

A Political Science Presentation by

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Follow the Family: Kin Targeting in Counterinsurgencies

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Lane Room, Ellison 3824

Why are counterinsurgency campaigns able to overpower some insurgencies and not others? We compare two counterinsurgency campaigns in India with divergent outcomes. The one in Punjab was able to subdue the insurgency, whereas the one in Kashmir has had limited success. Drawing on 105 interviews, 54 with security force personnel and 51 with family members of insurgents, we highlight the ability of the security forces to target a key vulnerability of an insurgency – insurgent family ties.

Family ties bolster an insurgency. They are used to socialize an insurgent and offer a network of trust and emotional support. But as the phenomenon of insurgent family targeting points out, family ties are also a vulnerability for an insurgency. Counterinsurgents target families to: limit the exposure of civilians to violence, threaten active insurgents and deter potential insurgents, gather information on the insurgency, and encourage insurgents to leave the rebels. We find (1) when insurgent families are accessible to counterinsurgents, they are targeted; (2) counterinsurgents rely on three unique yet interwoven insurgent family targeting mechanisms: coercion, inducements, and surveillance; (3) when an insurgency is unable to evolve mechanisms to resist family targeting, it is more likely to be overpowered, whereas, when the insurgency evolves successful mechanisms to counter family targeting, it is able to prolong its lifespan.