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Varieties of insecurity and rebel–civilian ties across time

Evidence from post-war Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Literature on rebel governance has examined various ways in which rebels engage with civilians, build informal governing institutions, and exert social control during civil war. When rebels win, how does rebel governance affect post-war politics? This paper explores how varieties of insecurity that the victor faces after war—external threat, internal challengers, or electoral politics—explain the role of rebel–civilian ties in helping the new ruling party to successfully consolidate power. I examine forty years of rebel government rule in Zimbabwe, where the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriot Front (ZANU-PF) faced different threats at different points in time from its wartime rivals, ex-combatants, and opposition parties. ZANU-PF's strategies to eliminate these threats illustrate how rebel governance and rebel–civilian ties affect post-war politics differently based on ruling party constraints.

Key words: rebel victory, rebel governance, conflict legacies, rebel-to-party transition, Zimbabwe, process tracing

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1   Introduction

Existing research has examined how rebels govern across different regions, both within and across countries, highlighting how they interact with civilians, create informal governing structures, and maintain social control during conflicts (Arjona 2016; Mampilly 2012; Stewart 2018; Huang 2016; Cunningham et al. 2021; Revkin 2021). Only more recently have scholars have begun to explore the *post-war implications* of rebel governance, both in war's immediate aftermath (Liu 2024b; Martin 2021; Thaler 2018) and in the long term (Liu 2024a; Loyle and Onder 2024; Haass and Ottmann 2022). Notwithstanding this more recent body of work, understanding the aftermath of these conflicts, and in particular linking its short term effects to longer term legacies, remain critical yet understudied dimensions of rebel governance.

This paper examines how organized ties with civilian supporters on the ground influence post-war politics when rebels win control of the state. I argue that the relationship between organized civilian supporters and a ruling party after war depends in major part on the *varieties of insecurity* that the rebel victor faces as the new ruling party, and the governance challenges that potentially threaten their hold over power. Further, rebel victors are likely to face multiple instances of insecurity across time. I investigate three distinct scenarios which commonly affect the stability of a ruler's hold over power. First, rebel victors may confront existential insecurity stemming from lingering wartime rivals, meaning that they face an *external* challenge in the form of a counter-revolution or a return to civil war. This is particularly common across post-war contexts, where various armed factions seek to regroup and return to resume conflict (Walter 2004; Mason et al. 2011). Second, rebel victors potentially face *internal* challenge from splits within the rebel government or ruling coalition, threatening intra-party cohesion. These splits may emerge either between the political and military wings of the movement (Martin 2022; Meng and Paine 2022), or between different political factions in the government that have different tastes for ideology, policy, and reform (Atlas and Licklider 1999; Daly 2014; Roeder 2005). Third, the primary challenge to the rebel victor may be *electoral* in nature: the victorious rebel party faces no existential threat in the form of violent overthrow, but may fear being voted out of power by the opposition party's civilian base (Haass and Ottmann 2022; Liu 2024a).

The type of challenge with which the rebel victor is most acutely concerned will condition how rebel governance and rebel–civilian ties shape the post-war political landscape at specific points in time. In addition, rebel victors' strategies with respect to their organized civilian base may change across time as new forms of challenge take primacy within domestic politics. In instances where victors grapple with existential insecurity from external rivals, rebel–civilian ties should serve as one integral component of the rebel victor's broader statebuilding strategy to exert control, stabilize the state, and consolidate power (Liu 2022). In such cases, rebel–

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civilian ties in victor strongholds may be used to tamp down demands for greater redistribution from the state, freeing up the ruling party to concentrate its resources on insecure regions. Alternatively, where internal party disagreements may weaken party cohesion, the ruling should may use the strength of rebel–civilian ties between communities and specific former commanders as a heuristic for selecting strategically optimal individuals for cooptation, thereby reducing coup threats and strengthening the ruling party overall (Meng and Paine 2022). Finally, where the victor's primary concern is electoral insecurity, rebel–civilian ties—along with rebel institutions and informal structures—may be repurposed as efficient party brokers, offering a cost-effective means of maintaining control without resorting to broader statebuilding initiatives (Liu 2024a; Haass and Ottmann 2022).

I illustrate and substantiate these arguments through a comprehensive examination of four decades of rebel victor rule in Zimbabwe after the end of the Zimbabwe Liberation War in 1979. During the Liberation War, two anti-colonial rebel parties—the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)—fought for the country's independence from the eastern and western borders of the country, respectively. During this time, both engaged in rebel governance and formed significant rebel–civilian ties within areas that they operated; however, ZANU's mass mobilization efforts across Zimbabwe's rural regions using Maoist tactics proved to be especially effective in organizing civilians across different communities and galvanizing them to aid the war effort. Where ZANU succeeded in implementing these strategies, its rebel governance structures—from local party cells (village committees), to groups of youth collaborators (mujibas), to the politicization of traditional community events (pungwes)—were useful not only during war for exerting control over the broader civilian population, but also was socialized and institutionalized into political processes after war in a variety of ways.

Following Zimbabwe's independence in 1979, ZANU emerged as victorious during its first post-war elections in 1980 under the party name ZANU-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). The party has subsequently won control of the government in every election since: first under wartime leader Robert Mugabe as president, and then more recently under Emmerson Mnangagwa, a former ZANU combatant and Mugabe's long-time ally. Throughout its post-war rule, the ruling party has faced varying threats that shifted over time, ranging from electoral uncertainties during election periods, to existential challenges posed by wartime rivals, to internal party concerns posed by former liberation war veterans who demanded greater compensation for their wartime sacrifices. Across each of these forms of insecurity, ZANU's ties to its civilians shaped the nature of politics and policymaking in a variety of ways. Ultimately, both the nature of politics—shaped by rebel governance strategies—and the expansion of various rebel institutions themselves come together to help explain the political party's longterm hold over Zimbabwean politics.

By analysing the historical trajectory of rebel governance and the evolving nature of rebel–civilian ties across different regions in Zimbabwe, this paper aims to provide one account of how these factors intricately shape post-war politics based on the security and electoral constraints that the ruling party faced. It contributes to a broader body of literature on rebel politicization and organizational structures during war (Wood 2008; Arjona 2016; Mampilly 2012; Stewart 2021) and how such wartime processes affects post-war effects politics, state capacity, and party-building (Thaler 2018; Huang 2016; Martin 2022; Liu 2022, 2024b; Schwartz 2020). Particularly where rebels have had success in organizing civilians (Wood 2000), exerting social control (Sánchez De La Sierra 2020; Balcells 2011), and engaging in service provision (Revkin 2021; Stewart 2018), such activities are likely to have substantial post-war effects on politics and the organization of the state. This ought to be especially true in cases of rebel victory (Lyons 2016; Meng and Paine 2022; Daly 2022; Liu 2024a), as the revolutionary regime durability literature has also theorized (Levitsky and Way 2022; Lachapelle et al. 2020); however, this chapter contends that such durability is achieved is explained not only through elite-level politics but also the organization of pro- and anti-government forces at a subnational level (Liu 2022). This organizational capacity, which connects the party to community-level affairs, speak in particular to literature on clientelism through community and extra-party ties in new or developing democracies in post-conflict states (Haass and Ottmann 2022; Taylor et al. 2017; Bowles et al. 2020).

