Educating for Control: Evidence of Rebel Intimate Governance from South Asia

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Abstract

Although the rebel governance literature recognizes the importance of rebel interest in controlling emotions to increase predictability in civilian behaviour and in articulating a social contract in a rebelocracy, there is a lack of focused research examining the governing of emotions and intimacy. How do rebels engender the willing compliance of civilians? In answering the question, we articulate the concept of intimate governance, which we define as the deliberate strategies and everyday practices deployed by rebels to extend their control to emotions in the personal, interpersonal (social), and everyday aspects of individuals' lives. Rebel organizations govern the intimate sphere to legitimize and achieve their political objectives of social control. Empirically, we illuminate the mechanisms of intimate governance by examining rebel governance of education in four different armed groups in South Asia—the Maoists in Nepal and in India, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the LTTE in Sri Lanka. We show that these rebel groups, by controlling the design, delivery and curricula of education, regulate the emotional and intimate aspects of civilian life, which allows them to present themselves as the rightful authority.

Keywords: rebel governance, intimate governance, service provision, legitimacy, education, South Asia, LTTE, Maoists, Taliban, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal.

Introduction

Less than a month after rebels led by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) toppled Bashar al-Assad in Syria, it's leader Ahmed Hussein al-Sharaa, also known by his nom de guerre Abu Mohammad al-Julani, issued a nine-page list of changes for school curriculums that was implemented on a short notice. The education ministry of the interim government planned on redefining nationalism, removing theory of evolution, and dropping any reference to Assad across all subjects.[2] It is unsurprising that a rebel group prioritizes the education system as a key tool for governing the population under their control. An extreme example of it is the *Boko Haram* which stands for "Western education is forbidden." Education has long been a key instrument of rebel governance beyond Islamic insurgencies, as evidenced by the following statement by Prabhakaran, the founder and leader of the LTTE, who underscored its central importance in his rebel government as early

[1] Authors are listed in alphabetical order.
[2] Read BBC coverage on this via https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/c1ln12056ppo (Accessed 02 January 2025).

as 1993. "A life combined with war and education is our historical need today. Just as our struggle is a shield for education, so must education be a shield for our struggle."[3]

Rebel groups, much like the state itself, control the design and delivery of education with an aim to inculcate their ideology among the youth, reinforce their political objectives, ensure the perpetuation of their ideals within the community, and ultimately to shield their struggle in garments of legitimacy. However, there hasn't been much systematic study on why and how rebel groups control education, and more specifically, how this helps them establish intimate connections with the populace, foster their loyalty, earn legitimacy[4] and govern the territory under their control. This yearning of rebel groups to control the hearts and minds of civilian populations is reminiscent of Mao Zedong's metaphor of rebels integrating themselves in civilian lives like fish in water so they could win the support and trust of the local population, which was considered crucial for the success of guerilla warfare. In other words, rebels know that in order to challenge state legitimacy they need to manufacture alternate legitimacy and win the consent of the population they want to govern. Territorial control, service provision or taxation are all instrumental in generating this alternative legitimacy, but are not synonymous or coterminous with the intimate attachment Prabhakaran and Mao Zedong had alluded to above.

How do rebel governors who aspire to be seamlessly integrated with their people (like the proverbial fish in water) engender the willing compliance of civilians? In this paper we argue that rebels do that by wielding instruments of intimate governance far more effectively than the state. A central constitutive element in this alternative legitimacy is the loyalty or buy-in of the people rebels govern, which allows rebels to challenge the pre-existing, elaborate legitimizing infrastructure of the state with much fewer resources and in a much shorter time window. Intimate governance is an important component of rebel governance, distinct from and not an inevitable outcome of territorial control, taxation, or other concrete, observable rebel activities in conflict zones. Rebels seek control not only over territory and taxation, but also over how civilians navigate wartime uncertainty and perceived injustice, and how they choose between competing values and objectives of the warring sides, in their intimate, emotive, everyday lives. Often, territorial control and service provision are also the function of this intimacy and solidarity.

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[3] Read more on this here: https://telibrary.com/en/tamil-eelam-general-education-examination/ (Accessed on February 5, 2025)

4 On the question of legitimacy, a logical starting point is the work of Max Weber. Bose (2016: 11) articulates legitimacy as generalized normative support. By generalized they mean "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an actor are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions—and not as the attribution of special qualities to an actor, nor to its mere opinions. Therefore, I mean the support for principles and rules, norms and laws, regardless of actor policy and the specificities of time." By normative support they mean "a relationship that rests on a principled commitment to a process, is regulated according to understood rules, and confirmed through the expression of consent." In this study, we use Bose's conceptualisation of legitimacy.

Although the rebel governance literature recognizes the importance of rebel interest in controlling emotions to increase predictability in civilian behavior and in articulating a social contract in a 'rebelocracy' (Arjona, 2016), there is a lack of a focused research program examining emotions and intimacy in rebel governance – What role do they play? How are they engendered and curated? Why rebels care/don't care about them? The Weberian legal-rational and material model of the state governance (Weber, 1947) still weighs heavily into the rebel governance where ideal type of legitimacy is synonymous with a rational utility-oriented bureaucratic administrative staff of the governing authority. While the legal-rational and material elements remain largely relevant, they don't give the total picture of complex intimate web of legitimacy that inhabits intra-state struggle for legitimate governance.

In explaining how rebels generate alternative legitimacy that challenges the authority of the state, we shift our focus away from the top down, state-like behavior of rebel groups like taxation, service provision, and territorial control to the more micro-level dynamics of rebels controlling the emotional and intimate aspects of civilian lives, which also underpin larger political processes and structures in rebel governance. While we do not summarily dismiss the significance of control over territory, taxation, and service provision in rebel governance, we propose that these observable rebel activities do not explain how rebels challenge and undermine the far more entrenched state legitimacy. We shed light on intimate governance by rebels, which explains how rebels produce control over the intimate and the emotional, which also shape their capacity to govern. In doing so, we complement the "new directions" in rebel governance research highlighted by Loyle *et al.* (2023).

Our empirical strategy focuses primarily on education as a site for generating intimate governance. "Education serves as a powerful site for understanding intimate governance because all rebel groups—regardless of ideology, geography, or political goals—engage with it as a space where new identities, social norms, and loyalties are forged through both personal and community-level interactions." Rebel education includes usurping schools and colleges, creating new curriculum, redefining mission and value statements, re-shaping the beliefs, behaviors, priorities, goals and loyalties of the local population. We also introduce the concept of 'everyday education' which transpires alongside more formal education, through low(er) cost, quotidian unstructured learning opportunities and teachable moments that socialize individual and group behavior. Through everyday education integrated with the usurped formal education, rebels teach civilians an alternative system of values, rituals and beliefs of themselves, their history and their future, and all aspects of life and death, which contributes to a sustainable cultural reproduction of violence. In this paper, we hold the educational field as the analytical gravitational center, made up of both formal and everyday education.

