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**The Role of Far-Right Pro-State Militias in Democratic
State Systems**

Diploma Thesis

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Declaration

1. I declare that I have independently processed the presented thesis and used only the sources and literature specified.
2. I declare that the thesis has not been used to obtain another degree.
3. I agree that the thesis may be made accessible for study and research purposes.

In Prague, 10th July 2023

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Abstract

This diploma thesis examines the impact of ultra-nationalist pro-state militias with a radical political ideology on the stability and functioning of democratic systems. The observed cases encompass the Ukrainian Azov Battalion and Right Sector, as well as the Croatian Defense Forces (HOS) and the United-Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). Through qualitative analysis and multiple case studies, the research investigates the consequences of these militias' activities, their integration into the state apparatus, and their potential threats to democratic processes. The findings reveal a complex relationship between militias and the state, characterized by ideological differences and simultaneous integration within the political sphere. The study highlights the militias' role in defending the state during civil conflicts, while also noting the gradual loss of autonomy as they collaborate more closely with official military structures. The research emphasizes the significance of popular support garnered by these militias during wartime, yet it highlights the limitations in their political influence within the democratic system. The thesis also introduces the concept of the "Militia-State Ambivalence Nexus" as a framework of understanding the strategies employed by governments to harness militias' capabilities while mitigating potential destabilization. Future research should explore the political wings of these militias and expand the framework's applicability to radicalized armed pro-state formations within democratic environments, deepening insights into the implications of such groups in democratic frameworks.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá vlivem ultranacionalistických pro-státních milicí s radikální politickou ideologií na stabilitu a fungování demokratických systémů. Studované případy zahrnují ukrajinský Pluk Azov a Pravý Sektor, stejně jako Chorvatské obranné síly (HOS) a Ozbrojené síly sebeobrany Kolumbie (AUC). Prostřednictvím kvalitativní analýzy a několika případových studií tato práce zkoumá důsledky činnosti tohoto typu milicí, jejich začlenění do státního aparátu a jejich potenciální hrozby pro demokratické procesy. Získané výzkumné údaje odhalují složitý vztah mezi milicí a státem, jenž se projevuje ideologickými rozdíly a zároveň integrací do politické struktury. V práci je zdůrazněna úloha milicí při obraně státu během občanských střetů a současně je zaznamenána postupná ztráta jejich autonomie v důsledku jejich užší spolupráce s oficiálními

vojenskými strukturami. Výzkum zdůrazňuje význam veřejné podpory, kterou tyto milice získávají během války, zároveň však upozorňuje na omezení jejich politického vlivu v rámci demokratického systému. Diplomová práce rovněž zavádí koncept "Militia-State Ambivalence Nexus", který slouží jako rámec pro pochopení strategií používaných vládami k využívání schopností domobrany a zároveň ke zmírnění potenciální destabilizace. Budoucí výzkum by měl blíže prozkoumat politická křídla těchto milicí a rozšířit aplikovatelnost tohoto rámce na radikalizované ozbrojené pro-státní formace v demokratickém prostředí, čímž by se prohloubil vhled do důsledků působení těchto skupin v demokratických strukturách.

Keywords

militia, conflict, ideology, state, impact, far-right, government, patronage ties, security, integration

Klíčová slova

milice, konflikt, ideologie, stát, vliv, krajní pravice, vláda, patronátní vazby, bezpečnost, integrace

Title

The Role of Far-Right Pro-State Militias in Democratic State Systems

Název Práce

Role krajně pravicových pro-státních milicí v demokratických systémech

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Introduction

In this diploma thesis, I have chosen to undertake a multifaceted piece of academic research that delves into the role of pro-state militias (PSM) within the political system of a state. Although the phenomenon of pro-state militias, which have a significant impact on politics, is a recurring factor in the history of some states, it has not been thoroughly researched in the context of democratic political systems. Therefore, my thesis aims to narrow the focus of research by examining mainly PSMs that are driven by ideological perspectives, particularly nationalism. The research will be centered on far-right paramilitary groups operating within the political and military fields of a state. Moreover, while the main focus of this paper will be on pro-state militias, it will also provide an insight into other groups that fall under the larger framework of pro-government paramilitaries, which also includes the term pro-government militias. It is important for readers to consider that both terms will be used interchangeably throughout this research. The paramount difference lies in the fact that militias tend to be relevant predominantly during conflicts (civil wars), while pertinence of paramilitaries also translates into periods of peace. As for the pro-state and pro-government militias, the distinction fundamentally lies in their level of affiliation with the ruling regime of a country.

First, it is important to explain the significance of ideology in the research I am undertaking. Pro-state militias with ideological leanings can impact a state's political system positively or negatively. Previous research has suggested that if the ideology of PSMs is aligned with that of the government, it can lead to a mutually beneficial relationship. Such militias can help maintain law and order, protect the state's interests, and uphold its principles and values. This argument commonly holds true for authoritarian states that endorse various armed entities to work as extensions of governmental power, justice, and order. It is also paramount to analyze the ideological foundations of these groups as it can help us understand why they support the government and what their ultimate goals are. For example, some PSMs may be motivated by a desire to defend their country from external threats, while others may be motivated by a belief in authoritarianism and the need for a strong leader.

The previous argument may not, however, hold up in cases where the governmental force holds democratic values while the influential PSMs lean towards ideologies that conflict with this political structure. In my research, I focus on PSMs

upholding far-right ideologies, which are characterized by extreme nationalism, authoritarianism, and anti-democratic values. Their actions can lead to polarization of society, disruption of free and fair elections, disregard for the rule of law along with democratic institutions and ultimately undermine the legitimacy of the state.

Moving forward, the formulation of research questions and hypotheses this work attempts to decipher lies as following.

A) *"What is the impact of ultra-nationalist pro-state militias with a radical political ideology on the stability and functioning of the democratic system?"*

B) *"To what extent do such militant groups pose a threat to the democratic system, and how are they integrated into it (e.g. through patronage ties)?"*

I assume that it can be extensively debated whether these ideologically driven PSMs are furious political extremists or mere pragmatic participants pushing their individual agenda to amass power and wealth. These assumptions translate into the two research questions presented in the last paragraph.

Furthermore, this introduction presents the rationale and objectives of a diploma thesis that explores the impact of pro-state militias with a distinct political ideology on the stability and functioning of democratic systems. The focus of this study is on understanding the potential consequences of these militias' activities and influence on democratic processes and institutions in the context of a civil war. Moreover, it aims to assess the threat posed by these militias to the state, particularly in the light of their radical ideological background.

Additionally, this research aims to investigate the extent to which these pro-state militias have integrated into the state, examining aspects such as patronage ties, their incorporation into official military structures, and other forms of interaction. By addressing these research objectives, this study intends to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing a nuanced understanding of the implications and dynamics involved when such groups operate within a democratic framework.

To address the research questions, I propose conducting empirical research in the form of case studies. These case studies align with my delimitations and aim to partially

fill the underexplored gaps of research regarding pro-state militias.

Moreover, the proposed concept of the "State-Militia Ambivalence Nexus" represents a novel framework for analyzing the complex relationship between states and ideologically driven pro-state militias. Grounded in the premises of reputable academic literature on security studies and conflict resolution, this concept offers a unique perspective on the ambivalent dynamics that emerge when states interact with the observed militias. By examining historical case studies, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence, this research aims to shed light on the intricate interplay of cooperation and confrontation, dependency and autonomy, and legitimacy and contestation within this nexus. Furthermore, by formulating hypotheses based on established theories and empirical observations, my study seeks to provide a robust analytical framework that enhances the understanding of state-militia dynamics. The integration of this innovative concept and the rigorous application of hypotheses will not only anchor the research in existing scholarship but also contribute valuable insights to the field, enriching the overall quality and significance of the diploma thesis.

The specific case study that I will be analyzing within this framework is Ukraine's Azov and Right Sector, given the country's struggle against the Russian threat and its power politics. The limitations I have set for this research provide a crucial starting point for readers to understand the scope and boundaries of this thesis. Additionally, I will incorporate two more case studies, Croatia's 1990s HOS (*Hrvatske Obrambene Snage*), and the Colombian AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*), to demonstrate the relevance of my thesis through external validity and to provide a broader range of empirical evidence.

For instance, my research does not extend to entities like Emzar Kvitsiani's *Monadire's* in Georgia, as they were not ideologically driven, or Russia's *Kadyrovtsy*, as the Russian state apparatus cannot be considered a democracy. Therefore, my research is focused on partly free democracies, where these entities of pro-state militias could have a substantial influence over the political system, power structures, and decision-making of state officials.

The fundamental motivation behind my thesis is to partially fill the research gap I have encountered during my studies of this phenomenon. Although there is a substantial amount of academic research, sources, and perspectives regarding pro-state militias, only a few of them would successfully apply to my previous delimitations. This is mainly due

to the fact that there are not many democratic countries with a suitable environment for ideologically driven militias. Therefore, my thesis aims to shed light on this often overlooked but important topic within the context of democratic political systems.

Literature Review

Pro-government militias (PGMs) have emerged as a relatively new issue in Security Studies. Their rapid rise in the post-Cold War period and subsequent spread in the contemporary world order have attracted much interest in the scholarship of International Relations. Thus it is safe to declare that the available academic literature has dealt with the phenomenon of pro-state militias with due diligence. However, an important caveat to consider is that much of this research focuses on militias within specific environments or scenarios, such as their linkage to authoritarian regimes, their effect on the outbreak of civil wars, or their agency and role within failed states (Staniland 2012, 2015; Ash 2016; Aliyev 2017, 2016; Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021).

Despite these limitations, these works have proven to be valuable assets in understanding and analyzing the key factors that shape the way how state-affiliated militias tend to form, operate, and ultimately perish in the military and political void they occupy. It is important to highlight that, in authoritarian regimes, pro-government militias generally pose lesser level of threat to the regime. This is due to the fact that the monopoly of violence is often firmly held by the authoritarian political structure (Ash 2016; Carey et al. 2016b).

The inclusion of some of these writings in the literature review serves to draw out a broader theoretical framework and provide the thesis with more knowledge related to militias, which is essential for successfully understanding what they represent. On the other hand, some provided reviews consist of important research materials and arguments that are directly related to the stated notions and objectives of my diploma thesis. Such academic knowledge predominantly examines how PGMs may endanger the political system, to what extent their actions compromise governmental power, or how they form and nurture relationships with official authorities inside the state. Overview of such argumentation spectrum enables us to observe and analyze the inter-state relations of PGMs vis-à-vis democracies. Moreover, much of the included literature encompasses empirical findings related to case studies discussed in this thesis, particularly those concerning armed volunteer battalions in Ukraine from 2014 onwards.

Carey, Mitchell and Lowe (2013) introduce the Pro-Government Militias Database (PGMD), which comprehensively identifies and classifies PGMs from 1981 to 2007. The database captures the affiliations and characteristics of PGMs, including their links to the

government, membership composition, and target groups. The authors distinguish between informal and semi-official militias, providing a nuanced understanding of PGMs' affiliations with the government.

Carey and Mitchell (2017) develop a typology for PGMs, classifying them based on their connections to the government and society. They explore the reasons, repercussions, and persistence of PGMs, focusing on their impact on human rights and security. The authors argue against "apolitical" research on militias, emphasizing the ideology-based linkages of PGMs and their societal and political ramifications. They assert that ethnoreligious and political militias pose a greater threat to a state's foundations than local or non-civilian militias. Additionally, Carey and Mitchell (2017) propose ways to control PGMs based on their typology, which informs research on state strength, conflict dynamics, security sector reform, and human rights. Furthermore, Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell (2016a) demonstrate how states can utilize militias to mitigate coup risks and enhance regime stability. They discuss the conventional method of coup-proofing through establishing loyal military institutions while addressing the challenges related to power abuse and subversion of government authority. However, other studies have shown that such parallel forces can be difficult to regulate, particularly in terms of power abuse, jeopardizing civilian lives, and subverting the authority of the government (Aliyev 2022: 1378; Aliyev 2016: 12).

Other extant literature on state-militia relations has been burgeoning and focusing on many aspects of the interactions between these actors. Barter (2013) differentiates between predatory and popular anti-rebel militias, which applies to the PGMs' impact on local communities. Predatory PGMs worsen conflicts, displace populations, and commit human rights abuses. Popular PGMs, on the other hand, offer security and protection to marginalized communities threatened by rebels. Conversely, even popular PGMs can contribute to the erosion of democratic governance if they operate outside the rule of law or engage in criminal activities (Garay-Salamanca et al. 2012; Schultze-Kraft 2018). In some cases, these militias may even take control of governance in certain state institutions, justifying their actions by challenging the corrupt and ineffective regime while simultaneously catering to discontented civilians (Tate 2018; Pécaut 1997). In addition, scholars such as Laryš (2022) and Bjørgo (2019) have specifically examined the vigilantism dimensions of these pro-state militias, as well as their convergence with criminal networks and government authorities.