2   Theory

A large literature has explored how armed groups govern during war—balancing coercion with public goods provision—by forming ties with civilians (Martin 2021; Liu 2022) and establishing parallel institutions to exert control over local communities (Arjona 2016; Breslawski 2021; Mampilly and Stewart 2021; Loyle et al. 2023).[1] While these costly governing strategies may not increase the likelihood of rebel victory, they often reflect rebel group strategies for demonstrating state-building and governance capacity (Stewart 2018, 2021).

Rebel governance strategies vary, but not all persist after rebels gain power post-war (Kasfir 2024). Rather, due to continued insecurity post-war, rebel victors are more likely to rely on the coercive elements of their wartime rule to continue to retain control once they have captured power (Liu 2024a). I focus specifically on the wartime ties with civilians as a major building block for successful rebel governance, and explore how different *varieties of insecurity* may reactivate these ties for the continuation of post-war social control. In this section, I first describe the varieties of insecurity that rebel victors may face once in power, as well as the timing

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[1] While initial research suggested the importance of *territorial* control (Kalyvas 2006), increasingly scholars argue for the role of *social* control for successful rebel governance (Liu 2024b).

of such insecurity in the post-war landscape. I then outline predictions for how rebel victors leverage their wartime ties in rebel-governed areas for exerting control at a national level after war.

2.1 Varieties of insecurity

Following rebel victory, whether through a military victory or through a political (electoral) victory, rebel groups come into power to form the new post-war government. The government may be ruled entirely by a single rebel party, such as in Angola, Uganda, Eritrea, and Rwanda; or, it may be ruled through a nominal coalition of rebel groups where one is the clear dominant victor, such as in Zimbabwe or South Africa. Regardless of the structure of the new government however, threats to the rebel victors' position in power are not eliminated simply by winning war and political control—they continue to face various major threats to their hold over power due to the polarized and fragile nature of the post-war peace. In short, beyond various forms of low-level violence that remain from war or emerge from new sources (Bara et al. 2021),[2] rebel victors must also contend with major challenges that—if managed poorly—may result in their overthrow (Mason et al. 2011).

I explore three major forms of insecurity that threaten rebel victors' rule: (1) violence from external rivals, (2) violence internal divisions, and (3) peaceful transfer of power due to electoral politics. While this is certainly not an exhaustive list of threats to the rebel victors' consolidation of power—e.g. interstate warfare, such as the Eritrean-Ethiopian War, is also a major form of insecurity not explored fully here—these three forms of insecurity are sufficiently broad to apply to a wide range of challenges to incumbent power across states.

First, violence from *external rivals*, and specifically from counter-rebellions or other armed groups discontent with the rebel victor's new position in power, poses an existential threat to the new regime's survival. This is particularly likely to happen shortly after the end of civil war, where the risk of return to outright war in the fragile post-war context is already high (Walter 2004; Call 2012). While rebel victories tend to remain more stable in the long run (Mason et al. 2011; Toft 2010; Meng and Paine 2022), they too are susceptible to civil war recurrence as they face violent challenges from ex-government forces, from other wartime rivals where more than one armed group contested for the state, or even from newly created armed groups dissatisfied with the rebel regime's ascent to power.

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[2] It should be noted that other forms of violence are likely to exist in tandem with external and internal threats, including criminal, militia, or communal violence occurring in the post-war landscape. However, while such violence weakens the state and state capacity, in most cases they do not pose outright threats to the rebel victor's position in power.

The threat of civil war recurrence is a major cause of concern for rebel victories: as Liu (2024b) finds, 75% of the rebel victories (15 of 20) in sub-Saharan Africa faced violent rivals within two years of coming into power. These come in various forms, and often within the same country. Take, for example, the National Resistance Movement (NRM)'s rebel victory in 1986. Not only did the former government's forces become armed challengers against the new NRM government, but new rebel groups emerged from ex-government-supporting regions of rural Uganda as the new government was still working to consolidate control over the state (Lewis 2020). Rebel victors in Rwanda, Angola, and Liberia faced similar concerns as they continued to contend with rival armed groups that they had technically defeated to end the civil war. The possibility of violent overthrow is problematic for rebel regimes in other continents as well, including cases such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, among others.

Beyond civil war recurrence, rebel victors are also threatened by challenges from within their own organization: like all governments and ruling coalitions, rebel victors are vulnerable to party splits and coups. Despite seizing power, *internal* factionalization can hinder the consolidation of authority and introduce intra-party weakness—particularly dangerous when other forms of external challenges are also taking place concurrently. To be clear, the existing literature has found that rebel victors are particularly resistant to internal splits in comparison to other post-war governments, for various reasons. Levitsky and Way (2022) and Lyons (2016), for example, point to ideological or organizational cohesion and shared experiences during war as being instrumental for keeping ex-rebel governments cohesive after war; Meng and Paine (2022) argue that rebel victors are adept at powersharing between the civilian and military wings, resulting in a cohesive elite alliance between the political party and the defense sector.

Despite rebel victors' broader successes at minimizing the likelihood of intra-party challenges, these challenges still occur with some frequency. For example, Martin (2022) finds that militaries where commanders do not sustain strong ties to particular communities outside of the rebel movement are more likely to remain loyal to the political party, while those with strong ties have greater opportunities to defect. Variation across victorious groups is also implicit in Levitsky and Way's (2022) analysis of why some revolutions are more durable than others. Notably, unlike civil war recurrence—which tends to happen quickly after war has ended—internal threats often take longer to manifest (see Liu 2024b), possibly for several reasons. First, and particularly where movements are cohesive during war, discontent from within the party may take longer to manifest as policy decisions are made and implemented. For example, discontent ex-combatants in Zimbabwe only began to threaten violence against the ruling party over a decade after independence, large due to unkept wartime promises. Alternatively, factions within the party may be more likely to appear only once the ruling party is weakened

by other challenges—such as in the case of Charles Taylor's presidency following the First Liberian Civil War.

Finally, rebel victors may be threatened electorally: even if they have consolidated power by eliminating potential armed rivals, and have sustained organizational cohesion from within, they may still be susceptible to being voted out of power. Both the conflict termination and reconstruction processes often involves setting up elections for democratic and institutional reform (Lyons 2004; Sisk 2009; Matanock 2017). These may be an integral part of peace agreement provisions, such as in Burundi or South Africa; or they may be set up after conflict termination by the ruling party, such as in Uganda or Rwanda. Rebel victors often have an incentive to comply with, or set up new, electoral institutions for strategic reasons such as democratizing while strong to increase domestic and international support, address intra-party factions, or attracting greater foreign aid from donors (Riedl et al. 2020).

Rebel victors are often stronger than their opponents at the outset of conflict termination, particularly as people are more likely vote for parties that are militarily the strongest (Daly 2022). Yet, even strong ruling parties that enjoy significant popular support are susceptible to electoral defeat down the line (Riedl et al. 2020). The African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa is the most recent example of this: the anti-apartheid party sustained dominance at the polls for three decades before eventually losing its electoral majority during the 2024 elections due to popular discontent over government performance. To guard against losing power at the polls, ruling rebel parties are more likely to become competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way 2010): they weaken opposition parties, cultivate fear among constituents, and hold elections on uneven playing fields to prevent being ousted through electoral processes (Young 2019; Liu 2024a; van Baalen 2024).