In this milieu, the central questions we explore in this paper are: (a) How do insurgent groups govern the intimate sphere? (b) How regulating education helps rebel groups to govern the

intimate sphere? We investigate these questions on the microprocesses of rebel governance by drawing from our close reading of the tactics and strategies of four different armed groups—the Maoists in Nepal and India, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the LTTE in Sri Lanka. While all four of these rebel groups are similar in some aspects like their geographical location (in South Asia) and their explicit commitment to capturing state power, they also vary across the left-right ideological spectrum as well as their degree of success, which allows us to compare their tools and types of control over the intimate. We show that all of these rebel groups, by shaping the institutions, delivery and curricula of education, regulate other intimate aspects of civilian life, and present themselves as the rightful and capable authority. This allows them to consolidate their power and establish a new social order, which, in turn, is a necessary steppingstone to their other objectives of territorial control and political power.

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first section we interrogate the artificial divide in the field of rebel governance, between the observable rebel activities like territorial control, taxation, and public service provision on the one hand and the and sometimes less observable (or hidden) and less measurable rebel activities embedded in affect and emotions in the personal and interpersonal (social) aspects of individuals' lives in conflict zones. This oversight stems from the assumption that rebels emulate the Weberian state, and as such, just like the state, care about claiming a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. This discussion of an Intimate Leviathan sets the stage for developing a theoretical framework of rebel intimate governance, which we outline in Section II by identifying its key instruments. Section III then explores the processes and mechanisms of intimate governance and section IV is our empirical section that draws on our collective fieldwork experience in South Asia and illustrates those mechanisms by drawing examples from rebel control over content and delivery of education. In conclusion, we highlight the policy implications of our research on intimate governance and suggest some future directions of research.

Section I: Conceptualizing the State as *Intimate* Leviathan[5]

In this section, we interrogate a critical gap in the rebel governance literature in conceptualizing the state a monolithic entity defined primarily by Weberian control over territory and coercion. However, we know that coercion is both costly and insufficient to secure enduring

[5] In the Classical Realist tradition, the Leviathan symbolizes the coercive sovereign that represents the state, a concept drawn from Thomas Hobbes's 1651 book of the same name. We argue that while the Leviathan is a powerful metaphor in International Relations, it remains incomplete without the concept of the *Intimate Leviathan*. In Hobbes's depiction, the sword in the sovereign's right hand represents coercive earthly power, which commands the people's obedience. In contrast, the *Intimate Leviathan* refers to the sovereign's deep spiritual connection with the people. We use the term *Intimate Leviathan* interchangeably with *intimate governance*, emphasizing the role of non-coercive, personal bonds in shaping authority.

public compliance and legitimacy (Migdal, 1988; Rousseau, 1973). For the Hobbesian Leviathan, the key to an effective government was centralized coercive power. However, neither in seventeenth century England, nor in the contemporary conflict-ridden parts of the Global South, can we assume compliance based just on coercion and provision of security & services. Compliance is built on a social contract, and a state can effectively carry out its functions only when it achieves, based on that social contract, a quasi-voluntary compliance of citizens motivated by a willingness to cooperate even if backed by coercion (Levi 1998).

Insofar as rebels emulate the state, they also value the quasi-voluntary compliance of populations over coercive domination, and adopt conscious strategies for generating an alternative social contract. And yet, the literature on rebel governance refers to the range of administrative and regulatory functions performed by insurgent groups within territories under their control, while largely overlooking the moral economy of persuasion, coercion and violence which is central to generating local legitimacy (Thomson, 1971; Scott, 1976) for rebel government. This is puzzling because rebel groups that govern strive to generate an alternative righteousness that challenges the legitimacy of the state. The newly generated legitimacy of rebels is neither primordial nor automatic, and it is painstakingly built by rebels through deliberate strategies (i.e., alternative legitimation activities), which comprises intimate governance.

The turn of attention to rebel governance, including the provision of public goods, maintenance of law and order, taxation and implementation of justice systems by insurgent groups, is relatively new. Over the last ten years, however, this research agenda has gained attention for its implications on conflict dynamics, state-building, and post-conflict reconstruction (Levi, 1998)and Loyle, 2021; Kasfir, 2015; Mampilly, 2012) There is a growing interest in exploring how, when, and why rebels—typically associated with violence—assume governance functions; how they engage with the state and other non-state actors offering similar services; and how their governance efforts impact the welfare of ordinary citizens, as well as post-conflict outcomes in areas such as health, rule of law, and regime type.

This literature has, however, over time organized itself quite narrowly around whether or not rebels and their approaches to governance have Weberian ‘state-like’ qualities, often viewing states and rebels as competing for territorial control (Cunningham and Loyle, 2021), which also leads us to assume a zero-sum control between a rebel group and the state. More often than not, what we actually find are messy situations in which control is patchy, uneven, shared and mutually non-exclusive between states and rebels (Gutiérrez, 2018; Sen, 2021; van Baalen and Terpstra, 2023). The premise that rebels aim to resemble, imitate, or be states with clear exclusive control indicated only by institutions of service provision is problematic and has been questioned eloquently (Loyle *et al*., 2023). As Loyle *et al*. observe, “A laser focus on the most “state-like” rebels belie the diversity of actors and governance behaviors at play in conflict settings, and critically, limits the bounds of our collective inquiry about governance.” Extending this

observation, what has largely escaped scrutiny is how the predominant vocabulary of top down, observable structures and events in rebel governance obscures the often-unobservable processes of generating legitimacy, maintaining control, and building trust and loyalty within communities.

Recognizing the limitations of exiting literature, this paper illuminates the *mechanisms* of intimate governance, and we begin by interrogating the missing link between mainstream political science and economics literature on rebel governance on the one hand, and the critical security, critical geography, and feminist scholarship on the other. While the former focuses on the macro narrative of the logic of capital (geoeconomics), territory (geopolitics), with a focus on events / organized rebellions, the latter offers a more nuanced, co-generative axis of the geosocial (Mitchell and Kallio, 2017), allowing us to investigate a "finer scale of security" that "traverses public/private distinctions" (Hyndman, 2001: 219).

Our interest in the interpersonal and social dimensions of the intimate and emotional in conflict zones builds on the idea of 'geosocial' which is informed by critical security studies, critical geography, and feminist scholarship. 'Geosocial' extends ideas of emotional and intimate geopolitics to incorporate social relations and structures of feeling. The feminist work in the field of conflict and security studies has also consistently problematized the marginalization of the intimate and emotional in geopolitical security discourses that prioritize territorial logics (especially organization and events). Even outside of critical security and feminist scholarship, we knew that "strong emotions are a fundamental part of contentious politics" and they "drive episodes of contention" (Tarrow, 2013; Tilly, 1978). However, that implicit acknowledgment of the role of emotions as integral to "organization of civilians within rebel-held territory for a public purpose" (Arjona, 2014; Kasfir, 2015) also led many to subsume regulation of the intimate as a default outcome of rebel control over territory, but unworthy of separate analytical treatment. Although recent research highlights the need to recognize deterritorialized rebel governance happening in the digital space (Jones and Mattiacci, 2019; Loyle and Bestvater, 2019) or via public outreach from abroad (Awan, 2017), it continues to sidestep intimate governance.

