municipalidad Distrital de Llochegua y el Comité de Autodefensa*. Llochegua's Municipality Archives (2010–2022).
71. This information, spanning from 2017 to 2022, has not been digitized or systematically organized, making it a prime example of an informal archive (Auerbach, 2018). The CAD keeps these records for internal documentation and does not intend to make them publicly accessible. I was granted access to these documents after building rapport with organization leaders over several weeks.
72. Intervention Acts (*Actas de Intervención*), Llochegua's CAD Internal Records. Some specific dates when these thefts occurred include July 23, 2018; November 18, 2018; September 24, 2021; and January 13, 2022.
73. *Actas de Intervención*. Dates of these registered incidents include November 28, 2021; April 29, 2022; and May 20, 2022, among others.
74. Commitment Acts (*Actas de Compromiso*), Llochegua's CAD Internal Records. These incidents highlight CADs' authority within the district, as parents turn to them for guidance in raising their children.
75. *Actas de Compromiso*. Dates include January 26 and 30, 2022; March 13, 2022; and August 5, 2022, among others.
76. All public officials, civil society leaders, and key informants from Llochegua agreed on this point.
77. Participant observation in the field (August 12, 2022). Lunch with the organization's leaders.
78. Interview with Honorato Cabezas (August 12, 2022), *juez de paz* (top judicial authority) of Llochegua.
79. Interview with H. Graciano. Participant observation in the field (August 21, 2022). "Urgent" meeting at the Central CAD headquarters.

80. Specifically, representatives from the *Club de Madres* and the Glass of Milk Program (*Programa Vaso de Leche*).
81. Multiple Correspondence (*Oficios Múltiples*), Llochegua's Municipality Archives. Multi-sectoral meetings on July 12, 2010, and September 14, 2012, are two instances where this activity was discussed.
82. *Oficios Múltiples*. Specific instances of these workshops occurred on June 27, 2013, and October 2, 2018.
83. *Oficio Multiple* #53 (September 2, 2010). The official slogan of Llochegua district, "*Cuna de la Pacificación*" (literally, "cradle of pacification"), highlights the district's pivotal role, particularly that of the CADs, in bringing the civil war to an end.
84. Mayoral Resolution (*Resolución de Alcaldía)* #237 (October 1, 2012). Llochegua's Municipality Archives.
85. Participant observation in the field (October 22, 2022). Informal conversations with V. Kitazono while collecting crops.
86. Petition to the Municipality (*Petición a la Municipalidad*) (March 5, 2012). Llochegua's municipal archives.
87. *Petición a la Municipalidad* (March 9, 2014).
88. *Petición a la Municipalidad* (December 17, 2015).
89. Interview with Mauro Cubas (August 15, 2022), public official.
90. Participant observation in the field (August 6-7, 2022). CADs' anniversary.
91. Interview with M. Salinas.
92. Archival records from the municipality show that the parade has occurred uninterruptedly since 2010.
93. Participant observation in the field (August 6-7, 2022).
94. Interview with R. Paredes. Participant observation in the field (August 13, 2022).
95. Interview with N. Aguirre.
96. Interviews with N. Aguirre, R. Paredes; M. Salinas; and M. Cubas.
97. Interview with A. Gotzme la Fuente.

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