The concept of state-parallel paramilitaries, as defined by Aliyev (2016), is important for understanding the relationship between weak state institutions and armed violence. These militias operate independently of the state but may still receive support from government officials or political elites, often in pursuit of safeguarding individual interests (Wood 2022; Aliyev 2022). Aliyev (2016) argues that the emergence and reliance on these militias is not necessarily a sign of state failure, but rather a response to it. These militias may in many cases constitute the sole source of security and protection for local communities; while in other circumstances, militias may even establish power alliances with the state's security forces in order to overpower insurgent forces and govern certain territories (Civico 2012).

Raleigh and Kishi (2020) argue that the use of PGMs is becoming an increasingly common tactic for states to achieve political goals, particularly in situations of political instability and contested elections. While PGMs are often established as a means of countering rebel groups, they can also be used as a tool for political repression, manipulation and competition (Zabyelina 2019; Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021). This argument on the use of PGMs is insightful as it sheds light on the dynamics of these groups, which have become increasingly common in situations of political instability and contested elections. The authors highlight the potential impact of PGMs on democratic processes and the stability of the state, noting that they can contribute to the erosion of democratic governance by perpetuating violence and coercion. In this way, PGMs can distort the electoral process (Pachico 2011; Romero 2007; López and Sevillo 2008), intimidate opposition groups, and operate outside the rule of law, undermining state legitimacy and eroding public trust in government institutions.

The authors' argument is also relevant to understanding the formation and activities of PGMs in Ukraine and Croatia, where power struggles among elite political and military figures have been observed. The authors' claim that PGMs are not formed due to a particular crisis or the state's need to shift responsibility but are instead established based on governance methods that prioritize violent competition among powerful individuals is pertinent to the case of Ukraine and Croatia.

Additionally, Bukkvoll's (2019) research emphasizes the need for states to establish clear rules of engagement and command structures when integrating PGMs into their military operations. Without proper oversight and guidance, PGMs may engage in activities that are detrimental to the state's objectives and reputation. The study also

highlights the importance of understanding the motivations and ideology of PGMs. In the case of Ukraine, some volunteer battalions had far-right tendencies and were motivated by nationalist ideologies. Bukkvoll underscores the need for states to carefully vet and monitor the activities of PGMs to prevent them from engaging in activities that are contrary to the state's objectives and values.

In summary, Bukkvoll's article provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between PGMs and the state, emphasizing the potential risks and benefits associated with integrating PGMs into official military structures. His study underscores the importance of establishing clear rules of engagement and command structures when utilizing PGMs and understanding their motivations and ideology to prevent them from engaging in activities that are detrimental to the state's objectives and values.

Similarly, Malyarenko and Galbreath (2016) explores the motivations behind the formation and activities of paramilitary groups in Ukraine. The authors argue that paramilitary groups' motivations are not reducible to integration or abolition with the state, as they form in response to community-specific challenges shaped by historical, cultural, and political factors. Case studies of groups such as Azov and Right Sector show a range of motivations including defense of Ukrainian sovereignty, community protection, and nationalist/extremist ideologies. According to Rekawek (2023), foreign fighters in the Ukrainian conflict are not primarily motivated by ideology. Instead, their participation stems from a combination of adventure seeking, military training, and protecting their perceived ethnic or national group.

Much of the contemporary research on pro-state militias also emphasizes their impact on civil wars. Using the survival analysis method, Aliyev (2017) reveals that the involvement of pro-state militias consistently prolongs the duration of such conflicts. Carey et al. (2013: 256) add that the likelihood of civil conflict is slightly more than 2.5 times higher in states with informal militia groups, and it rises to being 3.7 times higher in countries with semi-official pro-state militias. In connection with that, disrupting peace processes appears to be a recurring phenomenon, particularly in relation to right-wing militias and their intolerant and uncompromising stance regarding nationalism and state perseverance vis-à-vis rebel forces (Kushner 2003; Bellamy 2003).

Moving forward, Käihkö (2018) explores the efforts of the Ukrainian government to control the various volunteer battalions that mobilized during the 2014 civil war in Ukraine. Käihkö's research focuses on the governmental strategies and possibilities for

exerting control over these pro-regime volunteer units. He presents four plans of action, namely undermining, co-opting, incorporation, and coercion, that the Ukrainian government employed in its efforts to control the volunteer battalions. Through his analysis, Kähkö highlights the importance of exerting control over pro-government militias to minimize the potential threat they pose to democratic political systems.

In order to further explore the potential dangers posed by PGMs to the political system, several sources were analyzed for this thesis. Ash (2016) examines the decision-making process behind the formation of PGMs. According to Ash, leaders may form alliances with PGMs in order to ensure their own political survival, particularly in the face of potential threats to their leadership. The data used in this research suggests that governments with a high risk of being overthrown are more likely to form relationships with PGMs, and that the creation of PGMs is strongly linked to the existence or threat of civil war.

Additionally, Umland (2019) analyzes the rise of the Azov battalion as a non-governmental force against separatist tendencies in Eastern Ukraine. Umland's research reveals that the emergence of the Azov battalion was led by controversial and radicalized individuals with dubious ideological backgrounds. Despite these concerns, some of these actors managed to penetrate high-level political structures in Ukraine (see also Fedorenko and Umland 2022). This presents potential dangers for democratic systems, as the involvement of such individuals in political circles may undermine the legitimacy of the political order and allow external actors to further the separatist tendencies against them. Taken together, the research of Ash and Umland highlights the complexities of the relationship between PGMs and political systems, and the potential risks that can arise from these partnerships.

Staniland (2015) delineates four different policies governments can deploy against state-affiliated proxies and connects the linkage between ideology and state-militia relationships with two comparative cases of India and Pakistan. Staniland argues that regime ideology is one of the paramount drivers of governmental stance and issued actions vis-a-vis militias. Although he omits the difference between democratic and authoritarian political systems, he contends that somewhat ideologically aligned militias are perceived as far less dangerous actors towards leading governmental regimes. This argument is relevant for researching the effects of ideology between governments and their subservient proxies, such as pro-government militias. While Staniland's approach is

more relevant when dealing with authoritarian (non-democratic) sentiment, this linkage can also be applicable in the case study of Ukraine, where the cementing point falls under the umbrella of nationalism. Therefore, the effects of ideology on pro-government militias need to be investigated further.

In conclusion, the academic debate regarding the origins, dynamics, and effects of PGMs on state-making has been relatively successful in explaining and answering some of the most essential questions necessary for policymakers, who need to deal with such a fluid phenomenon. We have gained an understanding of why and how PGMs form, operate, and perish. Academics have also emphasized the various linkages that PGMs tend to create, nurture, or oppose. Nevertheless, the provided overview highlights a lesser emphasis on the ideological nature of PGMs, particularly on the dynamics of these entities vis-à-vis democratic order. The convergence of far-right ideology and pro-state militias and their potential threats to democratic order has garnered surprisingly little attention from scholars. Existing research has yet to determine whether the far-right ideology plays a significant role in influencing the impact of militias on state structures, particularly within the context of democratic statehood. This gap in literature highlights the need for further exploration and analysis of the complex relationship between far-right ideology, pro-state militias, and the preservation of democratic values.

Since the 2014 conflict in Ukraine, there has been a regular stress on the existence of far-right paramilitary forces that are supported and endorsed by the government. This trend has been accentuated countless times, even in popular media and journalism. Hardly ever has the focus been on whether such militias with radical ideologies truly affect the state and democratic order, or on the contrary, whether they are merely a rallying symbolism brought forward by a handful of political extremists. This debate may appear intriguing to the public, yet it is perplexing and paramount in understanding conflict, security, and state-making in such conditions.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach adopted to analyze the empirical data will be based on middle-range theories related to the impact of pro-state militias with a distinct political ideology on the stability and functioning of democratic systems. This approach is relevant to the research questions, as it provides a framework for understanding the specific phenomenon being studied while drawing on broader theoretical concepts.

As the research is situated within the field of security and conflict studies, relevant theoretical concepts related to pro-government militias, civil war, radical ideology, and democratic systems will be applied. The approach is based on objective knowledge, facts, and reality, suggesting a positivist or realist ontology and epistemology. Any biases or assumptions that may impact the analysis will be made explicit in the research.

Given the practical constraints of limited access to data and language barriers, secondary sources will be relied upon, and ethical considerations will be taken into account to ensure that the research does not cause harm to any individuals or groups involved in the case study.

Pro-Government Militias

Throughout history, governments have employed a range of strategies to assert their authority and maintain control over their citizens. One such tactic involves the deployment of pro-government militias and paramilitaries: armed non-state actors that operate in support of the government and carry out tasks that the government is either unwilling or unable to undertake.

As contemporary academic discourse indicates, pro-government militias and paramilitaries can take various forms, ranging from highly organized military units to loosely affiliated groups of armed civilians. They may be formally organized and supported by the government or operate independently with the implicit approval of state authorities. These non-state actors are often employed to suppress insurgencies, control territory, or conduct operations that would be politically unfeasible for the government to execute openly. Furthermore, some of these actors participate in both military and

political activities, while others are solely involved in military operations. Additionally, some armed groups are exclusively relevant in the context of civil war, while others possess the ability to transform into distinct entities during peacetime and exert influence on political, military, and judicial structures.

The following chapter aims to propose, delimit, and differentiate the concept of pro-government paramilitaries and other similar actors, while simultaneously offering insight into the debate regarding the multifaceted nature of their dynamics vis-à-vis the state, political system, and rule of law.

Militias, Vigilantes, Death Squads, Proxies

Pankhurst and Thomson (2022) state that the term "pro-government militias" is frequently used interchangeably with other terms like "militias", "paramilitaries", "vigilantes", "death squads" and "pro-state armed groups". Jentzsch et al. (2015) define militias as armed groups that work alongside or independently of state security forces with the goal of protecting local communities from rebel demands or violence, while also attempting to gain the loyalty or cooperation of these communities. Paramilitaries are militant groups that operate outside the regular military or police forces, but with some degree of official backing from the government, and whose primary function is to suppress political opposition, including armed insurgencies (Felbab-Brown et al. 2017). Vinci (2008) coins vigilantes as armed groups that are formed by local citizens in response to insecurity, with the aim of protecting their communities from criminal activity or rebel violence, often with little or no support from the state. Death squads are armed units that are typically covert or semi-covert, and whose primary function is to carry out extrajudicial killings or other violent acts, often against political or social groups perceived as threats to the status quo or to the interests of the ruling elites (Campbell and Brenner 2002). In broader context, Keen (2008) describes pro-state armed groups as any militant entities that operate with some degree of official support or sanction from a government, and which pursue objectives that are broadly consistent with those of the state. These groups may include militias, paramilitaries, or other non-state actors that are aligned with and supported by a particular government or ruling elite. For instance, Aliyev (2016) similarly refers to such

concept as “state-parallel paramilitaries”. According to Keen, the use of pro-state armed groups by governments can have both positive and negative consequences, depending on the specific context and the goals of the actors involved.

Carey et al. (2013) delimitate pro-government militia as any group that is a) considered to be aligned with the government or receiving support from it (whether on national or sub-national level); b) labelled as being separate from regular security forces of state apparatus; c) armed; d) with certain amount of organization. Pro-government militias play a significant role in civil wars, with Ukraine, Russia, Syria, and Sudan being the examples of governments that enlist non-regular troops in their armed campaigns against rebel forces (Carey et al. 2016b). Subsequently, such two-dimensional approach as distinguishing between informal and semi-official militia allows this typology to illustrate the PGMs linkage with government. The former being armed groups that are positively affiliated towards government and may be supported by or linked to the government, but do not have a recognized legal or semi-official status. The latter on the other hand, have a recognized legal or semi-official status, but are still separate from the regular security forces and identified as a distinct organization (Carey and Mitchell 2017: 130).

Concurrently, Barter (2013) recognizes the paramount importance of state-militia relationship, yet he argues, that equal focus should also be put on the militia-rebel dynamics. Barter’s statement suggests that focusing primarily on the relationship between the government and militias can lead to an overemphasis on opportunistic behavior, while ignoring the role of coercion by rebel groups. Therefore, Barter challenges the traditional classification of pro-government militias (“loyalists”, “collaborators”, “proxy warriors”, “paramilitaries”) and instead coins a term “anti-rebel militias”. The author defines such entity as militias that oppose rebel forces and consist of various groups, such as paramilitary units, village guards, self-defense forces, or death squads (Barter 2013: 77). They usually blur the lines between public and private spheres as well as military and civilian roles. Furthermore, they subvert the state's (and the rebels') ability to monopolize violence and are seldom held responsible for their deeds. Anti-rebel militias are established and endorsed by the state, or they defy both the state and rebel groups. He states that the former terms aren’t inevitably inaccurate, but rather

they present too much of a narrow viewpoint on the issue. Barter's assertion challenges the prevailing assumption in literature that anti-rebel necessarily equates to pro-state. His reasoning revolves around the empirical evidence that these armed groups are not always loyal to the state as they may emerge due to the state's inability to ensure safety and security, or because government troops themselves create instability. Additionally, just because a state provides support to these militias, it cannot be assumed that they will always align with the state's agenda. It is worth noting that in remote areas of a country, militias established by ethnic minority groups may not necessarily conform to the government's expectations (Barter 2013: 78-79).