Drawing 'Geosocial' approach to rebel governance can allow us to recognize *relationality* and *multiscalarity* (Koopman, 2011; Secor, 2001; Sharp, 2013; Williams and Massaro, 2013), which highlight the continuity and connection between different domains (political, economic, social, ecological, cultural, etc.) and levels (individual, household, local, national, international, and systemic) of security and violence. Similarly, challenging the hegemonic and masculine scripting of geopolitics, feminist scholars have examined the everyday, intimate, emotional, and embodied experiences of security and governance neglected in conventional accounts (Enloe, 1990; Pain and Staeheli, 2014; Pain and Smith, 2008; Smith, 2012). Pain and Staeheli (2014) show that the geopolitical is already intimate and emotional, and the feminist geopolitics literature sheds light on the "the intersections of the private and the public, the intimate and the politics, the interpersonal and the structural" (Morgan, 2015: 19). Recent accounts also show that rebel

governance of the intimate spheres of marriage and sexuality can enable social control and political power for rebel groups (Giri, 2023).

Summing up, we argue that rebels not only usurp state functions of taxation and service provision in their areas of control. They also actively try to write a new social contract with civilians to ensure their compliance even if backed by coercion. As the literature moves in the direction of investigating deterritorialized rebel control, it continues to avoid how rebels seek to generate such quasi-voluntary compliance through intimate governance, which focuses on the interactions between rebel groups and local populations on a day-to-day basis. In addition, by centering the logic of human relations at the center of rebel governance in an armed conflict, we can attend to the social as a key medium through which different dimensions of (in)security are connected, imagined, experienced and modified. This perspective shifts the focus of conceptualization of the state in rebel governance literature from a Hobessian Leviathan to an Intimate Leviathan, illuminating the social and cultural dimensions of rebel rule. Including intimate governance also offers a more comprehensive view of rebel governance, highlighting the micro-level dynamics that underpin the political and existential aspirations of rebels.

Section II: Introducing Rebel *Intimate* Governance

Dipali Mukhopadhyay and Kimberly Howe (2023) draw from the idea of social solidarity by Ibn Khaldun (1967) to understand intimate authority in rebel governance. Ibn Khaldun proposed the idea of 'Assabiya'[6] which refers to concept of 'social solidarity with an emphasis on group consciousness, cohesiveness, and unity' in the midst of hardship, crisis, rough-and-tumult of wartime (Mukhopadhyay and Howe 2023, p. 13). Charles Tilly (2003: 45) draws from this concept of 'Assabiya' to propose the idea of 'institutional closeness,' which in addition to coercion (control), and capital (capacity) constitutes an essential condition for governance. Going beyond legal-rational and material construction of solidarity to non-material and relational solidarity, Mukhopadhyay and Howe (2023) expand on this idea of institutional closeness. In doing so, they propose the idea of 'intimate authority' where the solidarity in rebel governance is forged through common aspirations, shared experiences, and kinship networks (Mukhopadhyay and Howe 2023, p. 13).

As Tilly famously argued, "Big structures, large processes, and huge comparisons depend on people's everyday activities" (Tilly 1984, p. 147), underscoring how micro-level interactions are integral to broader institutional and political transformations. Although institutional analysis has a distinguished pedigree in comparative politics, "border-crossers" have constantly eroded the walls dividing the three main perspectives of rational choice, historical, sociological institutionalism since the 1990s (North, Skocpol, Katzenstein, Thelen). Our approach to intimate governance builds on this tradition of crossing borders by incorporating insights from critical security studies, critical geography, and feminist scholarship. This more eclectic perspective

[6] "Asabiyyah," in John L. Esposito (ed.) 2003. The Oxford Dictionary of Islam. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

foregrounds the ways in which everyday practices, affective relations, and spatial configurations shape governance structures, security regimes, and political contestations, challenging conventional institutionalist frameworks that often overlook how power is experienced, enacted, and contested through individual emotions and everyday spatial interactions within specific social, cultural, and political contexts.

We define intimate governance as the strategies and practices deployed by non-state actors, particularly insurgent groups, to exert control over emotions in the personal, interpersonal (social), and everyday aspects of individuals' lives within a specific territory. Intimate governance is analogous to 'everyday politics', often invisible to empirical research simply because they appear familiar, ordinary, humble, banal, and even personal, which also make them universal, ubiquitous, and 'normal'(Scott, 1987). Intimate governance, however, should not be assumed to be coincidental or unintentional; rather its power lies both in its pervasive presence and its purposefulness, and its ability to present itself as wrapped in the ordinariness of mundane rituals. In this we are reminded of James Scott's (1987) ideas of 'everyday resistance', where he describes hidden and invisible forms of power. Similarly, the 'micropolitics of [the] everyday' (Berlant, 2000) and the idea of social reproduction (Elias and Rai, 2019; Hedstrom, 2021) in feminist political economy and feminist security studies central to the everyday moral and political economy of war. Rebel organizations rely on the governance of intimacy in legitimizing, furthering, and achieving their political objectives of social control and political power (Giri, 2023; 2024). These theoretical concepts have foregrounded the intimate and social processes in everyday life of the rebellion crucial to the sustenance and furtherance of violent politics.

The quasi-voluntary compliance engendered by rebel groups through intimacy is not always a deeply positive affective attachment undergirded by the feeling of aspiration, admiration, and affinity. It is quite possible that different vectors of fear, coercion, and superficial attachment are simultaneously involved in the process of intimate governance. However, the fundamental premises of the intimate governance based on rebels tapping into and representing common experience (suffering), aspiration (hope and imagination of future), and affinity (closeness–institutional and interpersonal), via multiple simultaneous mechanisms of intimate governance. Such mechanisms could be spontaneous or carefully calculated, cultivated, and curated.

If the fear and coercion is the starting point of rebel governance, it lacks sturdy normative foundation. Liane Hartnett argues that love, instead of fear, is a normative foundation that constitutes community, legitimate coercion and empowerment (2024, 202). It is essential to the politics of collective power. Fear, after all, is not a primary emotion of attachment, aspiration, love, and care. Fear of death stems from love of life, fear of an authoritarian rule emanates from a love of democratic system. In Augustine's view, love is the basic attitude of all human beings towards reality. St Augustin elevates love from mere an affect to a profound orientation of the soul, a driving force that directs our desires, actions, and pursuits (Patterson and Joustra 2022). While

argue that the love or the intimate attachment to the rebel politics and governance is what rebel organisations ideally aspire for, we do not rule out the extraordinarily visceral and vivid role of fear as coterminous influence. Similarly, the direction of (political) love embedded into desires, actions and pursuits cannot always be liberatory, emancipatory, and just.

Overall, our attempt is to shed light to the intimate ways rebel engender and manipulate intimate affects to further their governance goals and objectives. However, we do not claim to capture all the scope, complexity and multi-layered nature of intimate constellation of rebel governance. Nevertheless, we lay out potential nodal points of intimate governance before delving deeper into the role of education, both formal/informal, in rebel governance as an illustration. We offer a brief snapshot of how gender, conjugal order, ideology, religion, ethnicity, symbolic process, and cultural programs including music and literature work as possible instruments of intimate governance.

Section III: Process and Mechanisms of Intimate Governance

Intimate governance operates through a range of mechanisms that blend symbolic, affective, and material strategies to shape political authority at the micro-level. Zachariah Mampilly (2015) argues that the symbolic processes deployed by rebel groups are more than mere rhetorical devices; they serve both vital instrumental and normative functions in governance. These symbolic mechanisms allow rebels to conserve resources while ensuring compliance without relying too much on coercion, which can be both costly and counterproductive. Moreover, they foster civilian identification with the rebel government, embedding its authority within the social fabric. Mampilly highlights how martyr's memorials, rebel flags, and national anthems function as symbolic tools of governance, cultivating a shared sense of belonging and legitimizing rebel rule. Beyond these, rebels may deploy other affective and embodied practices—such as ritualized mourning, cultural festivals, and everyday bureaucratic interactions—to deepen civilian allegiance.