2.2 Rebel–civilian ties under different forms of insecurity

Through rebel governance, rebel groups build locally-embedded social networks (i.e. rebel–civilian ties) and establish informal institutions to exert social control. Once a rebel group comes into power, these networks and institutions may be mobilized in different ways, depending not just on the *threats* that the new government faces but also on *where* they were able to successfully govern during war. Where rebel governance was well-established, their local ties and governing institutions are likely to be stronger. However, in regions where their wartime governing projects were incomplete or where the population resisted rebel control, these rebel–civilian ties are weaker or may not exist at all. Wartime ties offer different resources for postwar governance, allowing the new government to adapt to the types of insecurity it encounters. In other words, in managing dissent within the country, rebel–civilian ties play a dual role: providing a means of controlling populations outside of its strongholds while also helping to address internal tensions from within supportive populations.

As previously explained, the rebel victor may predominantly face violent threats from *external rivals* once coming into power which, if left unmanaged, is likely to expand into a return to civil war. These threats are likely to emerge in rival territory—where rivals are more embedded among their own supporters and can therefore most easily galvanize for support to resume conflict (Liu 2022). To suppress a potential counter-rebellion and contain conflict, the rebel victor should prioritize security and military operations in rival-held areas. However, overcommitting resources to these efforts creates a dilemma. Neglecting other parts of the state could increase civilian grievances, as they may expect investments in development. This dissatisfaction could bolster political support for the counter-rebellion. Then, if military operations cannot contain rivals quickly, the threat of civil war may spread beyond rival territory, especially if civilian discontent is already high.

To minimize is possibility, the rebel victors may rely on their wartime civilian ties in two ways: for *organization* and for *politicization*. First, a rebel victor may leverage its greater wartime organizational capacity to mobilize collective action for development and security—a core component of rebel governance during war. Just as rebel groups relied on civilian ties to secure support for security and goods provision during the war, these same networks can facilitate grassroots reconstruction efforts post-war. This approach lowers costs and fosters loyalty to the rebel victor, potentially reducing the state's resource burden. Second, the rebel victor may mobilize key civilian supporters to extend politicization campaigns into unorganized areas. This mirrors wartime strategies, using grassroots organizing to consolidate social control and expand support into previously unpoliticized localities.

Hypothesis 1. *Where the threat to power is violence from external rivals, the rebel victor minimizes conflict spread across the country by using its wartime ties to organize and politicize communities.*

Alternatively, where the rebel victor faces threats *internal* to the rebel party, it aims to prevent a coup attempt that may successfully result in its overthrow. Unlike insecurity from external rivals, which is managed through state-building strategies, internal factionalism requires balancing between different elites within the party who may be most successful in motivating defection and mounting a credible threat. Meng and Paine (2022), in particular, point to rebel victors' success in sharing power between civilian politicians and military elites through Minister of Defense appointments as an important coup-proofing strategy.

Extending this logic further, rebel–civilian ties may partially help the victor to determine *which* military elites to promote to minimize coup risks. As Martin (2022) argues, military commanders' likelihood of choosing defection vs. loyalty increases with the strength of their ties to local communities through rebel governance: commanders that failed to form strong and long-lasting rebel–civilian ties were more likely to remain obedient to the political part whereas

those who had an independent base of support posed a greater threat to the victors' civilian wing. If this is the case, rebel victors ought to focus internal cooptation on these particular military elites for two reasons. First, because they command the greatest risks, their promotion would help to reduce the likelihood of a successful coup. Second however, these military elites also are poised to bring the greatest benefit: if well-connected military elites with strong local bases of support are re-integrated into the ruling party, then these elites' local civilian ties—over whom they exert significant social control—are likely to be useful for consolidating power further.

Hypothesis 2. *Where the threat to power is internal to the party, the rebel victor strengthens party control through coup-proofing by promoting potential defectors that sustain greatest ties with civilians.*

Finally, once the consolidation of power has occurred and the existential threat of war has subsided, the rebel victor faces decreasing incentives to expand its influence. Under this scenario, power is sustained not through conflict prevention, but through the successful implementation of clientelistic state control—specifically, using vote-buying or intimidation tactics that can fragment challengers and win votes (Nichter 2008; Stokes et al. 2013). In short, once stability has been reasonably established in a post-conflict state, rebel parties begin to act much like other parties in developing countries that successfully retain power through electioneering. This cost-effective strategy helps maintain control and counter electoral threats, showcasing the adaptable nature of these relationships in navigating the complex post-war political landscape.

If rebel–civilian ties and rebel governing institutions are used for coercive clientelism, then there is path dependence from wartime rebel control to post-war state control (Haass and Ottmann 2022; Liu 2024a). War acts as a critical juncture through which social and power relations are upturned and reformed (Wood 2008): in areas where the rebel government had maintained institutions of governance and control during war, its embeddedness in local rural communities becomes a powerful tool for maintaining power through intimidation, vote-buying, and voter suppression under electoral politics. These behaviours would most affect the rebel victor's wartime strongholds, where these ties were strongest during war. This outcome has negative implications for sustained democratization under rebel victory: despite increased civilian politicization and democratic behaviour in the short run after war (Huang 2016), the long-run political control stemming from wartime institutions ought to decrease the likelihood of authentic and meaningful political participation.

Hypothesis 3. *Where the threat to power is electoral competition, the rebel victor uses its wartime ties to control voting behaviour through intimidation and coercion, predominantly within strongholds.*

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2.3   Summary

Figure 1 summarizes the different varieties of insecurity that rebel victors face, and the hypothesized ways through which rebel–civilian ties may be used to help the victor to sustain control and retain power. In the subsequent section, I next turn to the Zimbabwean case to provide evidence for each of these channels throughout different periods in its post-independence history.

Figure 1: Varieties of insecurity
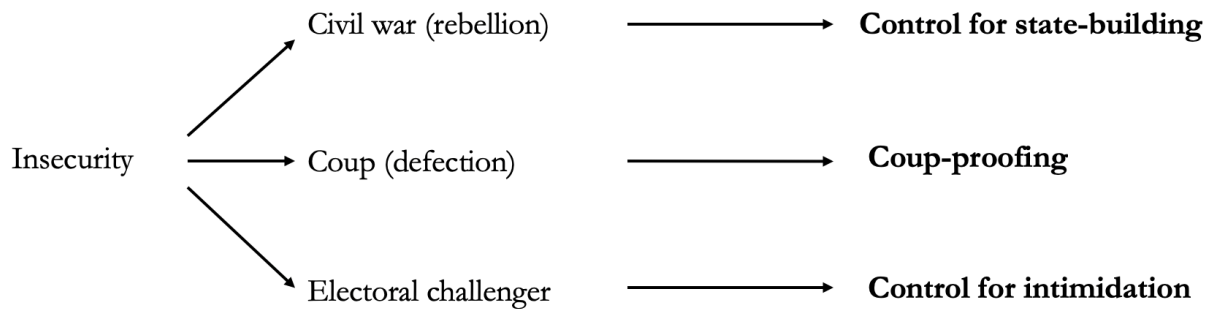
Source: author's illustration.