Continuing to explore the dynamics of PGMs, it is essential to recognize the recurring argument that such groups pose a significantly lesser threat to the political system of a nation ruled by an authoritarian regime. This is primarily due to the high loyalty, monopoly of violence and overall concentration of power firmly held in the grasp of the ruling elite. Several authors assert that PGMs promote stability, prevent violent insurgencies, and are less likely to engage in large-scale violence against the state than other types of armed actors (Ahram 2011; Cohen 2016). Furthermore, as Carey and her colleagues (2016a) state, PGMs may also contribute to political stability via coup-proofing.

Nevertheless, as other scholars outlined, such assumptions may not always hold true. Kalyvas (2006) suggests that when these militias are given a high degree of autonomy and operate outside of the formal military chain of command, they may engage in more extreme violence, which can fuel opposition and lead to the outbreak of an insurgency. Kalyvas also adds that the pro-government paramilitaries that engage in extreme violence against civilians can contribute to the cohesion of rebel groups by generating a shared sense of grievance among the population and increasing support for the rebels. Similarly, Weinstein contends that PGMs extreme violence against civilians can lead to a devastating cycle of violence, in which insurgent groups respond with even greater levels of brutality (Weinstein 2007: 3).

It is important to acknowledge that contemporary scholarship predominantly focuses on the dynamics of PGMs within non-democratic states. This is logical, given that PGMs are more prevalent in non-democratic states as they serve as a means for the

ruling regime to maintain power and control over the population. These militias are often composed of loyalists who are willing to use force to suppress dissent and maintain the status quo. Moreover, non-democratic states often lack accountability and transparency in the security sector, which allows PGMs to operate with impunity. In the absence of democratic institutions and mechanisms for peaceful resolution of disputes, militias can become a valuable tool for enforcing the government's will and suppressing opposition (Kleinfeld 2018).

Some academic scholars have conducted extensive research on the dynamics of PGMs within democratic states. While much of this research has focused on Latin America (Fumerton 2003; Bergquist et al. 2001; Koonings and Kruijt 1999), there is a growing interest in exploring the phenomenon in other regions and contexts, such as the complex PGM matrix in contemporary Ukraine. Furthermore, the inclusion of an ideological variable adds a new dimension to the existing literature on the topic. Through my research, I seek to examine how such groups may threaten democratic governance, or conversely, how they may not, adding to the body of knowledge and providing insights into a less explored context. Such research can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between PGMs and competitive democracies.

In the upcoming chapter, the thesis aims to explore the nature of radical ideology in states with at least a partial democratic order, with a comprehensive examination of its origins, characteristics, and impact. This overview will also delve into the challenges faced by democratic governments in responding to radical ideologies, particularly in balancing security concerns with the protection of civil liberties. The primary objective of this research is to shed light on this complex and pressing issue, contributing to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics between radicalism and democracy.

PGMs, Far-Right and Partly-Free Democracies

Contemporary scholarship has shown that there is a complex and debated relationship between pro-government militias and far-right ideology. This chapter will focus on the far-right ideological spectrum, particularly nationalism, as it is a crucial aspect of this connection. It is worth noting that far-right ideology is a political ideology that emphasizes nationalism, authoritarianism, traditional values, and often includes

xenophobic or racist beliefs (Mudde 2019: 11).

Oppenheim et al. (2015) argue that there is an inherent link between PGMs and ideology, particularly in terms of recruitment incentives and a sense of belonging to a strong community. Moreover, some pro-government militias have historical roots in paramilitary groups with connections to white supremacist or neo-Nazi movements (see Umland 2019; Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016). These militias promote far-right ideologies through their actions, such as the use of violence against perceived enemies of the state. Bjørge (2019) adds that far-right political movements often engage in activities that involve protecting what they see as traditional societal norms, the interests of their own group, and opposing what they view as unacceptable behavior. These activities are historically and ideologically linked to a specific faction of far-right politics and are often used as a means of expressing and advancing their beliefs.

Next, in order to correctly delimitate my scope of theoretical perspective, it is also necessary to introduce the concept of a partly-free democracy, which is a form of government that combines both democratic and authoritarian elements (Repucci and Slipowitz 2021). Levitsky and Way (2010) note that partly-free democracies often have weak institutions, high levels of corruption, and limited accountability mechanisms. Diamond (2002) adds that in such systems, political competition may exist, but the ruling party or coalition may have significant advantages over the opposition, such as control over the media or state resources.

An example of a nation struggling to maintain a fully democratic political system is contemporary Ukraine, which gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. According to Freedom House's 2021 report on Ukraine, the country is currently categorized as "partly free," with a score of 63 out of 100. The report highlights concerns regarding corruption, media censorship, and the independence of the judiciary, despite relatively free and fair elections in recent years (Repucci and Slipowitz 2021). Furthermore, the ongoing conflict with Russia in eastern Ukraine has continuously undermined democratic institutions (HRW 2022).

In the context of PSM's impacts and possible threats, it is crucial to understand that the democratic political system in this research is primarily analyzed in terms of its political and institutional state system dynamics, security, and integrity, rather than being

solely focused on electoral politics or the political party system.

In the following chapter, I delve into the theoretical discourse surrounding potential risks posed by PSMs towards the established governing order. I place particular emphasis on political systems that adhere to democratic principles or, as previously scrutinized, partially free systems. The debate on PSMs is multifaceted, with some scholars arguing that PGMs can help to bolster the state's security apparatus, while others suggest that they pose a significant threat to democratic governance. I explore the factors that determine the extent of the threat posed by PGMs, including the government's capacity to regulate and employ effective measures when confronting these groups. Additionally, I will highlight the perspectives of scholars who engage in this debate.

PGMs and Threats towards Political System

The extent of the threat posed by PGMs towards democratic governance depends on several factors, including the government's capacity to regulate and control these groups. According to Carey and Mitchell (2017), the state's monopoly on violence is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance. However, when the state is weak or lacks legitimacy, it may rely on PGMs to enforce its authority, which can undermine the state's legitimacy and ultimately lead to the erosion of democratic principles. Aliyev (2017) adds that governments often use PGMs to carry out violent acts that they cannot do themselves due to international laws. This is called principal-agent theory. However, PGMs have a history of committing atrocities against civilians such as mass killings, rape, and human rights abuses. Governments prefer to distance themselves from militias while still using them to maintain their control over the use of violence (Stanton 2015; Cohen and Nordås 2015; Carey et al. 2015; Ahram 2011). Moreover, Aliyev (2017) contends that PGMs, involved in civil wars, function as "veto players" with a vested interest in prolonging the conflict. These interests are complex and include the militias' pursuit of profit-making and political objectives, as well as the governments' desire to establish and maintain such militias. The militias' interests in continuing the war range from territorial control and retaining a monopoly on violence to earning illegal revenues and seeking political power. Although incumbents and militias may find common ground during civil wars, their interests may eventually clash. As a result, the conclusion of a conflict poses a threat to

the militias' collaboration with their patrons and their sources of income (Aliyev 2016). In this sense, the issue of PGMs poses a significant threat, as argued by Aliyev (2017), due to their capability to extend the duration of civil conflicts significantly and consistently. This is attributed to the various factors mentioned above, which ultimately hinder the protection of the democratic political system and undermine the establishment of the rule of law. Instead of preserving the democratic rule of law, PGMs tend to anchor the rule of force, thereby exacerbating the situation.

Additionally, Bukkvoll (2019) contends that the degree of influence that a government exerts over PGMs is a crucial element in assessing the level of threat posed by these groups. In certain circumstances, these organizations may operate independently of government control, while in other cases, they may be subject to direct or indirect government authority (Käihko 2018). For instance, Bukkvoll's (2019) empirical investigation exposes that the extent of independence attained by PGMs in Ukraine starting from 2014 was considerably elevated, and it ultimately undermined Ukraine's security to some extent. There were three decisive factors that facilitated a significant level of independence for some PGMs. Firstly, the battalions played a crucial role in the early phases of the conflict. Secondly, there was a considerable degree of similarity between the objectives of the regular Ukrainian forces and those of the volunteer battalions. Finally, these battalions were structured in a grassroots manner rather than being organized from the top-down (Bukkvoll 2019: 294).

Raleigh and Kishi address the perceived threat posed by PGMs and argue that they constitute a growing danger to both civilians and the stability of the democratization process of a state. To support their claim, the authors first note that these armed groups are offensive, rather than defensive, in nature. They aim to eliminate those whom they perceive as threats to the socioeconomic foundations of the ruling political hierarchy. The authors argue that this behavior is enabled by a political culture that allows the existence of unaccountable actors and violent actions (Raleigh and Kishi 2020: 2).

Moreover, the authors contend that PGMs have various affiliations with political elites, including senior regime affiliates, presidents, prime ministers, and others who are directly connected to the centralized power structure within the state. These armed groups engage with other organizations that have emerged in an environment of competitive

democratization. The authors believe that the existence of PGMs arises from top-down governance practices, meaning that they do not emerge in response to the nature or size of a specific crisis or to solely act as the state where it is absent. Instead, PGMs are built on governance practices that emphasize violent competition between elite actors, fought informally and consistently (Raleigh and Kishi 2020: 3). Using a similar mode of argument, Ash (2016) claims that one of the primary goals for rulers is to establish a connection and build a rapport with PGMs. He asserts that doing so is essential to guarantee their physical and political survival, even in the event of a coup attempt from either internal or external sources (Ash 2016: 15). This brings us back to the concept of coup-proofing, which poses a significant threat to the smooth functioning of a democratic political system in numerous instances.

In contrast to Bukkvoll's argument in the preceding paragraphs, this perspective in scholarship illuminates the hazardous aspect of PGMs - their ability to serve as instruments for regimes to participate in violent competition with other political and governing elites by means of informally affiliated militias. This danger is not limited to authoritarian regimes; even partially free democracies can use PGPs to undermine political opposition or to gain an edge over competing factions.

To sum up the contemporary academic debate for the purposes of my research, PGMs pose significant threats to political systems in several ways. Firstly, when governments delegate violence to PGMs, they risk losing their monopoly on violence, which can result in a loss of authority and legitimacy of the state, as well as an erosion of democratic processes. This is because PGMs may use violence indiscriminately, and without proper oversight, which can lead to human rights abuses and further undermine the state's legitimacy.

Secondly, PGMs can prolong civil wars by retaining authority over violence that they use to advance the personal and material goals of PGM elites often linked even to the government itself. This can result in continued conflict, which further weakens the state's ability to maintain peace and stability.

Thirdly, PGMs can penetrate and create linkages with high-level politicians and statesmen, enabling violent competition and oppressing rival forces. This can lead to a breakdown of political institutions, as well as a loss of trust and confidence in the

government.

Finally, PGMs can bring the state closer to authoritarianism, as they often serve as a coup-proofing entity with the goal of preventing the switch of power and protecting the ruling elite. This can result in a significant erosion of democratic processes and the consolidation of power within a small group of individuals.

To conclude the chapter, PGMs can pose significant threats to political systems, including the erosion of democratic processes, the proliferation of violence and the consolidation of power within a small group of individuals.

The Concept of Militia-State Ambivalence Nexus

In order to strengthen the foundations of the thesis in the current scholarship, demonstrate its relevance, and fill in gaps within the chosen topic, I formulate an argumentation and concept, which will be further tested and explored throughout the empirical and analytical sections of the research. Drawing upon the theoretical framework, key concepts, and subsequent empirical evidence, the argument put forth is that the government's ability to control, regulate, and politically and militarily absorb hardline ideologically driven pro-state militias is crucial in determining the level of threat posed to the political order. In other words, I argue that the level of threat posed by radical PSMs towards democratic systems is closely linked to the government's ability to adhere to nationalistic sentiments of patriotism, control PSMs violence through delegation, and ultimately incorporate these groups into existing military structures to dismiss any possible threats outlined already in the work.

The proposed concept titled "Militia-State Ambivalence Nexus" seeks to encapsulate the intricate and contradictory nature of the relationship between the authorities and these militias. These militias, distinct from conventional pro-government militias associated with authoritarian regimes, can be referred to as pro-state militias to highlight their differentiation. Their affiliation with the state is characterized by an inherent ambivalence, as they are simultaneously indispensable to the authorities while also posing a potential threat due to their autonomy, radical ideology, and the prospect of confrontation. Aliyev's research (2016) anchored a similar appellation of "state-parallel

militias”, whereas the term “pro-state” (militia, paramilitaries, armed groups) is widely used by Staniland (2015, 2012). An equivalent of “pro-state militia” designation was also coined by Carey et al. (2013) as “semi-official pro-government militia”.