The spatial dimensions of intimate governance are also critical; the reorganization of public spaces, renaming of streets, and establishment of alternative administrative centers further inscribe rebel authority into the lived environment, which, is best understood as a 'grey zone of state-insurgency interface' (Sen 2021), where rebels and state actors often engage in overlapping governance practices, blurring the boundaries between insurgent and formal rule. As shown in the next section, rebels can control content and delivery of education with or without territorial control. The LTTE, for example, entered into an informal dual governance of education with the state when it suited their ultimate purpose of governing the intimate and emotive aspects of civilian lives. This fluidity allows rebel groups to negotiate control over populations through both symbolic and material forms of governance. These mechanisms do not merely consolidate power but also create

a moral economy of governance, where legitimacy is not solely derived from coercion or service provision but also from the production of shared meanings, memories, and identities.

Gender has also often been overlooked in theories of state-formation (Peterson 2018; Lazarev 2023) which leads Devereux (2024) to argue that gender acts as another basic form of rule through which the central state negotiates with and exerts authority over societal elites and institutions. Moreover, Devereux (2024, 3-4) demonstrates that armed groups wishing to undermine these leaders exploit pre-existing gender grievances to build coalitions with marginalised young men and women with implications for community cohesion. Since gender roles are intimate, every day, and performative (Butler, 1988), rebel groups often seek to subvert or consolidate existing gender roles. Rebel gender governance is intricately linked to the political motives and objectives of the rebellion (Marks 2014, Baines 2017, Giri 2023, Matfess 2024). In fact, 40% of the rebel groups engage in some sort of gender governance (Devereux 2024).

While conjugal order can be subsumed within the gender order, Matfess (2024) shows that marriage in the rebel group influences cohesion and retention, as well as the rebels' logistical concerns directly affecting their governance, which makes the regulation of marriage and sexuality in the rebel group crucial to their social control and political power (Giri 2023) as well as the rebel moral economy (Giri 2025*). Ideology can be another vital instrument of intimate governance in rebel governance. While ideological identification can be driven by rational calculation, it is not detached from strong affective attachment. Rebel groups with a distinct ideology can act as an effective branding tool, enhancing constituents' identification and alignment with it (Akcinaroglu et al. 2025). This ideology enables rebel groups to offer a distinct social fostering strong relationships with their constituents, and hence benefits from such governance (Akcinaroglu et al. 2025).

Religion as an ideology offers another intimate attachment that allows rebel groups to use it as a guiding principle of rebel governance. Religions often address the psychological needs more comprehensively and potently by regularly offering cosmologies, moral frameworks, institutions, rituals, traditions, and other identity-supporting content that answers to individuals' needs (Seul 1999). Additionally, they offer a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and even self-actualisation (Seul 1999). These ingredients are essential to Ibn Khaldun's concept 'social solidarity' or 'Assabiya' (1967). In addition to fear and coercion, the ISIS in Syria and Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan have deployed puritanical version of religion in seeking to mobilise support and solidarity to govern the territory.

Like religion, ethnicity also provides intimate alignment with the rebel politics and building 'social solidarity.' Ethnic armed conflicts such as waged by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in India, and Kurdistan

Workers' Party (PKK)[7] in Turkey built organisational base exploiting the ethnic identity and grievances. There is a well-established literature on ethnic armed conflict that claims that ethnic armed conflicts are likely to last longer because of immutability of ethnic divide as well as strong attachment of members to their ethnic armed organisations (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Denny and Walter, 2014).

Relatedly, cultural artefacts and programs are often strategically deployed by rebel groups to promote rebel agenda, ideology, and facilitate rebel governance. The armed wing of the Maoists in Nepal, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) created its "Cultural Battalion," enlisting 1,500 artists to bring in new recruits with songs, dances, and shows and to maintain morale while proselytizing about the revolutionary program (Mottin 2009, 53). The emotive contents of cultural engagement built a relationship between the community and the party. Kristine Eck argues that the cultural teams in the PLA played a leading role appealing directly to people moving the crowd to laughter as well as tears (Eck 2007, 17). In case of Maoists in India, Alpa Shah (2013, 487) has noted that, Maoists rallies and cultural programs, music, and skits brought festive buzz drawing crowds connecting them with the Maoist movement. Cultural artefacts, programs often play key part in stirring up revolutionary zeal and sentiments enhancing the social solidarity.

We show these potential areas of intimate governance with three caveats. First, these instruments of intimate governance are not unique to rebel organisations; States/empires have been doing it for so long that they become taken for granted part of everyday life. Secondly, these instruments are not mutually exclusive. For example, governance of gender roles, norms, and practices as well as conjugal orders are often guided by religious ideology and beliefs, or rebel reinterpretation of those ideologies and beliefs. Finally, these are not the comprehensive nodal points of intimate governance. The ambit and influence of intimate governance vary depending upon the context of the armed conflict. For example, cult-like allegiance such as Joseph Kony in Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) can be seen as an alternative way of engendering intimate attachment to facilitate rebel governance.

Section IV: Empirical Evidence of Rebel Control of Education in South Asia[8]

Rebel groups control delivery of education to consolidate power, shape ideology, and cultivate loyalty. The LTTE in Sri Lanka, Maoists in Nepal and India, and the Taliban in Afghanistan demonstrate how insurgents leverage schools, curricula, and ideological instruction to embed governance structures within local populations.

The LTTE in Sri Lanka

[7] One can argue that this group is ideologically motivated to some extent.

[8] The evidence of intimate governance through education offered here is drawn from our more than a decade long collective field experience in South Asia over four countries: Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan.

The Sri Lankan Civil War (1983–2009) was a protracted conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government, rooted in ethnic tensions between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority. The LTTE, seeking an independent Tamil *Eelam* in the north and east of Sri Lanka, waged an armed insurgency against the state, which responded brutal counterinsurgency tactics, resulting in mass displacement, deaths and human rights violations, which finally ended in 2009 with the defeat of the LTTE by Sri Lankan government forces.

In its early years, from 1983 to 1987, the LTTE focused on eliminating political rivals, consolidating territorial control, and "clearing political space." After 1987, the Tamil Eelam Secretariat took charge of services like education, transport, local governance, media, and food distribution, which the LTTE saw as steps toward an independent Tamil Eelam. In 1987, just before the landmark peace agreement between India and Sri Lanka bringing the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to conflcit zones, the LTTE established the Tamil Eelam Secretariat, formally seizing civilian administration from the Sri Lankan government control.

After the IPKF withdrew in 1990, the LTTE restructured the Tamil Eelam Secretariat to fill the power vacuum and later requested the Sri Lankan government to resume service provision in the northeast (De Silva, 1998; Mampilly, 2012). Aware that Tamils had long relied on state services, the LTTE cautiously managed education and other public goods, fearing a loss of support if they failed to maintain or replace them. Recognizing these expectations was central to their governance strategy, ensuring they did not alienate their base.