3   Rebel governance and Zimbabwe's Liberation War

Zimbabwe's independence movement began as a political effort both within and beyond its borders but shifted to a military struggle in the 1970s to intensify resistance against colonial rule. The Zimbabwe Liberation War (1972–1979) involved two anti-colonial rebel groups, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), each with its own military wing. Although ZANU initially split from ZAPU as a minor faction, it came to dominate the military struggle during the war. After independence, ZANU's political party, ZANU-PF (ZANU-Patriotic Front), secured an overwhelming electoral victory in Zimbabwe's first post-independence elections in 1980.

ZANU's successes can be at least partially attributed to the strategies that the rebel party and its military wing used to exert social control over civilian communities in eastern Zimbabwe *during war*. This section explores three of its rebel governance strategies and outlines how these strategies were expanded heterogeneously across the country.

3.1   Strategies to exert wartime control

ZANU's rebel governance strategies were rooted in Maoist principles of a People's War: guerrilla warfare featuring separate military and political wings, with strength drawn from a broad and highly politicized civilian base. Once mobilized, civilians enabled the rebel party to remain embedded in local communities while also serving as a secondary support system for

military activities, such as providing reconnaissance, cooking and washing, hiding weapons, and other day-to-day activities. To sustain this structure, ZANU prioritized establishing local party cells to organize civilians and launched political education campaigns to mobilize them through ideology and nationalism.

Yet, to ensure the continued cooperation of such a large number of people across rural Zimbabwe was a difficult task, which necessitated greater collaboration with key civilians on the ground. Two forms of rebel–civilian ties emerged. First, ZANU strategically organized mujibas—small groups of youth collaborators—who became the direct line of contact with local communities. Mujibas played a crucial role in guerrilla warfare by bridging the communication gap between hidden ZANU military bases in the country and the general population: while the locations of these bases were intended to be confidential, mujibas were entrusted with this sensitive information, and ZANU members relied on them too relay messages and information between communities and other sympathetic institutions (such as the church). They also had 'a *policing* function as watchdogs of the ZANU controlled [localities], supervising the entry and exit of people' (Cliffe et al. 1980: 52). This system allowed rebels to maintain operational security while also being able to influence and mobilize the broader community for information, supplies, and secondary support (Murambiwa 2014).

Second, local village committees—-community-level party cells—emerged as a major informal rebel governing institution during the Liberation War. Village committees were made up of older members in the community, and were tasked with the key responsibility of gathering resources for the war effort and sustaining social control over civilian affairs within the communities. Village committees (in communication with mujibas) were the ones who organized civilians to provide secondary support for rebel soldiers. Village committees existed in a wider hierarchical structure that made up the ZANU's civilian wing, wherein several village-level committees reported to a base committee, which in turn was overseen by district committees and, ultimately, provincial committees (Jeche 2014). Cliffe et al. (1980: 50–51) writes about some committees that were particularly developed:

> While there was no widespread restructuring of production, the committees did provide the impetus for some self-help. In the field of health, for example, instruction in hygiene was given, the necessity of building latrines and pits to store the rubbish was stressed and in the last few months of the war, local clinics were set up in some areas...

Third, mujibas and village committee members would help the rebels to organize—and assure community attendance—at all-night pungwes, which were traditional all-night community events that became sites of mandatory rebel-led gatherings for mass politicization during the Liberation War. Where wartime pungwes were organized, ZANU political commissars

would educate the community about the independence and liberation, socialism, and nationalism; community members were instructed to sing songs of liberation, and were socialized into the practices of the broader liberation movement. Pungwes, however, were also sites of rebel control beyond education: it was during these events that mujibas would identify 'sellouts' in the community—i.e. those who were suspected of aiding the colonial regime–to be punished by ZANU members (Kwenda 2014).

Table 1 below summarizes ZANU's rebel–civilian engagement during the Liberation War. While rebels attempted to broker such rebel–civilian relations throughout all areas in which they militarily operated, these types of rebel–civilian institutions were successfully implemented primarily within a fraction of the areas—which became ZANU's wartime strongholds. Where the ZANU rebels were able to broker these rebel–civilian relationships, it exerted social control over civilian lives through these wartime supporters who played their roles as intermediaries between the rebel group and the community.

Table 1: ZANU's wartime rebel–civilian engagement

	Civilians	Function	Structure
Mujibas (Collaborators)	Youths	Intelligence, communication	Small groups (5–10 people)
Village Committees	Older generation	Logistics, bureaucracy	Village, base district, province
Pungwes	Entire community	Politicization	Singing, drinking, denunciations

Source: author's elaboration.

4 Varieties of insecurity in post-independence Zimbabwe

Post-independence, Zimbabwe's ruling party ZANU-PF faced all three forms of insecurity described previously: external, internal, and electoral insecurity. These periods in the country's history therefore allow me to investigate their use of their wartime rebel governing strategies to reduce post-war threats to their power. I highlight four periods in particular. First, from 1979-1980, the party engaged in pre-election campaigning where it faced an *electoral challenger*. Second, from 1980-1987, ZANU-PF faced post-independence insecurity from its wartime rivals, and thus it feared a return to *civil war*. Third, threats internal to the political party ballooned from 1990-2008, and ex-combatants credibly threatened a *coup*. Finally, from 1999 onward, the ruling party has faced major *electoral challengers* every election period.

4.1   Pre-election campaigning (1979–1980)

Following the Lancaster House agreement signed in December 1979, the newly independent Zimbabwe began preparing for its first elections that would take place between February and March of 1980. Despite initial agreements to run as one party, the two liberation parties contested the elections separately as ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU and became the two main competitors for these first elections.[3] During the campaign period ZANU-PF's wartime rebel–civilian ties proved to be exceptionally helpful during the first election period. As Hypothesis 3 would expect, the rebel party relied on these wartime endowments to engage in electioneering, and often did so using a combination of politicization and coercion within its strongholds to ensure obedience from the local population while preventing the opposition party from free access to conduct their own campaign activities.

As part of the peace process, combatants from the two rebel armies were required to assemble in cantonment sites for demobilization, while the parties' civilian leadership conducted nationwide campaigns for the 1980 elections. The policy aimed to reduce the risk of electoral violence and prevent armed combatants from participating directly in the campaigns. This led to serious concerns, however, that demobilizing and gathering at cantonment sites would leave the rebel parties vulnerable to sudden security threats. Additionally, combatants feared that their gathering in specific sites would make themselves easy targets for retaliatory violence from the former colonial party and army.

ZANU combatants avoided these concerns by relying on their wartime civilian ties. They did so by colluding with trusted mujibas, who would surrender themselves to demobilization processes as combatants while the actual combatants themselves went free. Observers estimated that over a quarter of ZANU combatants failed to comply, and instead ZANU demobilization camps were filled by mujibas (P. Ndlovu 2012). This strategy was particularly useful not only for retaining security forces who could respond if the peace process went poorly: it was useful also for electioneering because it allowed combatants and wartime political commissars—who were not supposed to be campaigning at all—to return to their wartime operational areas and work once again in conjunction with the wartime civilian supporters to campaign at the grassroots level. As one former ZAPU combatant noted, 'ZANU from word go they had seven thousand commissars, trained commissars who were being infiltrated into the country. Even toward the elections seven thousand were outside and doing the party work' (Nkiwane 2012).

