The Nexus of Elites and War Mobilization: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract
Elites often draw on social networks to mobilize citizens to participate in conflicts. However, it is challenging to elucidate the role of elite networks due to the difficulty of measurement. It is even more difficult to further investigate how mobilization affects the elites after the conflict, as mobilization may be endogenous to elite networks. We highlight the nexus of elites and war mobilization by studying a context that helps address these challenges. Our setting is the Hunan Army – a standing army organized by one Hunanese scholar-general from an existing local militia to repress the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). We construct comprehensive datasets to depict the elites in the general's pre-war network, measure soldier deaths, and characterize the career of the elites in the network pre and post the war. A two-way nexus of elites and war mobilization emerges from our analyses: (i) elites used their personal networks for mobilization, and (ii) mobilization benefited the elites and elevated them to the national political stage.