By the 2002 ceasefire, the LTTE had established the Tamil Eelam Education Council (TEEC) to oversee education in its territory, mirroring the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education. The TEEC issued directives to provincial representatives within the LTTE's civilian administration, gradually expanding its role in education governance. In 2005, the Rural Economic Education and Research Organization (REERO), a branch of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), constructed school buildings in Jaffna and Mannar, further consolidating LTTE control over education infrastructure. Under the leadership of LTTE Secretary of Education Ilang Kumar (Ilankumaran), the TEEC prioritized community participation by establishing civil society-based advisory committees in each northeastern district. Comprising parents and educators, these committees helped regulate and supplement government-run schools, particularly addressing teacher and material shortages. This integration of civilians into education governance was a hallmark of intimate governance, embedding LTTE authority into daily life and fostering local identification with the rebel administration.

Additionally, the TEEC lobbied Sri Lanka's Ministry of Education to grant permanent status to temporary teachers in the northeast, further embedding its influence in the formal education system. Investing in education infrastructure allowed the LTTE to deepen its

administrative control, demonstrating its capacity to function as a parallel state. By co-opting state structures, the LTTE blurred the lines between its governance and the Sri Lankan state, solidifying its parallel rule.

Teachers in LTTE-controlled areas often complied with LTTE directives, in a quasi-voluntary manner although the fear of coercion, including harassment or violent reprisals, cannot be ruled out entirely. In July 2004, the LTTE mandated that teachers and principals administer exams on the history of the Tamil people to their students, as part of the group's broader propaganda efforts. Through curricular control, the LTTE used education not only as a means of service provision but as a vehicle for shaping political consciousness and fostering allegiance to its rule. Children in these schools also raised the Tamil Eelam flag each morning, pledged allegiance to Tamil Eelam and Prabhakaran, and became members of the LTTE Student Organization of Liberation Tigers (SOLT). LTTE members also regularly visited the schools in areas under LTTE control to show videos of successful LTTE missions and atrocities perpetrated against Tamils. These practices exemplify intimate governance, where the LTTE leveraged everyday rituals and symbolic control over education to entrench its legitimacy and shape future generations of Tamil nationalists. It is difficult to explain all these efforts by the LTTE unless we argue that the rebel group, determined to establish their own state, saw these concerted efforts at capturing the hearts and minds of civilians as an unavoidable extension of their overall governance project.

The LTTE not only controlled schools, teachers, and curricula but also distributed history textbooks commissioned by its education wing, even in government-controlled schools in Jaffna. While some condemned this as an "attempted invasion of young minds", urging authorities to intervene, Ilankumaran, head of the LTTE's education wing, defended the books, claiming they increased student interest in history, while aligning with national exam curricula. The Class VI textbook, for example, opened with chapters on "National anthem, national flag, and national insignia", prominently featuring LTTE symbols, including its flag. It defined Tamil Eelam's boundaries as spanning 20,000 square kilometers across the north, east, and central regions, with a population exceeding 2.5 million. In Sri Lanka's state-run education system, where 95% of schools are public and official textbooks are provided even to private schools, education is a key tool for cultural reproduction and national identity consolidation. By producing its own textbooks, the LTTE sought to challenge state narratives, reinforce Tamil nationalism, and assert symbolic control over its envisioned Tamil Eelam. By embedding Tamil history and LTTE symbolism into History and Citizenship Education, the LTTE forged an emotive connection with civilians, using intimate governance to cultivate a shared historical consciousness, reinforce allegiance, and legitimize its rule as the true representative of Tamil identity.

In addition, schools dual-purpose spaces—institutions of formal education by day and sites for rebel organizational activities by night. Students would gather to watch "promotional" videos

showcasing LTTE military operations and their interpretation of the war's history. Schools were the recruiting grounds, where sometimes children were forcibly taken to attend LTTE meetings, and at other times they willingly displayed LTTE symbols, such as cyanide capsules and grenades, during school activities. Additionally, while the formal school setting provided the structure for education, armed actors often infiltrated this space outside of official hours, becoming direct agents of knowledge transmission. This interplay of formal education, students' personal experiences, and rebel interventions constituted the fragile yet evolving collective understanding of the war, which simultaneously upheld and subtly subverted the state's sanctioned history, reflecting a complex dynamic of both reproducing and resisting the prevailing power structures.

The elite *Sirasu Puli* (Leopard Brigade), one of the LTTE's most formidable fighting units, was composed entirely of children drawn from orphanages that the LTTE built to foster and educate children displaced by the conflict, and many of whom were children of their martyrs. In these facilities, children received education alongside military training in LTTE camps, remaining there until they were considered ready to serve as full-time military cadres. The sustainability of armed conflict in the East of Sri Lanka, as in other parts of the world, was deeply embedded in knowledge systems that framed war as a transformative mechanism. These systems were sustained by partially shared historical narratives and emotional memories of history, legitimacy, justice, identity, and grievance that circulated across various social domains. By dictating the content and delivery of education, rebel groups like the LTTE can cast the state as illegitimate and the rebels as the rightful defenders of a community's past glory, present status, and the future trajectory. The focus on education is also a way for rebels to control and shape how young children perceive them and manufacture an intergenerational support system in their areas of control. Control over the curriculum allows rebels to indoctrinate youth with their ideology from an early age. By instilling their values and perspectives, they can create a generation that is loyal to their cause, which can be crucial for long-term recruitment.

The Maoists in Nepal and India

The Maoist insurgency in Nepal (1996–2006), led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), transformed Nepal's political landscape, ultimately leading to the abolition of the monarchy in 2008 and the integration of former rebels into mainstream politics. The Maoists in Nepal exerted control over education as a strategic tool to advance their ideological agenda, recruit and retain supporters, legitimize their violent tactics, foster cohesion and loyalty within their ranks, and instill communist ideals in the citizenry. By 2002, the insurgency had spread to seventy-three out of seventy-five districts (Kumar, 2003), covering more than eighty percent of the country. Schools, among the few remaining state institutions in Maoist-controlled areas, became both ideological and literal battlegrounds (Caddell, 2006). Consequently, these schools were targeted by the Maoists as part of their broader effort to dismantle existing state instruments, structures, and symbols.

The Maoist insurgency in India, rooted in the Naxalite movement (1967–present), has been a protracted conflict led by the Communist Party of India (Maoist) across the "Red Corridor"—spanning several districts across Indian heartland. Unlike their Nepali counterpart, the Maoists in India have doggedly refused to take the path of political mainstreaming and electoral success. The Maoists seek to overthrow the Indian state, advocating for land redistribution, indigenous rights, and a New Democratic revolution. In this conflict, the schools were frequently occupied by security forces and targeted by Naxalites, leading to the destruction of educational infrastructure, displacement of students, and militarization of learning spaces (Shah, 2011).