Within communities themselves, mujibas and village committees continued to be instrumental for exerting control. Continuing their wartime functions, they kept a watchful eye on citi-

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[3] Two other parties—the colonial Rhodesian Front supported by white voters, and the United African National Council led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa—also contested.

zens in the communities and campaigned on their behalf. Most critically, they supported ZANU combatants in sidelining PF-ZAPU politicians, effectively barring them from campaigning in ZANU's wartime strongholds. As one former ZAPU politician explained (Dabengwa 2012):

> [...] at a certain stage when ZANU decided to say there were no-go areas, there were certain areas in the country where they would not allow political party to participate in... and those are the areas where [ZANU combatants] had had a strong presence. [...] [ZAPU] actually made a very strong protest [...] to say that we can't call that free and fair election where you have one party refusing people to come and campaign in the areas where their forces are.

The resulting vote shares for the two political parties in each province is presented in Table 2. The table also indicates whether that province was a ZANU stronghold during war. Noticeably, ZANU's wartime strongholds had significantly higher percentages of votes for ZANU-PF; more importantly, these vote shares could not be attributed solely to ethnic voting. During the war, ZANU recruited primarily from the Shona ethnic group while ZAPU recruited from the Ndebele ethnic group—which undoubtedly played a large role in the resulting vote shares. Yet, Mashonaland West and Midlands provinces both voted for ZANU-PF at lower proportions than their Shona ethnic composition would suggest. Party leaders attributed this to the lack of grassroots mobilization due to a lack of wartime rebel–civilian ties: while the party set up formal party machinery in Mashonaland West and Midlands to campaign during the elections, these formal structures were not as effective as the informal structures for control that ZANU was able to embed within communities during war (Cliffe et al. 1980).

Table 2: Votes for main parties

	ZANU wartime stronghold	ZANU-PF votes	PF-ZAPU votes
Manicaland	✓	84.1%	1.6%
Mashonaland Central	✓	83.8%	2.3%
Mashonaland East	✓	80.5%	4.6%
Mashonaland West		71.9%	13.4%
Matabeleland North		10.0%	79.0%
Matabeleland South		6.7%	86.4%
Midlands		59.7%	27.1%
Masvingo	✓	87.3%	1.9%

Source: vote shares from Tevera (1989); wartime stronghold data from Liu (2022).

4.2 Post-independence insecurity (1980–1987)

After winning the first post-independence elections, the ruling party ZANU-PF faced domestic insecurity from its wartime rivals. ZAPU combatants and civilian supporters viewed the election results as illegitimate, largely due to ZANU's campaign tactics, which included violating ceasefire terms and restricting free movement. ZAPU also enjoyed strong support within

its own strongholds, as well as the strong support ZAPU maintained in its own strongholds. Further, while ZAPU leaders did occupy some positions of power within the government, and many ZAPU combatants were integrated into the army, a substantial proportion of its former combatants still advocated against full demobilization in case of violence from ZANU-PF. As a result, 'ZAPU was deeply suspicious of ZANU, believing that no true will of the people was reflected in the election result. ZANU, apparently, feared ZAPU, presumably because of its continuing military strength...' (M. Ndlovu 2012: 91). This deep mistrust between the two parties escalated tensions at all levels of government and society, spanning the ruling civilian leadership, the military, and the broader civilian population nationwide.

ZANU-PF would point to two concrete incidents, in 1981 and 1982, as evidence of external threats to its power. First, ZAPU soldiers integrated into the national army fomented a small uprising in the Entumbane barracks in 1981. These barracks were located in territories that were ZAPU wartime strongholds, meaning that it was already difficult for ZANU-PF to sustain complete control. In 1982, a large collection of weapons were found on ZAPU-owned farms, which ZANU-PF took as clear evidence of a mounting security threat. In response, the ruling party purged the government of PF-ZAPU politicians and began preparing for a return to violence. Meanwhile, ZAPU ex-combatants deserted the military *en masse* and joined their other wartime fighters to launch a low level guerrilla campaign from the Matabeleland provinces, which had long supported ZAPU.

ZANU-PF's responded to these threats with mass violence against its civilians living in the Matabeleland provinces. The Gukurahundi massacres, which were carried out by the Fifth Brigade army from 1983-1986, killed an estimated 20,000 civilians who were labeled as ZAPU dissident supporters simply by co-ethnicity. At the same time, Zimbabwe's National Army carried out counterinsurgency efforts to eliminate combatants themselves, while the Zimbabwe National Police, along with ZANU-PF youth members, used coercion and intimidation to prevent conflict spread beyond Matabeleland.

While state forces and paramilitary forces were deployed to eliminate external threats in rival terrain, ZANU-PF's wartime ties to local communities, along with their wartime institutions, played a significant role in post-war politics. As I next explain, they helped the ruling party to consolidate power by *sustaining control* in strongholds (Hypothesis 1), which became necessary under the tense post-war political landscape as well as greater demands for resources within both the development and security sectors:

Resource constraints

As is common with post-conflict reconstruction, post-war Zimbabwe struggled with resource constraints to rebuild the nation. This was exacerbated by three major (though not exhaustive)

factors. First, public infrastructure and goods were severely ill equipped to accomodate the majority Black Zimbabwean population under the colonial regime, which predominantly met the needs of the White population. Addressing these disparities became a priority for the new government, which focused on expanding education, healthcare, and infrastructure, particularly in rural communal areas where most Black Zimbabweans lived. Second, ZANU-PF's wartime promises extended beyond independence and Black majority rule; the party had also pledged widespread land reform, as the country's most productive lands remained concentrated in the hands of wealthy White farmers due to colonial policies. Post-independence, the ruling party worked towards this promise through the 'willing buyer willing seller' policy, in which the government would buy land from White landowners who were willing to sell (Chilunjika and Uwizeyimana 2015). Despite promises of assistance from the British government to compensate white landholders, and despite very few farmers actually being willing to sell their land, buying land at full market value proved to be resource intensive. Third, the threat of return to conflict in the Matabeleland provinces pushed the ruling party to spend more on security forces—army and paramilitary—diverting funds from its development projects elsewhere in the country.

ZANU-PF, during Zimbabwe's first decade of independence, sought to tackle development challenges across the country by relying on bureaucratic professionalism and efficiency. Yet, it was unable to keep up with the resource demands from projects it had conceived, while the large hopeful population pushed their new government to make good of its wartime and election promises. At its face, development did not immediately threaten the ruling party's power; however, in combination with a growing insurgency and distrusting population in the West, ZANU-PF's inability to meet civilian demands threatened to increased support for the opposition—which would then exacerbate the need for resources within the security sector. In other words, resource constraints and external rivals were simultaneously threatening ZANU-PF's consolidation of power, and thus political factors undoubtedly shaped how the ruling party engaged in resource allocation across priorities and territories.