In many instances, these pro-state militias openly express opposition to the ruling government for various reasons, such as the lack of patriotism, nepotism, inept military actions and so forth (Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021: 8). However, these pro-government “government challengers” (Aliyev 2022) remain staunch advocates of state unity, the nation's integrity, and resolute opposition to any destabilizing forces, both internal and external, that jeopardize the ultra-nationalistic ideals ingrained within their far-right political ideology. Importantly, they do not harbor intentions to orchestrate a coup, although they may occasionally employ threats of such action as a means to amplify their influence, popularity, or power projection (Aliyev 2016:12). Their association with the state therefore hinges on delicately striking a balance between their utility to the authorities and the prevailing apprehension regarding their autonomy and potential confrontations (Staniland 2015). By adopting this concept, I underscore the unique characteristics of these militias and emphasize the dynamic tension inherent in their allegiance to the state and their autonomous identity.

The "Militia-State Ambivalence Nexus" framework offers a comprehensive approach to assessing the threat levels posed by ideological PSMs while simultaneously addressing the complexities of their relationship with the state. The framework encompasses three interconnected steps: adhering to nationalism and promoting patriotism, engaging in controlled delegation of autonomy over violence, and incorporating these militias into existing military structures.

Firstly, the strategic response of embracing nationalism and disseminating patriotism narrative emerges as a viable approach to mitigate the threats posed by ideologically driven pro-state militias. By cultivating a narrative of inclusive patriotism, the state can effectively counteract the potential harm emanating from these groups. As Kähko (2018: 10-11) illustrates, Jews and Muslims once fought alongside far-right radicals to protect Ukraine. In addition, Staniland (2015: 777) argues, if militias ideologically aligned with the regime's ideology (at least to some degree), the possible threat levels would decrease significantly. Most notably, pro-state militias play a crucial

role in constructing and disseminating powerful ultra-nationalistic narratives that strongly resonate with the population, particularly in the times of (civil) war when the very foundations of the nation are at stake. Nevertheless, if the government itself embraces and partially incorporates this narrative, these militias face a significant erosion of their main pillar of popularity, thereby diminishing their political and electoral support among the general populace. Furthermore, this way of cultivating nationalism serves to unite society during the periods of conflict, fostering a sense of cohesion and shared identity (Malešević 2011).

Secondly, the controlled delegation of violence challenges some of the conventional wisdom that the loss of Weberian monopoly on violence undermines the legitimacy of the reigning governmental order, as exemplified by the case of Somalian warlords (Adam M. 1992) or the 1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War (Ghosn and Khoury 2011). Instead, I contend that by carefully entrusting certain powers of violence to pro-state militias, these groups can assume the role of guardians against destabilizing insurgent forces within the state. This delegation provides a degree of freedom from accountability when dealing with internal conflicts, enabling the state to navigate delicate situations while maintaining a positive international reputation (Aliyev 2016; Carey et al. 2013). Moreover, as Aliyev (2016) frames, during periods of crisis and crucial moments for the regime's survival (e.g. civil war), pro-state militias tend to arise and flourish. At this time, the regime is left with limited alternatives and must depend on these paramilitary groups to handle various counterinsurgency duties. In such circumstances, the state reluctantly relinquishes its exclusive control over the use of violence in order to ensure its own survival (Aliyev 2016: 6). Although this link between the government and pro-state militias may be deliberately obscured, it is less likely to create a negative public perception (Ash 2016: 4).

Building upon the previous steps of adherence to nationalism and controlled delegation, the third step involves the assimilation of these militias into existing military structures, a process I term as 'state integration and cohesion'. Failing to incorporate pro-state militias into the military exposes them to the risk of operating outside the government's control, potentially posing a threat to the political order. Moreover, without proper integration, these groups may further radicalize and eventually turn against the

very government that once supported them. Therefore, state integration and cohesion entails absorbing these ideologically driven PSMs into existing military structures, providing them with clear chain of command, and establishing accountability mechanisms. This process ensures that these groups are trained, equipped, and directed in a manner that aligns with the government's goals and values. By incorporating pro-state militias into the military, the government confers legitimacy and recognition upon them, while simultaneously neutralizing any potential risks they may pose to the political system. This integration also yields additional benefits, such as enhancing the government's military capabilities and improving overall security, as experienced fighters and military personnel contribute their expertise and combat skills.

Although my concept draws inspiration from the reputable contributions of Carey et al. (2013) and Aliyev (2016), it presents a distinctive approach to the delimited subject matter. The concept I propose aims to capture the intricate and contradictory nature of the relationship between authorities and militias, while emphasizing the inclusion of radical ideology that fundamentally contradicts the democratic state system. These pro-state militias, driven by their radical ideology, have the potential to pose a threat, yet they can also serve as invaluable assets to the government during times of conflict. Moreover, while Aliyev (2016) and Carey et al. (2013) have explored similar concepts, my methodology differs in its emphasis on the dynamics of integration, confrontation, patronage ties, and the overall impact of ideologically driven militias on the democratic state. This approach recognizes the resilience of the state and takes into account the popularity of these pro-state militias within political circles. By adopting this framework, I shed light on the unique characteristics of these militias and underscore the inherent tension between their loyalty to the state and their autonomous identity.

In conclusion, I argue that the proposed three-step framework of "Militia-State Ambivalence Nexus" offers an effective approach to assessing the threat levels of pro-state militias and addressing their intricate relationship with the state. By promoting nationalism with patriotism ideals, engaging in controlled delegation, and incorporating these militias into existing military structures, governments can effectively regulate and utilize these groups while simultaneously enhancing overall security and stability.

Methodology

Type of Methodology

I have opted to use a qualitative approach that utilizes non-numerical and unquantified data as the methodological approach of my diploma thesis. This decision was driven by the central idea of my thesis, which aims to comprehensively explain both latent and manifest data concerning the role of pro-state militias in political systems. Additionally, this methodology will allow me to examine the interconnectedness of ideologically driven pro-state militias within the democratic system of Ukraine.

The qualitative model was selected as the most suitable method to investigate the phenomenon of pro-state militias and to examine the specific case studies of chosen political environments. This choice was reinforced by the need to explore the significance of context of pro-state militias and their impact on democratic systems. Conducting a thorough analysis and understanding the important interconnections, as well as the underlying nuances in contemporary academic research, will facilitate the development and conceptualization of my research question and essential notions of the thesis.

The ontological framework of my thesis aligns with the objectivism idea, as the existence of pro-state militias operating in Ukraine is an established fact. Moreover, several of these militias have ideologically driven motives that may affect democracy. Consequently, the subsequent empirical research will generate objective knowledge, furthering the aim of the thesis.

The epistemological approach of my thesis mainly draws from political science, acknowledging that I can only work with the earlier-described objective knowledge. In this way, I will gain insights into the effects of pro-state militias on democratic systems, and my research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this area.

Data

For the purpose of my empirical research in my master's thesis, I am using secondary data. The collection, analysis, and use of various secondary data sources enables me to augment my initial research questions and test various theories, concepts, and studies against this data. Specifically, I am utilizing external secondary data sources, such as scholarly articles,

journal entries, academic literature, and website publications developed by other researchers in the field. Additionally, my thesis includes partially internal data, such as various governmental papers or political statements related to pro-state militias.

However, it is noteworthy to mention that my project is able to work solely with publicly available data. Access to classified data is not possible, and even publishing such data is not aligned with the nature of my research. Consequently, omitting the use of primary data is a suitable approach for the methodological perspective of my thesis. Moreover, as I lack the expertise and position to interview for instance Ukrainian politicians or militia officials, this approach is deemed as pragmatic.

It is also crucial to acknowledge the limitations regarding the trustworthiness and validity of the data used in my thesis. Working with purely secondary sources can potentially result in biased knowledge, statements, or courses of action. For instance, relying too heavily on research regarding pro-state militias operating in totalitarian regimes might not be applicable to the case study in my thesis.

In conclusion, using secondary data sources in my research allows me to analyze and interpret a range of data from various sources, and facilitates testing of theoretical concepts and frameworks. However, it is important to recognize the limitations of using only secondary data, and to consider the potential for bias when drawing conclusions from this data.

Data Collection

For the method of data collection for my thesis, I opted for the traditional case study analysis. The chunks of empirical data I retrieve are from a number of various types of case studies, all of which correspond to the theme and nature of my diploma thesis. Subsequently my additional endeavour in the data collection method lies in the observation and analysis of a diverse range of academic texts, publications, documents, newsletters and reports. I intend to access all these mentioned data through two ways. First, by using various universal and comprehensive databases archiving all of such materials I am allowed to access those data and subsequently analyse them for the purposes of my research. Second, using few distinct physical archives and libraries in my country to access complete pieces of literature allows me to employ such data in a manner that corresponds to the intellectual course of my thesis.

However, it is necessary to mention few obstacles and limitations I may encounter while using these methods of acquiring data. The most frequent one might be the absence of some important data sets from the data sites I desire to draw from. Regardless, this obstacle could be surpassed by visiting a more renowned library or archive abroad, should I encounter such limitation. Last but not least, it is also appropriate to mention the range of databases my faculty allows me to access through the profile available. Although I am often able to access a very large scope of online databases for the materials needed for research, there may be some cases where the data might be stored in a database that isn't included in those available to our faculty. Nonetheless, when dealing with the literature review, such scenario proved to be rather unusual and if it occurred, I was simply able to obtain the data from a different source, generally unmodified or only slightly reduced. Last but not least, in order to overcome the security and validity risks of data collection when collecting the empirical data, I shall subject some of them to the triangulation principle, in the sense of combining different types of data I gather. For instance, using different sources in terms of person, time and place categories.

Data Analysis

After conducting the data collection process, my focus shifts to the analysis phase, which I intend to undertake in a qualitative manner, primarily adopting a case study method with the utilization of analytical categories to enhance clarity, robustness and overall cohesiveness. This method involves a systematic process of observation and explanation of repeated patterns and consistency in the data sets. In other words, I will use an organized process to identify and explain the context within the data, subsequently expanding and extending the data content with more objectives.

Furthermore, I will analyze the statements of politicians or warlords about the pro-state militias and their reactionary proclamations about their actions, beliefs, statements, or dangers. By doing so, my diploma thesis attempts to employ a comprehensive data analysis approach that goes beyond mere overview of case studies. The obtained data are also divided into four analytical categories to improve clarity and provide a more coherent presentation of empirical findings both for the reader and for the purpose of successfully fulfilling the research objectives.

In addition to the enhanced case study analysis, I will also utilize parts of the qualitative comparative analysis approach. This approach will enable me to identify,

confirm, and highlight the complex causal blueprints while also making a clearer distinction between sufficient and necessary circumstances of pro-state militias in strongly different environments, their external validity, and other relevant factors. By fusing these distinct data analysis approaches, I will be able to fully capitalize on each of their strengths and partially negate the pitfalls each one offers. This will enable me to take an objective stance when analyzing the large amount of data subjected to my diploma thesis.

Overall, the use of multiple data analysis procedures in my research is a positive step towards ensuring the reliability and validity of my findings. It will enable me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and contribute to the existing knowledge on the subject matter.

Conceptualization

In the preliminary process of conceptualizing the data analysis for my thesis, I will adhere to the following approach. I shall observe and link the wide range of patterns, similarities, and relationships that I encounter during my data collection. Then, in the data analysis stage, I will summarize and consolidate all my findings and deploy them against the theories and research questions or ideas that I developed in the earlier stages of thesis research design.

The hypotheses I will be working with were introduced in the earlier part of my research design. Specifically, I will be examining the numerous pro-state militias with ideological backgrounds, such as Right Sector and Azov, to determine if they pose a real and notable threat to the democratic political system in Ukraine or if they are pragmatic participants operating in a mutually beneficial relationship with the Ukrainian political spectrum. When linking these hypotheses with the conceptualization of my data analysis, I will highlight the importance of focusing strictly on the contextual patterns inside the data sets that directly correlate or partially relate to the key notions of my thesis.

The aim of my conceptualization chapter is to establish a clear framework for the data analysis process and explain how it will be used to examine and evaluate the hypotheses I have developed. By following a systematic approach to data analysis, I can ensure that my findings are objective and based on sound evidence. Additionally, by observing and linking patterns in the data, I can identify relationships between variables and draw conclusions based on empirical evidence.