In the heartland of world's longest guerrilla war, the Indian Maoists have continued to strategically use education to indoctrinate, recruit, and sustain ideological commitment, establishing informal schools (*vidyalayas*) as part of their governance (*janatana sarkar*) while attacking state-run institutions as tools of oppression, assimilation and surveillance (Rao, 2017). The Maoist *Janathana Sarkar* simultaneously embodied both coercion and consent, where governance is sustained through service provision, ideological control, and strategic use of violence. The state-insurgency interface remains fluid, as the Maoists simultaneously oppose and manipulate state institutions, leveraging external resources while maintaining territorial control(Kunnath, 2022).The rebel curricula in the Red Corridor systematically emphasized class struggle, state repression, and revolutionary consciousness. By providing an alternative education system, the Maoists sought to undermine state legitimacy, foster ideological loyalty, and mobilize tribal communities into the insurgency. Schools in conflict zones are both sites of resistance and instruments of governance, where Maoists control the curricula to reinforce class struggle, state exploitation narratives, and militant solidarity, further embedding their influence within marginalized communities (Sen, 2021). Schneiderman (2003) argues that the Nepal Maoists also offered an alternative counter-hegemonic nationalism in their curriculum that recognizes the value of indigenous participation and addresses indigenous needs.

In Nepal too, schools were strategic locations for recruitment for the rebels and also the physical space for shelters and political gatherings (Watchlist, 2005). The list of 40 demands that the Maoists presented to the Government immediately before declaring war included the right to mother tongue education, universal education, and the closure of all for-profit schools (Thapa and Sijapati, 2004). The Maoists attacked school buildings and the education system - not only as symbols of state institutions, but also as icons and processes of ethnic subjugation and discrimination (Pherali, 2013). They also simultaneously cultivated a broader educational ethos central to the instilling a culture of reading and writing amongst the Maoist youth (Zharkevich, 2013). This is also reflected in the explosion of Maoist memoirs by the former guerrilla youth that emerged in the wake of the war (Hutt, 2012). This educational ethos sought to address the intellectual inadequacy of the populace plagued by the absence of schools and formal education. The list of 40 demands that the Maoists presented to the Government immediately before declaring

war included the right to mother tongue education, universal education, and the closure of all for-profit schools (Thapa and Sijapati, 2004).

The formal education system in India, shaped by colonial legacies and post-independence nation-building efforts, prioritized urban, upper-caste, and mainstream linguistic and cultural identities, leaving *Adivasi* (indigenous) and *Dalit* populations alienated, and with limited access to quality education. Indigenous grievances are embedded in daily life and felt in deeply personal ways: in how someone is spoken to, whether their home is entered with respect, or if food is shared. The "Maoists have understood Adivasi grievances in terms of these everyday intimacies," and rebel education gives meaning to these grievances by embedding them in a structural critique of the state, capitalism, and systemic oppression, transforming personal suffering into collective revolutionary consciousness (Shah, 2013a, 2013b). The Maoist idea of nation-building in Nepal also co-opted the struggles of indigenous nationalities and Madhesis who asserted 'people-centric' inclusive notions of 'Nepaliness' and legitimation of the language, history and lifestyles of diverse cultural, social and regional communities in the national space (Gellner, 2016). The Maoists in both India and Nepal upheld Lenin's dictum that the masses must be systematically educated to champion - most resolutely, consistently, boldly and in a revolutionary manner, the right of nations to self-determination"

Before the decade-long Maoist *Janayuddha* (People's War), Nepal's education system also functioned as a hegemonic tool to coalesce the diverse Nepali society with the monarch and the ruling elite (mainly representing hill high castes) maintaining their control of the state (Lawoti, 2007). The National Education System Plan (NESP) announced in 1971, for example, aimed at meeting the social, political and economic needs of the nation and solidifying the project of nation-building through the educational process. The main objective of the NESP and the exclusionary education system it perpetuated was to produce a citizenry loyal to the Crown and the Panchayat political system, serve the ruling classes, subjugate ethnic minorities, as well as to develop scientific and technical human resources (Pherali, 2022). The Maoists banned some elements of this national curriculum, like teaching of Sanskrit, in their areas of influence, and school teachers and administration were assassinated for non-compliance by both the state and the Maoists. 145 teachers and 331 pupils were reportedly killed by the state and rebels during the ten-year period of violent conflict in Nepal (INSEC, 2007).

In their project to create an alternative legitimacy, challenging the deeply entrenched Hindu ruling elite, as well as other structures of oppression including feudalism and patriarchy, the Nepal Maoists took the deliberate steps to ban Sanskrit and other Hindu rituals, the lingua franca of the Hindu priests who upheld the monarch's divine right to rule. Teachers reported that schoolchildren in their districts were asked to tear out the portraits of the monarchs from their textbooks and in many places, the students affiliated to the Maoist student wing All Nepal National Free Students Union (Revolutionary) burnt the books (Pherali 2022). The number of children abducted and

tortured by the warring parties was reported to be several thousands. The Maoists burned books they deemed ideologically opposed, vandalized school offices and libraries, and forced school heads and teachers to comply with their demands—attending political programs, paying donations, allowing political training, and even storing ammunition and supplies—to keep schools open (Pherali, 2022). The Maoist education system (formal and everyday) also fulfilled this basic and essential function of informing the population about the existence, goals, and methods of the Maoists in Nepal (Eck 2007: 25).

It is no coincidence that the Maoist supremo in Nepal, Prachanda, along with many other top-most Maoist leaders, were themselves teachers before leading the Maoist armed conflict in Nepal. Similarly, Muppalla Lakshmana Rao, alias Ganapathy, patriarch of CPI (Maoist), and top leader Akiraju Haragopal aka RK were also school teachers in Warangal district of Telangana, as were many other local leaders. School teachers were among the key agents spreading Maoist ideology in rural India and Nepal (Ogura 2007: 464–566). The strong presence of school teachers in Peru among the Maoist rank and file led Angel (1982) to call them 'classroom Maoists.' Similarly, Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) with Peru's Shining Path consisted of leaders who were educated but frustrated with the existing system (Richards 1998: 27-28). These alternative education systems and new cultural practices also helped Maoists to forge a new subjecthood that is based on inclusivity, equity, and justice. The Maoists in South Asia also repurposed existing cultural practices with their ideology to spread their movement. In many cases, the Maoists merged and co-opted Maoist themes with established cultural practices to convey complex ideas about ideology and grievances in an easily accessible manner for poorly educated peasants. Local cultural practices were utilized by the Maoists as a means to popularize the ideas behind their movement. These practices connected the Maoists with masses providing the people with a sense of collective strength, as well as facilitating the education, mobilization, and recruitment of the peasantry (Eck, 2007: 19).

The Taliban in Afghanistan

In many ways, the Taliban case-study mirrors both the LTTE and Maoist cases. Jackson (2018) observes that the Taliban do not need to take territory to control it; they just control, regulate and deliver education to Afghans, which helps establish the group as a legitimate authority. During the decades-long insurgency from 2001-2021, the Taliban used education to mobilize civilians against foreign occupation. Several analysts have observed that the Taliban are hostile to education, and view state-led (Western) education as un-Islamic (Pherali and Sahar, 2018). During the insurgency the Taliban repeatedly attacked schools, school administrators, teachers, and even students (Giuztozzi and Franco, 2013; Burde, 2014). Schools were often closed due to these security risks.

During the insurgency, there was a clear incentive to suppress education, both as an indirect representation of the state and for its direct influence on the population. The Taliban viewed the

existing education curricula as contravening Islamic values and a potential threat to their political and social goals. Palmer (2020) notes that controlling the flows of information helps consolidate power, as information contrary to the group looking to influence a population can undermine their ideology and promote rebellion. The Taliban's ideological position on education is informed by their deep suspicion of curricula developed under Western influence (often shaped by Western-educated technocratic elites). This explains why the Taliban especially targeted (and prohibited) material promoting human / women's rights and democratization. Hence, they recognised the need to develop and promote new curricula (a hark back to their previous rule, 1996-2001) to eliminate foreign influences.