To address resource constraints, ZANU-PF promoted self-help, urging communities to take an active role in reconstruction and development by partially providing for their own needs rather than relying solely on government resources. This strategy drew on practices from wartime rebel governance, where village committees had been instrumental in mobilizing community cooperation and fostering collective action (Cliffe et al. 1980). In the first few years after war, village committees both collected and disbursed aid to community members in need (Kriger 1991); throughout the rest of the decade, ZANU-PF continued to rely on them to co-produce local development. Within the healthcare sector for example, rural women were trained as Village Health Workers to work either as a volunteer or while receiving a small stipend; this program eased pressures on the government to pay the extensive costs of healthcare expansion,

which was already straining budgets at the time (Sanders 1990). The role of self-help and co-producing development was most evident in education, a sector in which ZANU-PF enjoyed massive success in the first decade after independence. Where communities could be galvanized to engage in self-help for fundraisers and manpower, the government was able to rely on them to engage in school construction and expansion with less resource inputs from the government (Ministry of Education, NAZ 1983). A ZANU-PF ex-combatant put this succinctly (author interview[4]):

> When the government began to develop, began to build the schools, there was not enough budget... The news reached the war veterans who said 'no problem! Let the government pay teachers with the budget. We will organize the parents to build the schools' ... Remember when I told you of the organization [during the war]?

Ultimately, the ethos of self-help, through community organizations such as village committees, were instrumental for allowing the ruling party to sidestep the threats of resource constraints in development. It also freed up national budgets for security spending in the West to tackle ex-ZAPU dissidence in the Matabelelands.

Social control

Beyond engaging citizens in self-help to loosen budget constraints, rebel–civilian ties were also particularly important for maintaining social control over the population. Kriger (1991: 215), for example, details this clearly in various districts that had been under strong ZANU-PF control during the war. Immediately after the war, it was already clear that the institutions left over from wartime would continue to retain its coercive elements:

> Seemingly influenced by guerrilla courts, some party committees took it on themselves to punish people who did not obey party rules. A man who experienced such party justice took the matter to the Mutoko magistrate's court. His crime was that he did not obtain permission to visit an area. Monitoring visitors to an area was a war-time hangover from guerrilla instructions to villagers to watch people, especially those new to an area, to detect potential 'sell-outs'.

For the years following the war, the political mood after war was one of national reconciliation and unity—at the expense of allowing for criticism against the new ruling party. The decade after war saw major changes as the new government sought to implement policies and projects based on its own visions of development. Beyond education expansion, the government also rolled out policies such as large vaccine campaigns, substantially curbing traditional leaders' powers, and attempting to implement different strategies for more efficient land allocation.

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[4] Author interview conducted in Harare, 2017.

These changes were not always popular with communities, who oftentimes experienced these new government directives as major impositions on their lives and livelihoods. In addition, while the ethos of self-help was broadly popular, citizens consistently made demands for greater resources as they noted that some parts of the country were greater beneficiaries of government funding. The previously mentioned Village Health Workers program is one such as example: to make up for a lack of major clinics, the VHW program was meant to train a large number of civilians to work as volunteer health workers in rural communities, and therefore to take the strain off of the national health system. Yet, while VHWs in some were indeed volunteers, VHWs in other areas were paid a stipend—leading to general dissatisfaction among those who had not been offered payment (Sanders 1990).

Where ZANU-PF sustained greater embeddedness within local communities, such complaints were largely stifled by newly elected party cells and newly appointed bureaucrats who had previously played important roles in the Liberation War (Liu 2024b). While people living in ZANU-PF strongholds expected to for their homes and communities—which were badly affected by the war—to benefit during the reconstruction period, they were largely disappointed by government inaction (Kwenda 2014). However, civilians were not allowed to speak out against the ruling party where party structures had been long embedded into the community. Fear of dissent, and of being seen as an opposition party supporter, was common:

> In some districts, including parts of Mutoko, people refused food aid, also fearing that it had come from another party and would get them in trouble later. When I asked questions about the new resettlement programme, which did not meet many villagers' expectations, or ZANU-PF, many people simply refused to answer or said 'one cannot say anything bad about the party', by which they implied that it was foolish to ask them what they felt about policies (Kriger 1991: 219).

In short, while the national government preached participatory politics, reconciliation, and self-help, community-level politics through local party officials did not operate in line with those goals. Instead, wartime strongholds became sites of intense political and social control as local party officials helped the ruling party to consolidate power across the nation.

4.3 Internal threats and ex-combatant demands (1990–2008)

By the late 1980s, having largely consolidated power over the country by eliminating civil war threat in opposition-supporting areas, ZANU-PF turned to internal consolidation of power through coup-proofing in the face of potential defection from within its base (Hypothesis 2).

Initial pressures came from the war veterans, who had been combatants during the Liberation War but had since been demobilized as part of the political transition process in 1980. Al-

though various commanders were rewarded after conflict with high-ranking positions in the army or government, rank-and-file ex-combatants found themselves with little prospects during the first decade of independence. Many ex-combatants had hoped to join the Zimbabwe National Army, but were not eligible based on age and education requirements. Demobilization pay was relatively meager—a one-time payment of Z$400 in 1980, and another lump sum of Z$4,400 a few years later—and there were few reintegration services or job training opportunities beyond it due to lack of resources and government capacity to implement programs for the overwhelming number of ex-combatants eligible for them. Ten years after independence in 1990, around 25,000 ex-combatants were still jobless and were struggling with poverty and poor mental health (Hove and Mutanda 2014).

While external threats to ZANU-PF's rule in the 1980s demanded greater internal cohesion and loyalty from the armed forces and demobilized combatants, when threats subsided, ex-combatant dissatisfaction with the ruling party became particularly salient once again. Discontent war veterans became increasingly vocal about their demands in the 1990s and fissures between veterans and ZANU-PF politicians grew stronger. Sadomba (2008: 81) writes about ex-combatant power and connection with civilians in Masvingo, a staunch ZANU-PF stronghold since the war:

> In Masvingo War Veterans mobilised peasants to vote against the ZANU-PF Politburo choice of candidate in primaries leading to the 1990 general elections. In a nationally publicised showdown between Shuvai Mahofa and Cosmas Gonese (a War Veteran) the Politburo candidate lost the primaries, humiliating the ruling party in what was seen as a head-on conflict between a War Veteran-peasant alliance and the ruling clique...

> The War Veterans continued with their tactic of organising peasants as their power base to challenge the ruling oligarchy, a tactic applied until [the late 1990s]. With this tactic the War Veterans' movement expanded beyond ex-combatants, drawing in peasants, youths and other political interests.

Particularly contentious was the issue of land reform: as previously explained, ZANU-PF initially attempted to roll out land reform through a willing-buyer-willing-seller system wherein white farmers who were willing to sell their land would find the government to be a willing buyer at market price. This land was meant to be redistributed to Black Zimbabweans. Yet, meaningful land reform was slow to materialize during the first two decades—resulting in substantial frustration among ex-combatants. In particular, they had expected to be beneficiaries of land reform given their wartime service per the government's eligibility requirements for land allocation, which indicated that land would go to the landless poor, war refugees, and war

veterans. Yet, substantial portions of the already-insuffcient lands were reallocated to party supporters, predominantly those living within ZANU-PF strongholds (Kriger 2007).

The Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) became a powerful platform for ex-combatants to express their grievances. Established in 1990 to advocate for ex-combatant welfare, the organization quickly mobilized former fighters for collective action. Within just a few years, the ZNLWVA successfully used violence to pressure the ruling party into implementing reforms, including the War Veterans Act of 1992, which established a War Veterans Board, and the War Victims Compensation Act of 1993, which provided compensation to ex-combatants injured during the war (Musemwa 2011).[5] Violent ex-combatant protests during the Heroes Day demonstration in 1997 extracted even greater compensation from the government but not sustainable program, including a large lump sum payment of $Z50,000 and a monthly pension of Z$2,000, which hastened Zimbabwe's economic decline due to the unbudgeted expense.

ZANU-PF's contention with the ZNLWVA and the war veterans were further complicated by electoral challenges occurring in parallel. In 1999, the first meaningful political opposition emerged to become a major challenger in electoral politics (to be explained further later). The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by union leader Morgan Tsvangirai, was able to rally substantial support from urban Zimbabwe and the youth population seeking for political change. The MDC had early successes, including a strong showing at both the parliamentary and presidential elections; it also successfully campaigned against a proposed constitutional change in 2000, which would have greatly benefitted the ruling party had it passed.

In short, by the turn of the century, ZANU-PF faced *both* ex-combatant discontent and a viable opposition party, which required it to increase the intensity of its coercion and control over the civilian population. In particular, ex-combatants' ability to wield violence and to galvanize rural communities within ZANU-PF strongholds was problematic for the party's survival; the opposition MDC's ability to campaign in the cities, as well as in areas outside of ZANU-PF strongholds, compounded the ruling party's concerns.

To respond to both of these threats, ZANU-PF passed and implemented the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in July 2000, a major land reform that would allow the government to expropriate land from White farmers for redistribution. The FTLRP also allowed for *cooptation* to reduce coup threat: ZANU-PF empowered War Veterans under the ZNLWVA to lead the charge in expropriation, resulting in major violent land grabs and squatting across the nation. This strategy was economically poorly conceived, but politically expedient for two intertwined

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[5] As Musemwa (2011: 123) writes, 'The government's gesture was therefore not simply an altruistic measure but one into which it had been cajoled by a series of protests led by the intemperate war veteran leader Chenjerai 'Hitler' Hunzvi who at one time laid siege to President Mugabe's party offices with disgruntled war veterans.'

reasons. First, despite FTLRP's initial criteria for land allocation, the program resulted in ZANU-PF's supporters gaining a substantial amount of land, including both the political and military elite alongside ZNLWVA leaders who controlled the ex-combatants (International Crisis Group 2007). The land occupations therefore greatly increased ex-combatants' power in society, and tied the welfare of important players in Zimbabwean politics directly to both the land issue and also to ZANU-PF in particular.

Second, FTLRP renewed the wartime organizational capacity that ZANU-PF uses to perpetuate its control. As Matondi (2012: 214) writes about the Fast Track Farms that emerged from FTLRP, social organization was 'influenced by politicisation, which resulted in power struggles, the creation of personality cults based on political connections or liberation war credentials.' In particular, ex-combatants were able to organize the rural civilian base to organize for occupation in the first place, and in ways that mimicked wartime rebel governance (Moyo and Yeros 2005). Further, because ex-combatants led the land occupations, this ultimately gave the ex-combatants substantial say over community affairs and allowed them to also organize social relations in the new Fast Track Farms. Thus, in conjunction with increasing ex-combatant wealth and power in society, the creation of the new Fast Track Farms also allowed the ruling party to ensure that 'political participation became a major determinant of influencing social order,' wherein political participation among citizens—much like wartime politicization—often meant involuntary engagement with pro-government community-level institutions and organizations (Matondi 2012).

As strong evidence of Hypothesis 2, FTLRP successfully bound ex-combatants to ZANU-PF. Ex-combatants sought to sustain the ruling party's power for their own economic benefit, thereby reducing the likelihood of internal dissent, while ZANU-PF relied on them to maintain control over rural populations. This dynamic has had far-reaching consequences for civilian life well beyond the peak of the land occupations in the 2000s. Because the ex-combatants' organizational strength was in part rooted in their ties to civilian communities—and because this organizational strength was derived from wartime strategies—the result was an illiberal socio-political structure that further entrenched ZANU-PF's power over rural civilians. From the early 2000s onward, the ZNLWVA became a clearly partisan organization, one on which ZANU-PF heavily relied to retain control over local communities where the ZNLWVA had strong ties (i.e. wartime strongholds), particularly during election campaigns.

Ultimately, by bringing the military and war veterans closer to the ruling faction within ZANU-PF as well, the party had successfully sidestepped the possibility of a coup from potential defectors. As a 2007 report noted: 'war veterans, who campaign for Mugabe in the party and the countryside at election time, have been formally constituted as a reserve force under defence ministry control, with a monthly wage. Their loyalty and that of the military would make it

difficult for ZANU-PF dissidents to stage a successful coup against Mugabe' (International Crisis Group 2007). This continued to be true until a decade later.

4.4   Insecurity at the polls (1999–ongoing)

As briefly explained in the previous section, ZANU-PF once again began to face insecurity through a new electoral challenger beginning in 1999. After eliminating ZAPU in the late 1980s, the ruling party had enjoyed uninterrupted support for over a decade due to a lack of political challengers despite growing political discontent within the country. In 1999, the opposition movement coalesced around the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), an urban and labour union-based party that sought to contest for elections and install a new generation of young leaders into national politics. The MDC was exceptionally successful from the outset: during the 2000 parliamentary elections, the young party won almost 50% of the seats despite credible allegations of state-sponsored vote coercion. In 2002, the MDC's party candidate, Morgan Tsvangirai won 42% of the presidential vote. These vote shares were a substantial shift from ZANU-PF's prior electoral challengers: during the prior election cycle—the 1995 parliamentary elections and the 1996 presidential elections—the largest opposition party won only 7% and 5%, respectively.

The opposition party performed even better in the harmonized 2008 elections. The MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) party[6] won the plurality of parliamentary seats (99 seats, to ZANU-PF's 97) while Tsvangirai emerged with a higher vote share during the first round of the presidential elections (47% to Mugabe's 43%). These results led to two outcomes: the MDC-T alleged major vote coercion and rigging during the first round of the presidential election and subsequently boycotted the runoffs; due to the MDC-T's success in parliamentary elections, ZANU-PF and MDC-T formed a Government of National Unity in February 2009, with Mugabe as president and Tsvangirai as prime minister.

Since the rise of the MDC—and particularly after the disastrous 2008 election results—ZANU-PF has increased both its covert and overt violence during election campaign periods. To be clear, these behaviours had been present since the first post-independence elections in 1980, as previously noted: even despite winning a comfortable majority across each election, ZANU-PF had used a combination of intimidation and vote-buying to keep constituents in line each electoral cycle (Kriger 2005). Its successes in using these strategies—both in terms of *how* they are carried out but also *where* they are carried out—are a direct reflection of rebel–civilian tie-formation during war and the legacies of how these ties facilitated post-war control through the institutionalization of wartime roles, relationships, and practices.

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[6] In 2005, the MDC split two factions, the MDC-Tsvangirai and the MDC-Ncube, due to leadership disputes.