Ultimately, the conceptualization of my data analysis will facilitate the derivation

of meaningful and reliable conclusions regarding the research questions and hypotheses presented in my thesis. By maintaining a diligent focus on contextual patterns directly relevant to the fundamental concepts of my thesis, I can ensure that my analysis remains both pertinent and impactful.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that my research conceptualization extends beyond the mere examination of far-right militia groups. I firmly believe that this approach holds significant potential in effectively analyzing a broader spectrum of militias characterized by radical ideologies, including far-left, Islamic extremism and so forth. This could, for instance, involve the investigation of cases such as Allende's Chile or the Spanish Civil War, within the framework of my research. By acknowledging this, the applicability of my argument expands to encompass a much larger set of case studies for potential future research endeavors.

Empirical Findings

This empirical study investigates the pivotal role played by pro-government militias (PGMs) in the political systems of various, to some degree democratic, countries, with a particular focus on Ukraine. Croatia Defense Forces in the 1990s and Colombia with the United Self-Defenses of Colombia (AUC) serve as two auxiliary case studies to lend external validity to the research. The motivation behind focusing on Ukraine as the main case study is that ideologically-based PGMs have become a critical element in Ukraine's political landscape in recent years. The Ukrainian government has increasingly turned to militias to augment its security forces amidst the ongoing conflict with Russia. However, some of the prominent figures within these militias have infiltrated the governance system and become political actors in the process. While most PGMs were successfully integrated into official structures, the intricacies of the processes and actions leading to their incorporation are undoubtedly of significant academic interest.

The main empirical study centers on two ideologically-based PGMs in Ukraine – Azov Battalion and Right Sector. These militias emerged during the 2013-2014 Maidan protests and played a significant role in the conflict with Russia in eastern Ukraine. Their far-right and nationalist ideologies have stirred controversy both within Ukraine and on the global stage. This empirical study therefore aims to examine the role of Azov Battalion and Right Sector in Ukraine's political system.

To achieve this goal, the study's analytical framework focuses on answering several sub-research questions. These include: how ideologically-based PGMs perceive their role in Ukrainian politics and what their political goals may be, how they interact with the Ukrainian government and other political actors, and how they influence the political dynamics in Ukraine. The study employs a case study methodology and collects data from various sources such as academic literature, document analysis, and news reports. The analysis of this data will provide insights into the broader issues of non-state actors' influence on politics.

In conclusion, this empirical study offers a unique perspective on the role of PGMs in Ukraine's political system. The findings have significant implications for policymakers and scholars interested in understanding political violence and the role of

ideologically based non-state actors in political systems. Additionally, the auxiliary case studies of Croatia and Colombia lend external validity to the study's findings, broaden our understanding of the role of pro-government militias in other contexts and open up avenues for further research.

Initial Hypotheses and Assumptions

In order to establish the framework of my initial hypothesis, which will later be tested against empirical findings in the analytical section, I argue that the oft-cited danger of right-wing militias' ideological foundations may be often considerably overstated by mass media, peripheral international entities with limited political clout, and select influential individuals. My hypothesis centers on the notion that while these paramilitaries may indeed include political radicals and extreme far-right advocates, it is important to note that ideological motivation is not the sole determining factor for all militia members when it comes to their reasons for joining. Some individuals are motivated by the perception of being determined fighters against insurgency threats in order to protect the nation, while others are driven by the desire to be recognized as skilled professionals of elite forces operating outside of conventional, and often dysfunctional, army command. Furthermore, there are other incentives to join militias which may include personal motivations combined with a sense of adventure-seeking or the need to ensure individual survival during conflict (Carey et al. 2013; Rękawek 2023).

Hence, I contend that the purported ideological peril posed by these militias is considerably less significant than the frequently contested discourse suggests. To clarify, the recurring discussion surrounding the presence of hazardous extremist beliefs in a nation boasting a reasonably stable democratic governance provides a sensationalized and inflated narrative that ultimately holds limited relevance to substantive political and military matters.

In the short-term perspective, the existence of nationalist militias can significantly strengthen a state's security and defense, particularly during times of military conflict. However, for such dynamics to ultimately benefit the state, these armed groups must be successfully integrated into the official military structures. As this occurs, the cloud of radical ideology behind the militias fades and ultimately disappears. While it is true that

the state loses its monopoly over violence, and there may be consequences when combined with perceived far-right radicalism, the correct decision-making processes can ultimately allow a regime to secure its defense and augment its combat potential. Furthermore, the presence of ill ideology has little room to cause significant turmoil among military and civilian populations, as there are more important goals, such as defending the homeland, protecting national identity, or ensuring individual survival in times of war.

In summary, my hypothesis suggests that while right-wing militias include members driven by ideology, the radical ideology underlying these groups has little impact on the functioning of democratic political systems. Moreover, the short-term benefits of nationalist militias during the times of conflict can outweigh potential risks, especially if the groups are eventually integrated into official military structures, leading to a reduction in the threat posed by ideology. However, greater emphasis should be placed on analyzing the far-right political wing establishments of these PSMs, as they appear to hold greater relevance for the political system based on my initial thoughts and empirical overview. Nonetheless, this topic exceeds the scope of interest for my thesis, and therefore should be rather considered as a potential foundation for further academic research.

Case Selection

The cases of pro-state militias that were chosen were based on specific criteria. These cases were selected because they demonstrated clear ideological radicalism and a commitment to state unity without challenging the existing order during civil wars, while in some cases not necessarily conforming to the ruling government. Furthermore, all of the selected cases existed within a partly-free democratic environment, which enables the research to investigate the nexus between the militias with distinguishable radical ideology and their potential threat and impact on the democratic political system. The rationale behind selecting the four cases presented below lies in the fact that they exemplify a far-right militia operating within a competitive political system that is experiencing an armed conflict, resulting in significant weakening of the state and its capabilities. Consequently,

all of the cases chosen for empirical analysis provide a robust sample for unraveling the research questions addressed in the thesis.

Two case studies focus on Ukraine in the post-Maidan period starting from 2014. One of these studies examines the Azov Battalion, which later evolved into the Azov Regiment and expanded into a broader socio-political organization known today as the Azov movement. The origins of the Azov movement can be traced back to the establishment of the Azov Battalion in 2014, which emerged in response to the aggression of Russian-backed forces. The Azov Battalion was explicitly affiliated with far-right ideologies and acted as a precursor to the Azov movement (Colborne 2022; Umland 2019, 2020; Shekhovtsov and Umland 2014).

Second, The Right Sector, an influential nationalist political and paramilitary movement, emerged amidst the Maidan protests of 2013-2014, leading to the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovich and his pro-Russian government. During the early stages of the Maidan protests, the formation of the Right Sector emerged as a coalition of smaller far-right political factions and football hooligans, including extremist nationalist groups like Trident (*Tryzub*) and Ukrainian National Assembly-Ukrainian People's Self-Defense (UNA-UNSO; *Ukrayins'ka Natsional'na Asambleya-Ukrayins'ka Narodna Samooborona*), as well as far-right organizations like the Social-National Assembly (SNA; *Sotsial-Natsional'na Asambleya*) and its paramilitary arm Patriot of Ukraine (PU; *Patriót Ukrayiny*). Despite starting with a small number of members, the group quickly recruited thousands who were armed, trained, and prepared to serve as self-defense units. After the Maidan revolution, the official paramilitary wing of the Right Sector was established as the Ukraine Volunteer Corps (UVC; *Dobrovol'chyi ukrains'kyi korpus*) (Katchanovski 2019: 10; Zabyelina 2019: 284; Umland 2020: 261). Characterized by pronounced far-right ideologies and anti-Russian sentiments, the Right Sector encompasses both political and paramilitary factions. During the protests, the movement played a pivotal role in inciting violent clashes and subsequently witnessed numerous members transitioning to the Ukrainian military, actively engaging in the ongoing conflict against Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine (Likhachev 2015; Shekhovtsov and Umland 2014; Zabyelina 2019; Umland 2020; Katchanovski 2019).

The third case encompasses the Croatian Defence Forces – HOS, a paramilitary of the far-right political party Croatian Party of Rights (HSP; *Hrvatska stranka prava*) led by

the activist Dobroslav Paraga. The militia formed as a reaction to inept actions of President Tudjman and the leading garniture in the war with Yugoslavia after Croatia declared independency in 1991. Its existence was short lived, as their antagonism towards Tudjman, Ustasha glorification and incomppliance was perceived as a tangible threat for the ruling regime, provoking a harsh and quick process in incorporating the armed militiamen into official army structures through years 1992-1993 (Ferguson 2015, 2020; Horncastle 2015; Irvine 1997; Radonic 2013).

The last case presents The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) which emerged in the late 1990s as a conglomeration of right-wing paramilitary groups. In the early 1980s, amidst ongoing violence and government inability to address the situation, right-wing individuals including businessmen, ranchers, and military personnel organized and armed vigilante militias as a response to the guerrilla threat in Colombia. In 1984, when the government proposed negotiations with the leftist terrorists, hardline factions in the military and business communities vehemently opposed it. As a result, the vigilantes formed a paramilitary coalition known as the AUC, led by Carlo Castaño. The AUC employed brutal and terror tactics to undermine the support for the leftist guerrillas, quickly gaining a reputation for their potency and intimidation (Kushner 2003: 384–385).

In the case of the AUC, it is important to highlight the caveat that this particular case may appear as a one of lesser significance, primarily due to its ideological nature. While Ukraine and Croatia exhibit a clear inclination towards far-right ideologies such as neo-Nazism or Ustasha legacy, the AUC presents a slightly different scope of the far-right movement, more aligned with the Latin American cultural context. Here, the radical right vehemently opposes the far-left guerrillas and advocates for a strong state with authoritarian elements rooted in fascist ideology. Despite this deviation, the existing literature still classifies the AUC as a far-right group. Hence, even this case serves as a valid empirical study within the delimited scope of my research (Kushner 2003; Bargent 2014; Rabasa and Chalk 2001; Tate 2018; Sherman 2015; UC DP 2023)

The discussion on the ideological nature of the Azov, Right Sector and the HOS follows the conventional left-right paradigm, where far-right movements are positioned towards the extreme end of the political spectrum. Far-right perspectives include radical nationalism and fascism, with neo-Nazi organizations being contemporary examples characterized by their adherence to national-socialist principles and the use of Nazi symbols (Katchanovski 2019: 9). These groups fall within the broader category of neo-

fascist or fascist political orientations (Griffin and Feldman 2003; Lipset and Raab 1970).

During the initial debriefing, consideration was given to the evidence of other far-right militias within competitive democratic systems during armed conflicts; however, the decision was made to exclude them. For instance, the case of right-wing falangists in the 1975 Lebanon civil war was deemed inapplicable due to the collapse of the state and the loss of governmental control. Similarly, the inclusion of the far-right paramilitary organization known as OAS (Secret Armed Organization) in 1960s France is irrelevant to this research, as France was a robust state that did not require the assistance of militias to fight Algerians. A similar conclusion applies to England, where loyalist militias with far-right elements participated during the conflict in Northern Ireland. In these instances, the state also exhibited sufficient fighting capacity, rendering the reliance on potential spoilers embodied by far-right paramilitary units unnecessary.

Areas of Friction and Conflicts with the State – Protests, Crime, Political Violence

Since their establishment in the middle of 2014, Azov and other battalions have consistently challenged the government in Ukraine, employing both "hard" and "soft" tactics. For example, the Ukrainian militias resorted to tactics that escalated the conflict in Donbas, compelling the Ukrainian state to take action rather than adopting a passive stance, as it did so during the Crimea crisis (Käihkö 2018: 1, 7-8). Among the "soft" methods adopted by these battalions, leveling accusations of corruption, nepotism, and inefficiency was a prominent strategy. For instance, during his electoral campaign in the parliamentary elections of 2014, Biletskyy, the leader of Azov, extensively used anti-corruption rhetoric and publicly accused the government of corruption on numerous occasions. The same modus operandi was employed by Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector, who openly leveled corruption allegations against President Poroshenko. Furthermore, Oleh Petrenko, a former commander of Azov, went a step further by accusing the National Guard of Ukraine (NGU; *Natsionalna hvardiia Ukrainy*) of colluding with pro-Russian separatists (Aliyev 2022: 1337).

However, it is important to note that their discontent did not involve challenging the government's legitimacy or its role in leading the fight against the eastern rebellion at that time. Yarosh initially pledged his allegiance to President Poroshenko and later

confirmed it (Puglisi 2015: 9). The ideology of ultra-nationalism often took precedence over other issues, and Azov with Right Sector aligned with the government's stance during the war against common outside enemy (Bukkvoll 2019: 296).