Prior to 2001, educational resources (such as textbooks) had little educational value except for disseminating ideological interests (Burde, 2014), and religious education replaced scientific education. For example, Pherali and Sahar (2018) observe that textbooks used in primary schools during mujahideen (1992–1995) and Taliban rule (1996–2001) glorified *jihad* and often started with

> *'A is for Allah. Allah protects all Muslims'; 'J is for Jihad. Jihad is an obligation of all Muslims'; 'T is for topak (gun)'. Ahmed has a topak and conducts jihad with it against the Soviets.*

Interestingly, in the '80s, the University of Nebraska—which holds one of the largest repositories of archival material on Afghanistan—published textbooks for mujahideen-run schools that stressed *jihad* and military resistance against Soviet occupation. In the '90s and during the two-decade long insurgency post-2001, the Taliban preferred these old education materials for schools operating in territories they controlled because they stressed resistance against occupation; the group consistently demanded that the mujahideen-era textbooks and Taliban approved religious texts be adopted and Western-style schools be demolished (Giustozzi and Franco, 2013).

In December 2006, the Taliban leadership issued a *layeha* (i.e., code of conduct) that authorized attacks on schools that used new / Western textbooks. The *layeha* contained a detailed procedure and stages of conduct that ranged from administering a warning, administering physical beatings of teaching staff and students, arson attacks on schools, and even targeted killing of education staff. Pherali and Sahar (2018) quote a district-level public servant who lamented that:

> *Taliban have banned the teaching of social and cultural studies such as music and arts in schools, claiming that these subjects are un-Islamic and promote Western culture and values.*

Soon after returning to power in 2021, the Taliban revised education curricula to prioritize religious studies. They established a new education commission, which was tasked with reforming the Western-inlfuenced curriculum. The commission rejected subjects that were previously part of school and university curricula, including art and civic education, prohibiting materials that introduced and debated topics including democracy, elections, the constitution, human rights, music and other topics in contradiction to Islamic values. In some provinces, the Taliban replaced

English, culture, history, and physical education classes with Islamic subjects. According to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR, 2021), the Taliban seek to teach war and jihad as two distinct concepts across schools in Afghanistan.

Instead, the Taliban have tried to operationalise what they call the 'Islamic education system' in Afghanistan. While forcing the closure of large numbers of education institutions including private schools and tuition centers, in 2022 they announced plans to build between 3 to 10 *madrassas* in each of Afghanistan's 387 districts—a massive financial and logistical undertaking. At the time of writing this paper in 2024, more than 2000 madrassas operate under Taliban patronage. The ultimate goal is to indoctrinate students, especially youth. This complements our findings from the LTTE case-study. While doing away with Western-style, civic education (which focuses on liberal ideas of citizenship, the social contract, rights and responsibilities), they have elevated and prioritized *madrassa* education and qualified concepts such as citizenship and 'civicness' in terms of *Shari'a*, religious customs and traditions. These subjects are crucial for understanding how the Taliban uses education to shape collective memory and civic identity within the nation, an ostensibly Islamic one.

Education reforms by the Taliban are not confined to curricula. Deeply aware of their organizational capacity and limits (especially during a power and regime transition), the Taliban appointed *mullahs* (graduates of madrassas who are trained in religion studies and Islamic jurisprudence) to the posts of Minister for Education and Higher Education. Abdul Baqi Haqqani, the Taliban's Minister of Higher Education until 17 October 2022, said that the people of Afghanistan will continue their higher education *in light of Islamic law* (Global Campus of Human Rights, 2022). Towards implementing the new policy, the Taliban introduced sweeping changes at all levels of study. At the tertiary level, for instance, within two months of assuming power the Taliban replaced the executive leadership at leading education institutions and appointed Taliban fighters as the new Chancellors at Kabul University, Kandahar University, and Paktia University. Kabul University's new Chancellor, Mohammad Ashraf Ghairat, took to social media / Twitter (now known as X) to boast that his mission was "to rid Kabul University of Western and infidel thoughts", prostitution and moral corruption. He went on to say, "As long as real Islamic environment is not provided for all, women will not be allowed to come to universities or work. Islam first" (Science, 2021). These appointments are at once strategic and ideological. The new ministers in Cabinet and university chancellors imposed an extremely conservative interpretation of *Shari'a* law on Afghanistan's higher education system. Many of these leaders have questioned the educational achievements of the past two decades and publicly stated that Islam is more important than qualifications.

Such policing is not limited to the executive leadership. The Taliban have appointed personnel at education institutions to identify and report teachers suspected of 'corrupt' and 'subversive' secular ideals and approaches, and have already dismissed educators from university posts (replacing them with their own fighters). In addition, they have instructed universities to not

hire new staff without the input of Taliban representatives and/or final approval from the Ministry of Education / Higher Education.

The Taliban also recognise that education is part and parcel of service provision demanded by the population; providing some education enables the Taliban to assume state functions and responsibilities. Under Taliban rule, the *madrassa* is the primary source of general education at primary and secondary levels. In 1999, 875,000 students were enrolled across primary and secondary levels, 64,000 of whom were female. While this marked a significant drop in enrolments from 1994/1995 when various mujahideen groups were in power, education was not outlawed (or was so only in name). Many schools continued to operate under the cover of foreign-run NGOS and aid agencies such as CARE International and the Swedish Committee in Afghanistan. Some Taliban commanders chose not to implement the official policy of a temporary ban on women's education.

In 1996 the Taliban issued a decree which declared education for girls to be stopped (Rauf, 2021). The regime remained in power for five years during which women and girls were banned from most levels of school and university education; the only exception was medical education for women because female patients were permitted to be examined only by female doctors. For this reason the Taliban did not ban women from working as doctors and nurses (but banned women working in all other areas) (Khwajamir, 2016: 3), demonstrating how the Taliban instrumentalised education to control both the private and public lives of women citizens. Since returning to power in 2021, the Taliban have banned secondary education for female students. The Taliban have claimed this was a 'temporary' decision implemented while they articulate and implement policy on school uniforms for women and curricula consistent with Islamic values as interpreted by the Taliban. Post-2001, the Taliban have imposed a draconian ban on women's education (alongside severely restricting women's access to healthcare, employment rights, etc.).

But the Taliban approach to governing education is not necessarily monolithic. During the decades-long insurgency the Taliban favored a hybrid approach to governance, often bargaining with state authorities and actors to facilitate the delivery of services. Previously, we indicated that sometimes rebels use state infrastructure to deliver education, as the LTEE did in Sri Lanka and the Maoists did in Nepal. Mampilly (2021) observes that rebel groups can strike agreements with the government they are fighting to allow government resources to continue covering the costs of the education system (thus preventing the need to divert critical resources and manpower away from war-fighting). The Taliban rulers also strike arrangements with NGOs and development/aid agencies that cover the costs of education while granting them a degree of say over curriculum and staffing. For the government involved, this allows them to retain a foothold in rebel territory while also preventing the armed group from manipulating the curriculum. Finally, rebels may allow private actors, whether religious organizations, parent associations or businesses, to provide education while forcing them to adhere to standards and stipulations outlined by the group. In doing so, rebels impose their ideology and morality on the population and socialize them into compliance.

