On October 31, 2021, Al Jazeera reported the Ethiopian government accusing the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) of killing more than a hundred ‘youth residents’ in the town of Kombolcha, located in the Amhara region of the country (Al Jazeera). According to local residents, hours of gunfight and possible air raids starting from the previous night preceded the killings. The accusations followed the TPLF’s announcement regarding the capture of the town but have yet to be verified due to the communications blackout in Northern Ethiopia. However, if true, the capture of Kombolcha would mark a “major strategic gain” as it is the furthest south Tigrayan forces have reached. This recent advance, as well as past developments, against the Ethiopian army demonstrate how the lack of economic endowments does not necessarily translate to a weaker character in rebel groups.

In his article “Resources and the Information Problem in Rebel Recruitment,” Jeremy M. Weinstein explores how the resource base affects a rebel group’s membership, structure, and behavior. When organizing a rebellion, rebel groups are faced with the information problem – when rebel groups are unable to distinguish high commitment recruits from low-commitment recruits (Weinstein). To avoid this issue, Weinstein outlines the use of different sets of incentives and mechanisms to attract the desirable group of recruits. However, rebels’ strategies are largely dependent on the economic and social endowments available to the groups. In a resource-rich environment, rebel groups provide payoffs in exchange for short-term loyalty, allowing the group to rapidly grow a base. On the other hand, in resource-poor environments, rebel groups rely on shared identities and promises of rewards to attract recruits dedicated to the cause. Low-commitment recruits are opportunistic, joining a movement for short-term benefits (payoffs) while, high committed recruits join because of promises of rewards in the future. To weed out opportunistic recruits, Weinstein suggests three strategies: gather information, vouching, and costly induction. Rebel groups can gather information about the recruit’s past behavior using local networks, enforce a vouching system for recruitment which bases the reputation of current members on the successes of the recruit they vouch for, and/or install a set of steps (training, education, etc.) that are more costly for individuals to then disincentivize them to join.

In a *New York Times* article, titled “How Local Guerrilla Fighters Routed Ethiopia’s Powerful Army,” author Declan Walsh describes an influx of thousands of “highly motivated young recruits” joining the TPLF as the conflict carries on. As Weinstein mentions, a resource constrained rebel group will find it much harder to recruit rapidly because tapping and creating social identities takes time (Weinstein). However, in a mostly ethnically homogenous region (Tigray), the Tigrayan rebel forces emphasized the shared identity, culture, and language of the region to recruit individuals. At the start of the conflict, Tigrayans were divided and distrusted the party, perceiving it to be “tired, authoritarian, and corrupt”; but, as the war progressed, the list of atrocities committed against the Tigrayans by Abiy’s government encouraged a shared identity stemming from shared experiences of discrimination, ethnic violence, and massacres (social endowment) (Walsh). To further establish a collective identity and disincentive low-committed recruits, the TPLF manages recruitment camps where instructors are teaching new recruits about Tigrayan culture and identity, reinforcing the collective and cohesive identity of the organization. Weinstein’s theory explains how the lack of economic endowments forced the TPLF to tap into the preexisting social identities and political beliefs, garnering a base of loyal supporters fighting for the promise of rewards or security.

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