In other words, although ZANU-PF's strategies for sustaining control have shifted over the years, similarities to wartime strategies are clearly evident. Voter intimidation and vote-buying are carried out by agents of the state, who reproduce wartime institutions from key positions of power in society (Liu 2024a). During war, mujibas and village committees organized local society and held pungwes for polticization; today, ZANU-PF supporters who occupy similar wartime roles, along with party cells, continue to do the same in various ways:

Wartime roles

The explicit use of youth militias in politics has carried on from the end of conflict until today, although they have taken different forms over the years. While the original cohort of mujibas were directly involved in the electoral strategy at independence, they have undoubtedly since aged out of playing such roles. Yet, it is their *roles* that have been institutionalized into politics, reflecting how wartime rebel–civilian ties and governance structures are perpetuated in post-war politics—even if the individuals themselves changed. After being elected into power, the newly formed ZANU-PF youth wing has been instrumental in ensuring support for ZANU-PF during every general election. ZANU-PF took it further in 2000 with the creation of the National Youth Service, more commonly known as the Green Bombers, which acted as a ZANU PF youth militia formed for the purposes of vote coercion. The Green Bombers was formed by ZANU-PF's Minister for Gender, Youth, and Employment, who had been a former mujiba during the war and sought to recreate a youth militia that would "foster 'patriotism,' as founded on memories of the liberation struggle, among youth who had not experienced the war" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 2009). Even later in 2010, the ruling party formed the youth organizations Chipangano and Upfumi Kuvadiki for the purposes of sustaining control and electioneering.

Beyond youth militias, organizations like the Zimbabwe Liberators and War Collaborators Association (ZILIWACO) and the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) still exist to carry out voter intimidation and exist explicitly with a pro-government orientation. For example, the secretary general of ZILIWACO recently asked: 'The million-dollar question to ask is do we need opposition political parties in a liberated Africa. Let us reflect our foundations which are liberations platforms of Africa as this gathering' (The Zimbabwe Mail 2021). ZILIWACO's vice-chairperson also noted: 'being a war collaborator is not about age. It's all about what has been stated and written down to indicate what constitutes a mujibha or chimbwido' (The Sunday Times 2019). Such sentiments highlight the continued influence of wartime rebel–civilian ties in post-war politics.

Party organization

During war, village committees were functionally ZANU party apparatuses as formally indi-
cated in the party's internal documentation (Bhebe 1999); after war, similar structures were
formally institutionalized as ZANU-PF party cells within communities to continue ensuring
deep party control in everyday life. As one ZANU ex-combatant and current-day politican ex-
plained when speaking about the Liberation War's effects on current-day politics: 'You don't
go into a village in Zimbabwe and slip in without people knowing who you are. They report
[you]... People are too organized' (author interview[7]).

During election periods, party workers are particularly relevant for ensuring control: they force
civilians to attend pungwes to repoliticize them with liberation music and rhetoric, and have
held war re-enactments in key sites (LeBas 2006). Harkening back to wartime strategies, these
are held in conjunction with the previously mentioned youth militias, who use these pungwes
as an opportunity to now identify and eliminate MDC supporters who were then 'beaten in
public or snatched away to secret detention centers that specialized in crude forms of torture'
(Bratton and Masunungure 2008: 51).

Further, because ZANU-PF derives most of its votes from its wartime strongholds, these are
also the areas that see the most organized and consistent voter coercion and intimidation. It
is in these areas that the legacies of wartime rebel–civilian ties and wartime institutions are
still the most salient; these areas are also where the ruling party has exerted strong social and
political control from the very beginning, and therefore continue to exert outsized influence
today. Bratton and Masunungure (2008: 51–52) write:

> The targets of intimidation were not so much the solid MDC strongholds in the
> cities and the southwest, but politically contested areas in the country's middle
> belt and northeast where, in the first round of the election, voters had swung away
> from ZANU-PF and toward the MDC. The object of electoral cleansing was to
> create 'no-go zones' (note again the guerrilla-insurgency terminology) where the
> ZANU-PF monopoly could be enforced at the local level through the direct and
> demonstration effects of violence.

In short, it is no coincidence that opposition parties, which had little access to ZANU-PF
strongholds even during the 1980 elections, still today derive most of their strength from areas
where ZANU-PF was unable to engage in rebel governance during war. While some inroads
have been gained in Manicaland province (a ZANU-PF stronghold from wartime), opposition
parties today still predominantly win their support predominantly from western Zimbabwe. In

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[7] Author interview conducted in Harare, December 2017

part because of ZANU-PF's deep rural penetration during the war through rebel governance, opposition parties are also far more successful in urban cores today as well.

5   Conclusion

This paper has explored the varieties of insecurity that rebel victors face once they come into power, and how each form of insecurity may subsequently the victors' strategies for consolidating power. In particular, I focus on the continuation of rebel governance strategies from wartime, and argue that the organization of rebel–civilian ties during war may be reproduced in different ways post war—depending on the threats to the ruling party's position in power. Where victors face *external* insecurity from wartime rivals and thus the potential for a renewed civil war, rebel–civilian ties complement other statebuilding strategies by artificially reducing civilian demands on ruling party resources. Where victors face *internal* insecurity—from within the party—it engages in coup-proofing by paying off its own members, but prioritizes those with particularly strong rebel–civilian ties as these ties both heighten insecurity but also strengthen party control if successfully coopted. Finally, where the victor primarily faces *electoral* insecurity at the polls, rebel–civilian ties may be repurposed as party brokers—a cheaper strategy for maintaining control than broader statebuilding.

I illustrate the argument through Zimbabwe's post-independence politics, during which the independence-seeking rebel group ZANU has continuously ruled as the ZANU-PF political party. Since independence in 1979, ZANU-PF has faced all three forms of insecurity: From 1979 to 1980, it contested and won its first national elections (electoral insecurity); then from 1980 to 1987, it then feared a return to civil war as ex-combatants and civilians loyal to its wartime rivals, ZAPU, grew discontent with its rule. While ZAPU was eliminated by 1987, ZANU-PF then faced its third threat: from 1990–2008, internal challenges from its loyal ex-combatants—who demanded to be paid off for their wartime sacrifices—increased in severity as the ZNLWVA's founding substantially bolstered their collective action. Overlapping these internal threats was yet another electoral threat by a new opposition party, the MDC (1999–onward).

Throughout each of these periods, ZANU-PF's strategies for eliminating threats to its power consistently drew from its wartime tactics of politicization, organization, and control. At its core, each strategy involved suppressing the demands of those within its wartime strongholds by leveraging its deep-rooted presence in these areas. However, the manifestation of this approach varied depending on the type of insecurity faced. When greater resources were needed to counter external challengers, the rebel–civilian ties in wartime strongholds helped reduce resource demands by promoting self-help through politicization and coercion. In cases where the party feared violent defection from ex-combatants, it rewarded war veterans and ZNLWVA

leaders, who were both dangerous and useful due to their networks and connections to civilian communities. Lastly, during periods of electoral uncertainty, ZANU-PF once again relied on its wartime strongholds as sites of organized coercion and intimidation to secure adequate voter turnout.

Of course, it should be noted that parts of the country that were not under ZANU control during war were *also* subject to various strategies for consolidating power, and these often were also violent and coercive as the ruling party sought to dismantle local institutions and collective action potential opposing their rule. However, because its power had—since war—been derived from its rural base in eastern Zimbabwe, organized social control after war continues to be strongest in these areas as wartime strategies are reproduced most efficiently and effectively in these regions.

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