When Dmytro Yarosh stepped down as the head of Right Sector in 2015, the organization underwent a shift in leadership and ideology. While Yarosh continuously voiced his disagreements with the government, he still advocated for compromise and closer relationships with the state. Nonetheless, the new leadership, represented by Andriy Stempitsky and Andriy Tarasenko, adopted a more revolutionary stance and intensified the criticism of the Ukrainian government while also inciting protests and utilizing violent means (Aliyev 2022: 1377). They denounced the post-Maidan government as an "internal occupant" and expressed their opposition to the perceived promotion of despised left-liberal values (Ukrainska Pravda 2016; Fedorenko and Umland 2022: 240-241). The leaders emphasized the use of violent means as a superior strategy compared to parliamentary battles (Aliyev 2022: 1337). In a televised interview, Andrii Sharaskin, the spokesman for the UVC, reported that Yarosh acknowledged divergent perspectives within the organization's growth towards establishing an independent Ukrainian state which was the paramount goal of their endeavors. While some members advocated for radicalization, Yarosh found it unacceptable, yet respected their right to hold such opinions (Censor.NET 2015b). The shift in ideology and tactics signified a departure from Yarosh's more compromising approach and marked a more confrontational and revolutionary era for Right Sector towards Ukrainian government.

Furthermore, the Right Sector, along with its UVC paramilitary force and other affiliated militias, consistently displayed hostility towards both the administrations of Poroshenko and subsequently Zelenskyy. This animosity stemmed primarily from their perception of the government's lenient treatment of pro-Russian politicians, activists, and political parties. The state's failure to take proactive measures against internal adversaries, such as pro-Russian elements, was a key point of contention raised by these militias. They regarded these adversaries as potential Kremlin spies who posed a significant threat to Ukraine's sovereignty. Moreover, the government faced criticism for its perceived lack of a robust patriotic response to destabilizing forces within the country (Balmforth 2014).

In comparison to Azov, Right Sector struggled to secure support from government officials and financial backing from oligarchs. Instead, the leadership of Right Sector sought connections with billionaire businessmen but involved criminal elements in the

procurement of weapons and military hardware (Wood 2022: 123). This difference in approach led to frequent clashes between Right Sector's armed volunteers and official security authorities, stemming from disagreements over subordination to the army and accusations of criminal activities among its members (Yarosh and Stempitskyy 2014).

The conflict between the government and the Right Sector eventually transcended mere verbal exchanges. The militia accused the government of engaging in political terror against voluntary battalions and exerting political pressure on volunteers, even resorting to violent means against certain militia members (Lashchenko 2015). For instance, the killing of Oleksandr Muzychko, the coordinator of the Right Sector, by special security forces further intensified their disillusionment and distrust towards the government. This event ultimately led the Right Sector to completely reject integration efforts in 2014 (Gomza and Zajaczkowski 2019: 782). The incident was enveloped in a cloud of uncertainty and conflicting statements. While the police claimed that Muzychko had taken his own life, the militias interpreted it as a premeditated murder or forced suicide orchestrated by the SBU to eliminate a perceived threat to the Ukrainian government. The latter scenario was also widely supported by Russian news agencies (Dolzhenkova 2014; RIA Novosti 2014). Subsequent official investigations concluded that the authorities acted within the confines of the law, determining that Muzychko's death resulted from his engagement in gunfire with the apprehending officers (Radio Svoboda 2014). Nonetheless, the ongoing tensions stemming from this, and similar incidents have significantly contributed to the perception of injustice by the government towards the Right Sector. Consequently, this has solidified their strong and adversarial stance, prompting them to actively seek influence and, to some extent, rebel against a political system they deemed oppressive and unpatriotic. Consequently, the Right Sector has resorted to utilizing its armed forces in protests, uprisings, criminal activities, and vigilante-like behavior.

In its vigilantism stance, the Right Sector was increasingly vocal in expressing its dissatisfaction with the Ukrainian justice system, particularly with regard to the judges whom they believed were failing to effectively administer justice to individuals involved in crimes against Ukrainians during the Maidan period. In relation to the courts, there are documented instances of Right Sector-associated groups forcefully disrupting trial proceedings and exerting pressure on judges to resign from their positions. They frequently targeted courts in Odesa, specifically in relation to the investigation and trial of individuals accused of crimes connected to the House of Trade Unions fire, which resulted in the loss

of over 30 lives during violent clashes between pro-Maidan activists and security forces. For instance, on November 27, 2015, when the Malynovskii District Court of Odesa granted bail to several suspects involved in the House of Trade Unions incident, approximately 50 members of Right Sector blocked the pretrial detention facility, demanding that the prosecution revoke the suspects' release (Zabyelina 2019: 285; OHCHR 2016). Furthermore, Right Sector, along with other groups, vehemently opposed any potential compromises with the rebel republics in the east, frequently organizing protest rallies and assaulting Ukraine's security forces. Dissatisfied ultra-nationalists often resorted to violent street protests as a "hard" means of challenging the status quo. Moreover, Right Sector directly engaged and undermined the official security forces of the regime, contesting the government's authority (Aliyev 2022: 1378). The leadership of Right Sector paramilitary has repeatedly issued warnings of a potential military coup should Kyiv officials concede occupied territories or grant special status to the Donbas region (Aliyev 2016: 12).

In March 2015, the Ukrainian military prosecutor initiated multiple criminal prosecutions against members of paramilitary battalions, including Right Sector. The main impetus were the reports of alarming rate of criminal activity of pro-Ukrainian militias in the Eastern Ukraine against civilians and their property. In response, the paramilitary groups engaged in various activities, starting with peaceful protests and escalating to violent actions and local battles with official security forces. The clashes were primarily seen as a result of competition between the battalions and government officials for the control of illegal trade and smuggling markets, rooted in the corrupt and weak state (Malyarenko and Galbreath 2015: 124).

One significant event related to the violent clashes between the state and militias occurred in early July 2015 when a conflict erupted in Mukachevo, a city in western Ukraine, between Ukrainian security forces and armed fighters from Right Sector. Following a violent exchange involving grenade launchers and heavy machine guns, that was initiated by the Right Sector and resulted in the destruction of police vehicles, the attackers retreated. Casualties were reported on both sides. A special operation was conducted to secure the area, disarm the assailants, and apprehend the criminal group responsible. The General Prosecutor's Office formed a joint investigative team with the SBU and the Ministry of Internal Affairs to investigate the incident, which involved charges of creating a criminal organization and committing a terrorist act (Radio Svoboda

2015). Immediately after the incident, President Poroshenko stated that the incident exhibited indications of the Kremlin's involvement, thereby implying a potential link between the Kremlin and the aforementioned event. He added that; “...*I must root out the phenomenon of illegal armed formations mercilessly regardless of their motivation.*” (Censor.NET 2015c).

In subsequent investigations, the Verkhovna Rada commission revealed that the shootout was primarily provoked by the police forces. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the perilous interaction between law enforcement forces and Right Sector members had been orchestrated by the leadership of the Interior Ministry and Security Services in the Zakarpattia region, with the aim of gaining control over contraband flows (Censor.NET 2015a).

In Croatia, with the onset of the war with Yugoslavia over the independency referendum from 1991, Tudjman and HDZ were subjected to intense criticism from HSP and Paraga for their perceived incompetence in responding to the Serb aggression. Specifically, they were accused of failing to mobilize the paralyzed and crumbling Croatian Army (HV) and of being unsuccessful in taking resolute military action to defend the country (Ferguson 2020: 77)

Furthermore, The HSP/HOS opposed Tudjman and his party due to their lack of radical nationalism, previous service in the communist army, and willingness to compromise with the Serb minority in Croatia. Another reason why Paraga, Paradžik, and others opposed the government was their disagreement over Tudjman's policy of collaborating with the international community to resolve the Yugoslav crisis. Additionally, they posited that the Croatian state required a more radical defense than what was being offered by President Tudjman (Bellamy 2003: 84). By contrast, Tudjman perceived the radical tendencies of HSP, accompanied by armed fighters in the HOS, as problematic (ibid. 78).

Friction between paramilitaries and the government further intensified following the loss of the city of Vukovar by the Croats in November 1991. The HOS suffered a significant blow in losing the battle to the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA; *Jugoslovenska narodna armija*) and Serbian paramilitaries, who characterized the city as a stronghold of Croatian fascists (Horncastle 2015: 756-757). The bloody 87-day siege of Vukovar was a bitter episode of the war for the HOS, who had participated in its defense. Moreover, the

Croatian government impeded efforts to reinforce the city, leading the HOS forces to perceive the authorities as having betrayed them deliberately, resulting in the city's fall (Veselinović 2014: 87-88). Paraga held the belief that the government's inability to provide assistance to the Croatians who endured the Vukovar siege for three months was an act of treason further fueled the already-hostile relationship between the opposing sides (Bellamy 2003: 78).

As a consequence, the HSP and HOS officials were frequently targeted by the authorities. For instance, Ante Paradžik was killed by Croatian police units on the outskirts of Zagreb in September 1991, as they allegedly mistook him and his colleagues for Serb paramilitaries. Paraga reacted to the press claiming that this was a calculated and premeditated political murder orchestrated by the government (Lekić 1991). In March 1992, a bomb detonated at the HOS/HSP headquarters in the Croatian town of Vinkovci (IRBC 1992; Milekić 2020). Furthermore, in August 1992, the Croatian Defense Council (HVO; *Hrvatsko vijeće obrane*) assassinated eight HOS fighters and their appointed commander for Bosnia, Blaž Kraljević (Ramet 2006: 343).

Additionally, the paramilitary officials were subject to various forms of political oppression, including trials initiated by the state authorities. After the fall of Vukovar, Paraga, vice-president Anto Djapić and HOS commander Mile Dedaković were charged with grand treason and plotting a coup d'état, as their statements implied. The prosecution alleged that the HSP planned to use the HOS to topple the government. Tudjman accused the militia of being manipulated by the Yugoslavian intelligence agency to overthrow the Croatian regime on national broadcasts (Ferguson 2020: 78). As a protest against the repression aimed at ultra-nationalists, HOS combatants and other opponents barricaded themselves inside a building in the Zagreb city center and took few hostages to express their discontent and strike against perceived injustice. Under pressure, Paraga ordered his loyalists to refrain from any violence. Eventually, the Supreme Judge closed the coup d'état case due to a lack of direct evidence (Veselinović 2014: 94; US GOV 1993). Furthermore, some of the trial statements made by HV officers revealed that the HOS soldiers on the front line were not given any directives by the HSP, and that the combatants primarily followed the commands of their HV superiors, with only a few minor deviations. Following the trial in November 1993, the military court in Zagreb declared the three men innocent. In the end, the prosecution processes demonstrated that HOS did not function as a rebel military entity, as the government tried to frame it. The opposition, impartial media,

and even the US government deemed the trials of the HSP/HOS officials to be politically motivated, as Zagreb saw the organization as an irritant and a potentially dangerous force to their fragile political milieu (Milekić 2020; US GOV 1993).

Amid the escalating tensions between Croats and Bosniaks, multiple points of contention emerged regarding the conduct of Muslims, who exhibited a sense of entitlement to power in BiH. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the use of the HOS (where 1/3 of all members were Muslims before the relations broke down) to enforce their policies. The daily influx of new Muslim refugees into the region, along with the escalating presence of Muslim forces in various towns, was particularly apprehensive to Croat representatives. This unfolded while HVO forces were occupied with fortifying the front lines against the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA), compelling HVO military authorities to develop defensive strategies in anticipation of potential clashes with the Muslim population (Shrader 2003: 68).

Finally, as the conflict between Croats and Muslims unfolded, Paraga issued an order prohibiting his fighters from cooperating with the HVO against the Bosniaks. This announcement was met with great concern by President Tudjman and the Croatian government, as it threatened to create division and fragmentation within their military forces. To address this issue, Zagreb took decisive action, denouncing Paraga as a blatant Ustaša fascist and levying charges of terrorism against him, which led to another arrest (Bellamy 2003: 78).

Similar to the previous cases in Ukraine, the Colombian AUC showcased a consistent anti-corruption stance. Through the implementation of armed clientelism, strong anti-corruption rhetoric, and effective administration, this paramilitary group was able to contest the official authorities and consequently solidify its control over crucial state institutions, such as healthcare and education. The commanders of the AUC justified their continued rule by arguing that their governance was more efficient and less corrupt than that of the traditional state elites (Tate 2018: 427-428, 437; Pécaut 1997: 151).

Another aspect worth considering amidst this chapter's contents is the challenging role played by the AUC in the government's peace processes with the rebel groups. The AUC, along with factions opposing the negotiations, strategically capitalized on President Pastrana's initiative to establish a demilitarized zone for the insurgents in late 2000. Seizing this opportunity, AUC forces swiftly entered the designated region and

swiftly achieved significant victories over the guerrilla forces, thereby undermining the ongoing peace negotiations. These military triumphs not only posed a direct obstacle to the peace process but also had far-reaching consequences, leading to the eventual collapse of the negotiations by early 2002. Subsequently, the government's military operations against the insurgent groups were resumed (Kushner 2003: 385). The active role played by the AUC in this context illustrates their antagonistic stance towards the governmental attempts to settle peace with the rebels, despite their broader alignment with the ruling regime.