Mampilly's observations on the LTEE mirror the Taliban approach to education as well. Prior to their return to power in 2021, many local Taliban commanders desired the population in areas they controlled to receive an education. This was as long as they believed they could exert influence over key aspects of education, such as curriculum, access to funding from the Ministry of Education, and teacher recruitment at designated learning locations. Local agreements between the Taliban and education providers, whether NGOs or in the employ of the state (aided by community elders and *ulama*), often resulted in a sense of control. The key was ensuring schools and communities adhere to the Taliban's code of conduct. Some common practices included having Taliban representatives present in school councils (in areas they controlled) to monitor school management processes, participate in staff recruitment, and facilitate the recruitment of Taliban affiliates to all available vacancies. At the very least, schools would have at least one staff member who reported to the Taliban on a regular basis (Ruttig, 2011).

Conclusion

How do rebel governors, who strive to be as integrated with their people as the proverbial fish in water, foster quasi-voluntary compliance of civilians? To answer this question about how rebels generate legitimacy, we shift our focus from the more visible, state-like behaviors of rebel groups—such as taxation, service provision, and territorial control—toward the micro-level dynamics where rebels influence the emotional and intimate aspects of civilian lives. These elements, often overlooked, play a crucial role in shaping the broader political processes and structures within rebel governance. While the importance of controlling territory, taxation, and service provision in rebel governance is undeniable, we suggest that these observable activities that are more amenable to our positivist preferences do not automatically lead to control over the intimate and emotional spheres, which are equally critical to a rebel group's ability to govern effectively. Intimate governance is a conscious choice, and not an afterthought or unintended consequence of other more observable and well researched aspects of rebel control.

Based on our collective fieldwork experience in conflict zones of South Asia, we argue that although territorial control is crucial to their rebellion, governing these areas requires civilian support. Quasi-voluntary civilian compliance, even if backed by the fear of coercion from either the state or the rebels, is an enduring puzzle of interest. Although the rebel governance literature recognizes the importance of rebel interest in controlling emotions to increase predictability in civilian behavior and in articulating a social contract in a rebelocracy, there is a lack of a focused research program examining emotions and intimacy. By focusing on intimate governance, particularly through formal and everyday education, policymakers can better understand how some rebel groups win civilian hearts and minds, identify the sites and tools of this governance, and grasp the mechanisms that enable some rebels to establish legitimacy, maintain control, and build community relationships, while others fail to do so.

In this paper we argue that rebels invest scarce human and financial resources to control content and delivery of education, and they do it to manufacture loyalty and legitimacy, and to effectively embed their ideology into every aspect of everyday life, which, in turn, legitimize their overall governance, and exert deeper control over the communities they govern. We identify four mutually reinforcing mechanisms of intimate governance through rebel control of education in South Asia. First, rebels control education to carefully construct an alternative view of the past, the present, and the future for people they govern. Different rebel groups achieve different levels of success in impressing upon civilians that this new reading of a people's history and the construction of a new future is a participatory exercise. But all rebel leaders that want to govern try to ensure that civilians have some buy-in in the new curriculums and textbooks that become vehicles of this project. However, in order to ensure that education serves their ideological purpose rebels carefully select who is in charge of the delivery of the new education, which explains why rebels insist on regulating the selection and ideology training of teachers as agents of influence. The process of integrating teachers into their governance structure is both a practical and ideological strategy that serves multiple purposes. We show how rebel rulers select and screen teachers in local schools, whether in Jaffna, in parts of Nepal or in Taliban controlled areas of Afghanistan.

Second, in addition to teachers, rebels pay a lot of attention to designing a new curriculum in a way that serves their dual purpose of generating legitimacy for the rebel government and negating the legitimacy of the state. To illustrate this argument, we provide examples to show how deliberate the Maoists, the Taliban, and the LTTE were in what they include in the history curriculum. Third, through education in its formal and everyday forms, this act of crafting a new *imagined community* transpires in schools as well as in everyday life, through small, conscious steps of rejecting the old Leviathan and building a new local identity. This exercise is fraught with danger, as the British learned in their attempts to question entrenched social norms in colonial India (Dutt, 1906). But to the advantage of the rebels, the new community that they try to consolidate either come organically from the local norms and markers of identity or evokes a history of the people that goes beyond the modern state. In other words, intimate governance by rebels engenders loyalty and commitment of civilians by convincing them that they are participating in and contributing to a new, more just form of governance, which respects their true identity and real history, all of which the state did not do.

Fourth, the whole enterprise of building an alternate moral authority depends on rebels' ability to redefine the personal morality of ordinary people, including what they consider good and bad in their private and public lives, including their roles in their families and communities, their duties as children, spouses, parents, citizens or soldiers. In this section we show that rebels are conscious of the importance and the challenge of building an alternate moral and ideological authority distinct from the default authority of the state. To illustrate how everyday education

creates alternate morality and consequently challenges the default morality of the state, we focus on rebel governance of death, where they redefine rites and rituals surrounding the dead. These newly crafted alternative rites of death can not easily be rationally categorized as means to bolster their military and territorial control; yet rebels are very thoughtful and deliberate in crafting them, which serves as evidence of the value of intimate governance from the rebels' perspective. Prabhakaran and the LTTE, for example, galvanized support for their cause by publicly invoking LTTE 'martyrs.' Most notably, this was done through the Heroes Day annual celebration. However, during the 1980s and 1990s Prabhakaran also inspired and institutionalized changed death rituals for LTTE soldiers. Instead of being cremated, the bodies of Hindu LTTE soldiers were buried. In turn, numerous martyr cemeteries (sometimes called "hero rest houses") popped up around Tiger territory.

Through formal and everyday education, broken down into four interrelated mechanisms listed above, rebels integrate activities like designing a new curriculum, recruiting/training teachers, creating new festivals, raising displaced children in orphanages, changing gender norms and expectations around marriage, redefining rites and rituals of the dead, which do not automatically have instrumental value in increasing rebel territorial control or military might. Yet they do all of these to instill a sense of loyalty and identity in everyday life, to weave a new narrative of where the people they govern came from and where they are/should be headed in future. Finally, governing the intimate and the emotive is not a default outcome of controlling territory or providing education; rather rebels take decisive, thoughtful, and concrete steps in governing the intimate.

Adding intimate governance as an extension of rebel governance has significant policy implications, as it highlights the deeply rooted, community-level control that rebels can exert in conflict zones. This concept extends beyond the traditional understanding of rebel governance, which often focuses on the establishment of administrative structures and the provision of services, by emphasizing how rebels infiltrate social and cultural institutions, such as education and local leadership. Recognizing intimate governance allows policymakers to better understand the full scope of rebel influence, particularly how rebels cultivate legitimacy, loyalty, and compliance within civilian populations through everyday interactions and social norms. This understanding is crucial for designing effective counterinsurgency strategies, post-conflict reconstruction efforts, and peacebuilding initiatives that address not only the overt structures of rebel governance but also the subtle, informal networks of control that sustain these groups. By incorporating intimate governance into policy analysis, interventions can be more precisely targeted to disrupt these deep-seated networks, thereby weakening the rebels' grip on society and enhancing the prospects for long-term peace and stability.

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