Moreover, the case of the AUC presents a unique and complex situation in comparison to previous cases in Ukraine and Croatia. This is due to the fact that a significant portion of the AUC's activities, funding, and connections were linked to highly organized crime, specifically the cocaine trade. While there were some criminal structures present in Ukraine, such as in the case of Right Sector, they were relatively insignificant and primarily engaged in smuggling and arming themselves with firearms. Therefore, these structures can be considered largely irrelevant in the context of their impact on politics and state-building.

While organized crime typically presents a conflicting relationship with a democratic state, the case of the AUC revealed a more nuanced dynamic; The variable of organized crime within the AUC model is crucial for this research analysis as it played a significant role in shaping democracy, politics, and state-making in Colombia. For instance, a social network analysis study on the institutional impact of criminal networks in Colombia and Mexico concluded that co-opted state reconfiguration was highest in the case of the AUC. The group was described as a complete and multifaceted criminal army with the capability to exert influence and co-opt political figures and public institutions on a national scale (Garay-Salamanca et al. 2012: 192). Civico (2012) argues that the intertwining of the state and organized crime was not a sign of weakness but rather a display of the state's power and presence. This intricate relationship challenges conventional assumptions and underscores the complexity of the AUC's role in shaping the Colombian state, highlighting that the influence of organized crime can transcend traditional notions of conflict with democratic governance.

The final conflict between the state and the AUC emerged during the demobilization process, as discussed further in the third chapter. In this regard, the government eventually adopted a resolute stance by deciding to extradite certain former AUC commanders to the United States to be held accountable for their criminal activities

(Grajales 2017: 40). Nonetheless, as the evidence demonstrates, the points of contention between the AUC and the government were relatively insignificant when compared to situations such as the HOS in Croatia or the Right Sector in Ukraine. The government's main objective was primarily directed towards combating the leftist guerilla groups, namely FARC and ELN. Consequently, the AUC enjoyed a significant degree of latitude in various aspects that would have otherwise been considered unacceptable, including territorial control, involvement in organized crime, and infiltration of state institutions.

Patronage Ties – Influential Representatives and Linkage to the Pro-State Militias

Arsen Avakov, the Minister of Internal Affairs in Ukraine, assumed a pivotal role in facilitating the convergence between militias and the state within Ukraine. This nexus encompassed various elements, including the establishment of legitimacy, the delegation of power to employ violence, the provision of funding mechanisms, and subsequent integration with state structures. Avakov's influential position solidified his widely recognized patronage, particularly in relation to the Azov Battalion (Kuzmenko 2018). Notably, amidst the initial outbreak of the conflict in 2014, a number of military leaders and influential politicians expressed opposition to the government's decision to confer authority upon these militias. Avakov, however, emerged as a steadfast supporter of volunteer battalions, actively advocating for their cause. As the Donbas conflict escalated, Kyiv deliberately elevated the levels of autonomy to these militias, enabling them to operate with a relative degree of independence from the state's monopoly on violence during the war against Eastern separatists and Russian forces (Bukkvoll 2019: 293, 302).

Consequently, due to Avakov's influential position within Ukraine's government, the rise of Azov to political prominence can be attributed to their alliance with him. Avakov offered support and permitted their operations in exchange for a certain level of allegiance. For instance, Andriy Biletskyy, Azov's leader, owed his first significant foray into politics to Avakov's backing, securing a single-mandate seat in Kyiv in 2014 (Colborne 2022: 83). Moreover, Avakov consistently protected Azov from information campaigns that aimed to discredit the unit's credibility through alleged spreading of Nazi ideology. He also praised unit's combat effectiveness and heroism in defending the state. It is noteworthy to mention that these proclamations were made even after Azov's

incorporation into NGU as special operations forces unit (Kyiv Post 2019). For an earlier example, in an interview from 2014, Avakov asserted that the majority of the battalion's volunteers did not endorse any far-right ideology as he “...spent many hours talking to the Azov fighters. There is no Nazism, no swastikas.” Moreover, he also advocated for the political aspirations of some volunteer members; “In the Verkhovna Rada, they can put pressure on politicians with their honesty and sincerity. Among them we will find future ministers of defense, internal affairs and so on.” said Avakov (Golubov 2014). Including not only Azov, but also the UVC of Right Sector, Avakov's support for these (former) militias is regarded as the reason behind his capacity to maintain his ministerial role under Zelensky's administration until 2021 (Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021: 12).

Nevertheless, aside from Avakov's enthusiastic patronage, during its early stages the Azov Battalion did not receive much of official recognition from the Ukrainian government. However, it garnered material and political support from various political and business elites who viewed it as a means to counter Russian aggression and protect their individual interests (Wood 2022: 123). Notably, there were claims that the battalion received financial support from prominent Ukrainian oligarchs, including Ihor Kolomoisky and Rinat Akhmetov (Aliyev 2022: 1377; Aliyev 2023).

Akhmetov, the wealthiest man in Ukraine, categorically denied financing the Azov Battalion and to a question about financing of other paramilitary groups, Akhmetov responded, “[...] we have been helping and continue to help the Ukrainian Army and Territorial Defence Forces.” (RAI News 2022). However, reports indicate that Biletskyy, the former leader and founder of the Azov Battalion, established a security company composed of Azov veterans. These contractors, in exchange for funding the political party of National Corps, provided law enforcement and security services to business enterprises, particularly the Azovstal steel facilities located in Mariupol, which are owned by Akhmetov (Ostryakova 2018).

Regarding Kolomoisky, the oligarch, politician, and energy tycoon, his involvement during the outbreak of the war is alleged to have included facilitating and financing the supply of weapons to volunteer battalions, notably Azov, as well as providing financial incentives for recruits. Additionally, he reportedly offered militiamen a personal bounty of \$10,000 for the capture of each pro-Russian saboteur in contested territories around his enterprises in Dnipropetrovsk (Sharkov 2014; Luhn 2014). His actions arguably served to protect not only the integrity of Ukraine but also Kolomoisky's own

business interests. However, these activities attracted significant disdain, leading President Poroshenko to compel Kolomoisky to step down as the governor of Dnipropetrovsk after a standoff incident at the state-owned UkrTransNafta (Cohen 2015).

Another early sponsor of Azov, Serhiy Taruta, a businessman, politician, and "one-time oligarch," during his 2018 presidential campaign, replied that he is frequently seen as "[...] *a person who paid for defending Mariupol.*" Consequently, in the interview, he quickly refuted any recent financial support provided to ultra-nationalist groups (Kovensky 2018).

Turning back to the nexus of state representatives and militias, Biletskyy wasn't the sole political adventurer from Azov's leadership circles. Other prominent figures from the Battalion have displayed a swift and enthusiastic interest in entering the realm of politics. For instance, during the intense fighting in Eastern Ukraine, a well-known deputy commander Ihor Mosiychuk left the battalion and embarked on the career of a full-time parliamentarian (Umland 2019: 121). Mosiychuk's departure was preceded by his Jew-baiting remarks towards Kolomoisky together with open disdain for "*...oligarchs who turned the war into business [...] and who make their vile profit from the blood shed by our patriots.*" This in turn endangered financial flows to the Azov unit, threatened by Kolomoisky's aide Boris Filatov, who referred to Mosiychuk as a "*...fascist bastard*". Additionally, these frictions within patronage networks included Oleh Lyashko, a leader of the Radical Party, who endorsed and collaborated with the Azov. Lyashko stated that when confronted by Kolomoisky to align with him and cooperate under his patronage and to "*...include his people on the list*", he refused and was met with physical threats. Eventually, he parted ways with Azov due to animosity from its "sponsorship" and compared these methods to the one of Yanukovich, "*...same eggs, different basket*" said Lyashko on air on the Zik TV channel (Young 2022; Kalinin 2014).

Similarly, other individuals, such as former commanders Sergei Korotkikh and Colonel Vadim Troyan, capitalized on their previous roles in Azov and the advantages gained from it to successfully join the political circles and official security forces of the regime (Aliyev 2022: 1377). Korotkikh, a former citizen of Belarus with documented ties to the Russian neo-Nazi scene and associations with criminal prosecution for the ethnically motivated execution of Shamil Odamanov (Novaya Gazeta 2021), was granted Ukrainian citizenship by President Poroshenko in 2014 after joining the Azov forces to fight in Eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, following his military involvement in Azov and law

enforcement units, Korotkikh was frequently associated with or present in circles related to the unresolved killings of various ex-combatants or journalists, such as Pavlo Sheremet, who was killed in a car explosion in Kyiv in 2016, or the camouflaged suicide of Azov fighter Yaroslav Babych in 2015 (Girin 2014; Kyiv Post 2021).

To put the previous introduction of Korotkikh into the broader context of this chapter, it is also widely recognized that Oleksandr Avakov, son of the aforementioned Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, is a close friend of Korotkikh. Moreover, Korotkikh, during his high-ranking position in the National Corps, was appointed by Arsen Avakov to lead the Ministry's Department for the Protection of Strategic Objects in 2015 (Furmanyuk 2017; Kuzmenko 2019). This is the same Korotkikh who confirmed his willingness to cooperate with a Russian law enforcement group in a 2021 video (Kyiv Post 2021).

Just as Umland (2019: 122-123) highlights, despite often questionable histories, some of Azov's prominent figures managed to transform themselves into relatively notable actors in Ukrainian society, spanning parliamentary activities, law enforcement services, mass communication, and political party involvement, all within six months, even though they were previously minor or even negligible socio-political entities and military men. For the purposes of my research, it is possible to interpret the outlined individual actions of Azov's leadership as an attempt to gain power and influence over the governmental order through political (and perhaps also business) means, rather than through the use of force, ideology, actions and the presence of their Azov paramilitary group. Scholarship and empirical evidence indicate here that the Azov Battalion, benefiting from its military successes, served as a stepping stone for gaining credibility, fame, and political influence. This foundation enabled its members to establish patronage ties and penetrate political structures (Umland 2019: 122; Fedorenko and Umland 2022; Colborne 2022). Overall, the remarkable and swift ascend of Azov can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the leadership's eagerness to participate in conventional politics and secondly, the presence of structural opportunities within the state (Gomza and Zajaczkowski 2019: 774-776; Shekhovtsov 2014, 2022).

Apart from Azov, other paramilitary units often lacked adequate funding and political backing, leading them to readily accept the government's offer of integration. However, the Right Sector with UVC did not face this issue during 2014-15 due to sufficient private donations and interest from political and business figures. A former member explained that their leader, referred to as "*providnyk*" Dmytro Yarosh,

commanded significant fear and respect among politicians, with many members of parliament competing for his attention. Yarosh was a proficient fundraiser who cultivated close relationships with influential businessmen such as Gennady Butkevitch, Aleksandr Gerega, and Gennady Korban. Most notably, he also had mutual sympathies with Ihor Kolomoisky (Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021: 12-13).

When interviewed in 2019 (Rudenko and Sarakhman 2019), Yarosh himself denied any affiliation between him, Right Sector and Kolomoisky's "project" of forging private armies. Yarosh stated: *"It is all fiction [...]"*. He also denied any familiarity with Akhmetov, saying; *"No, I've never seen him [...]"*. In response to the earlier mentioned funding of UVC by Kolomoisky's associates, including Korban or Filatov, Yarosh responded, *"[...] they were directly responsible for our contracts [...] they provided only part of the necessary things that we received from different people."* (Ukrainska Pravda 2019).

Without Yarosh's persuasive and captivating persona, which both attracted and potentially frightened influential figures in Ukraine, the Right Sector encountered difficulties in maintaining these networks after Yarosh departed from the organization and new leadership took on a more antagonistic stance towards Ukraine's government. It can be assumed that due to its increasingly radical politics, violent stand-offs, convergence with criminal elements, and inability to translate the legacy of Maidan heroes into electorate support, the Right Sector effectively disqualified itself from establishing any meaningful patronage networks that could help them acquire influence, resources and expand politically (Likhachev 2015).

In relation to Croatia, the existence of profound patronage ties between state officials and the HOS was practically non-existent, poorly documented, or largely inconsequential when compared to the extent observed in Ukraine and Colombia. This can be attributed to several factors. As discussed in the previous chapter, the HOS functioned as an armed militia associated with the HSP political party, which directly opposed and competed with Tudjman's government, albeit with limited strength. Even when a strong pro-state sentiment emphasizing independence, patriotism, and homeland defense prevailed, the relationship between government officials and militia leaders was characterized by antagonism, significantly impeding the development of a patronage networks for personal gains.

Moreover, historical evidence reveals that the independent military units of the HOS had a transient existence, mainly active during the years 1991-1992 (Ferguson 2020). These units were swiftly and forcefully integrated into the Croatian Army, and in the case of Bosnia, into the HVO a few months later (Shrader 2003: 46). Considering this, it is reasonable to assume that individual state representatives lacked incentives to exploit the HOS for personal objectives. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the successful centralization of power structures within the HVO minimized such opportunities. Additionally, the prosecution or assassination of many key individuals associated with the HOS, often by the government, significantly diminished the desirability for statesmen to intertwine their interests with those of the HOS (Lekić 1991; Milekić 2020; Ramet 2006; Shrader 2003).

Despite the aforementioned factors, there were instances in which certain commanders within the HOS persisted in their activities and assumed commanding positions in the HVO or parliament, indicating a potential association with the state apparatus. Consequently, some of these commanders also ventured into Croatian politics or business circles.

For instance, Ante Prkačin emerged as a leader within the HOS, holding the rank of general during the Bosnian War in 1992. After the dissolution of the HOS, Prkačin continued to serve as an officer within the HVO. Notably, Prkačin even ran for the presidential office in 2000 (Hrvatska Radiotelevizija 2000). Moreover, in 2020 Prkačin succeeded in securing a parliamentary mandate as an independent candidate, actively participating in the Agriculture Committee and representing the delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (Sabor.HR 2023).

Another example is Marko Skejo, who led the 9th battalion "Rafael Vitez Boban" within the HOS. Skejo remained an active member of the far-right party HČSP, founded in 1992, and also engaged in entrepreneurial pursuits with his quarry companies. In 2012, he incurred a debt of HRK 12 million to the Croatian government while simultaneously maintaining business connections with Radimir Čačić, who served as the Deputy Prime Minister at that time (Danas.HR 2017; Polšak Palatinuš 2017).

Furthermore, Valentin Rajković, the commander of the 19th Battalion "Vitez Jure Francetić," later found employment with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, Rajković faced accusations and subsequent sentencing of 3 years for abusing his position to forge visas. Despite this, Rajković received state commendations and even secured a place on the audience list with the Pope, allegedly due to his association with Jadranka

Kosor, who served as the Prime Minister at the time and had a familial connection to Rajković, who is a godfather to her child (Borovac, Popović, and Moskaljov 2010).

It is evident that certain ex-commanders from HOS were able to establish connections with the state, albeit long after the dissolution of the militia and the conclusion of the war. The presence of subtle patronage ties, particularly in relation to war veterans and political nepotism, persists to this day. Nevertheless, these are largely irrelevant as none of these existed or were observed during the peak of HOS's activity in 1991-1992.

In contrast to the previous cases in Ukraine and Croatia, AUC did not have any official political wing involved in electoral processes, nor was it directly involved in Colombian politics. Nevertheless, the existence of a powerful right-wing paramilitary group with deep ties to politicians, military forces, and the business sector undoubtedly exerted influence on political dynamics, decision-making, and statesmanship throughout AUC's existence. Although the AUC consistently received backing and financial support from local communities, influential elites, and political figures who required protection from insurgent factions, over 70% of its operations were allegedly funded through cocaine-related business (Colombia Reports 2016). This suggests that the AUC was not dependent on the finances of its patronage networks but rather on the power it wielded through violence, impunity for its actions, and the leeway it enjoyed in the political system due to them (Civico 2012). Moreover, the group interfered with local electoral outcomes, which is a classic manifestation of clientelism that has been augmented by the involvement of new actors, namely illegal armed groups. Subsequently, to garner the support of lower-class voters in rural areas, AUC's chosen representatives used the tit-for-tat method, promising material gains in exchange for electoral votes. (Tate 2018: 427-428, 437; Pécaut 1997: 151).

In the case of Colombia, Curry and De Vries (2020) suggest that the AUC, with the support of the army and local and national politicians, were deeply involved with the establishment while concurrently accusing them of neglecting their responsibilities (Medina Gallego 1990: 185, 197-198). The AUC contributed to the complex and multifaceted neoliberal transformation, while also providing significant support in combating rebel insurgents who posed a threat to the Colombian population and challenged the established government. However, it is important to note that the AUC also played a role in prolonging the conflict, driven by the vested interests of its officials who desired the

continuation of the war. (Avilés 2006; Kushner 2003; Curry and De Vries 2020)

The AUC was initially established with the explicit objective of safeguarding the economic interests of its supporters, including members of the local community, political elites, and influential figures (Global Security 2023). Certain individuals within the AUC, such as Carlos Castaño, aimed to acquire influence and recognition in Colombian politics. Nevertheless, this goal contradicted the resolution of the armed conflict, which was favored by a significant number of AUC members, including the co-leader and his brother, Vicente Castaño (Rabasa and Chalk 2001).

What truly stands out in the Colombian case is the scale and depth the militia-state patronage nexus went through. A large portion of these connections was unraveled during the demobilization processes, which were marred by dubious practices, as paramilitaries sought to avoid punishment for their crimes. President Uribe's simultaneous willingness to grant them immunity faced opposition from human rights advocates, the constitutional court, and even the United States government. The negotiations with the paramilitaries exposed a phenomenon labeled as "parapolitics." This term describes the extensive network of illicit agreements between AUC leaders and members of Colombia's political elite at various levels (Schultze-Kraft 2018: 486; Civico 2012: 80). The Parapolitics scandal is another perplexing illustration of how deeply the criminal nature of the AUC was intertwined with the Colombian state, forging vast amount of patronage networks, protectionism deals and so forth, as the scandal revealed the collusion of many Colombian politicians and public officials with the paramilitaries. The investigation revealed that politicians had received campaign contributions, votes, and even direct support from the AUC in exchange for political favors and protection (see López and Sevillano 2008; Romero 2007).

In 2011, at least 103 current and past local officials who were elected to office between 1997 and 2010 were being investigated for receiving support from the AUC. According to Nuevo Arco Iris, a Colombian research organization, the AUC was involved in the selection of at least nine governors, 251 mayors, and over 4,000 council members in 2003 alone (Pachico 2011). Due to the parapolitics scandal, numerous politicians, including dozens of congressmen, five governors, and other lawmakers, were arrested and sentenced to prison for their involvement (Alsema 2012a). This scandal resulted in a significant loss of public trust in Colombia's political institutions, underscoring the country's ongoing struggle with corruption and political violence. Moreover, it weakened

President Uribe's position concerning attempts to secure a free trade agreement and military aid from the US (Reuters 2007).

Turning back to the business ventures of the AUC, it is essential to note that during the AUC's tenure, Colombia experienced a substantial political and economic transformation, marked by the robust implementation of neoliberal policies. These policies were promoted, facilitated, and endorsed by the country's elites, politicians, and even corporations. The AUC arguably played a pivotal role in safeguarding and enforcing these policies, which included land reforms and other legislative measures (Avilés 2006: 387-389).

Some testimonies suggest that paramilitary leaders aimed to settle conquered, previously contested, areas with former militiamen and use the land investment for money-laundering purposes. Vicente Castaño, the AUC's finance leader, played a crucial role in this strategy. He sought support from the state and aligned his economic development vision with official discourse. Castaño believed that by bringing in wealthy businessmen, state institutions would follow. The assumption he made was somewhat accurate. Castaño's goal was to establish a palm oil industry in Uraba that would attract these investors to durable and productive projects. And indeed, in 1999, Vicente Castaño founded Urapalma, the initial palm company in Lower Atrato. His acquaintances and family controlled the company's directorial board, as reported by *El Espectador* in 2010. Castaño's role in palm business development highlights the extent of his and the AUC's influence in this regard (Grajales 2013: 221-222).

Security and Integration with State Elements– Maintaining Independence or Losing Autonomy?

As Tor Bukkvoll (2019: 299) states, during the initial stages of the conflict in 2014 and especially after annexation of Crimea by Russia, it became more and more apparent that heavily undermanned and disorganized Ukrainian forces would not be sufficient for Ukrainian leadership to conduct any successful strategy of countering the armed revolt outbreak in eastern parts of Ukraine (Fionik 2015). For example, the vice-minister of Interior Affairs Anton Heraschenko at that time proclaimed that Ukrainian army was inconsistent and therefore the state had no other choice but to rely on private actors

(Hladka et al. 2016: 146).

According to Ilmari Käihkö, the Azov Battalion formed part of a greater national effort to safeguard the state. The militias resorted to tactics that exacerbated the conflict in Donbas, thereby compelling the Ukrainian state to take action rather than adopting a passive stance, as it did in the case of Crimea (Käihkö 2018: 1, 7-8). Furthermore, militias frequently engaged in combat operations in locations where conventional regime forces had been unsuccessful, demonstrating a remarkable level of morale and steadfastness in their commitment to safeguarding the homeland (Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016: 116). Consequently, as one of the results of PSMs adamant determination to protect Ukraine, the government and its regular military forces were compelled to grant a greater level of independence to the volunteer battalions in terms of commanding and coordinating operations than they would have preferred under normal circumstances. This outcome played a crucial role in safeguarding the territorial integrity and political autonomy of Ukraine during the conflict period of 2014-2015 (Bukkvoll 2019).

According to Malyarenko and Galbreath (2015: 123), the Ukrainian government provided informal support to Azov and other battalions at the outset, while maintaining formal detachment from their operations. This enabled the regime to retain some measure of control over their actions, with the ability to offer approval or reprimand in cases of war crimes. Furthermore, Azov's actual operations on the eastern front, in addition to their interactions with the Ukrainian government, civilians, and supporters, were not particularly distinctive compared to the actions of other non-ideology (far-right) infused PSMs (Malyarenko and Galbreath 2015: 121). Promptly, the political leadership in Ukraine adopted a strategy to assimilate voluntary battalions into its authorized military institutions, such as the NGU. This approach was also applied to the Azov Battalion. Even though the Ukrainian authorities proclaimed that the battalion was fully integrated into conventional armed units, it still sustained a significant degree of autonomy, despite being theoretically subordinate to official structures. The primary reason for this was that the militia was self-funded, as it received financial support from outside sources (Wood 2022: 123), and it had its own mechanism for recruiting members. Although the majority of the battalion's heavy weaponry was still obtained from official sources, the militia's self-sufficiency enabled it to operate with relative independence (Bukkvoll 2019: 305).

On 17th September 2014, the Azov Battalion underwent a restructuring, and was elevated from a battalion to a regiment. Subsequently, on 11th November, the regiment

was formally incorporated into the NGU by minister of the internal affairs Arsen Avakov (Unian 2016; MMO 2022; Ukrainska Pravda 2014). This was a significant aspect of the broader policy modifications implemented by the Ukrainian administration, aimed at integrating the self-reliant volunteer battalions into either the Ukrainian Ground Forces or the NGU, thereby establishing a formal chain-of-command within the Anti-Terrorist Operation (Puglisi 2015).

The integration of the Azov Battalion into state structures under the National Guard in 2014 marked a formal association between the militia and the regime. However, it is evident that the Azov militia, along with its subsequent political wing, did not completely come under the unified command and control of the regime, both in terms of politics and military operations. Prior to securing a parliamentary seat in 2014, Biletskyy, a key figure in the Azov entity, expressed his ambition to establish a substantial youth movement established around the militia. This movement, as he envisioned, would extend beyond the Azov Battalion, encompassing various activities such as patriotic education (Colborne 2022: 35). Consequently, the Azov Civil Corps, a political and social movement, emerged in 2015, organizing marches, protests, and engaging in confrontations with anti-fascist demonstrations. In 2016, the Azov Civil Corps transformed into the National Corps political party. Despite their shared origins, it is argued that the Azov Battalion/Regiment and the Azov movement are separate entities (Likhachev 2022a; Laryš 2022: 498). The paramilitary underwent a process of de-politicization during the years 2015-2016, leading to increased autonomy from the political movement. As a result, the Azov movement lost its influence over the military unit (Shekhovtsov 2022).

In 2017, the Azov movement established the National Brigade, a paramilitary group aimed at assisting law enforcement agencies in Ukraine. However, it is important to note that this vigilante-like force was associated with the Azov movement, rather than the Azov Regiment. The National Brigade ceased its activities in 2020 and was succeeded by an organization known as Centuria. Therefore, it is crucial to underscore that the Azov entity comprises two distinct lines: The Azov Battalion/Regiment as a military unit integrated into the National Guard and a political movement with its roots in Azov. These two lines, while originating from the same source, operated with increasing autonomy from one another, culminating in the establishment of separate organizations and objectives (Likhachev 2022; Colborne 2022: 68).

However, unlike Azov, Right Sector with its UVC and later also with Ukraine Volunteer Army (UVA; *Ukrayins'ka dobrovol'cha armiya*) resisted integration attempts by the Ukrainian government for an extended period. The group has acted as a conventional pro-state paramilitary organization during the civil war to protect the state's interests, the UVC/UVA has also maintained a strong level of criticism, and at times, hostility towards various Ukrainian governments throughout its history (Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021: 8).

As Ukrainian government emphasized the strategy of incorporating all volunteer battalions into various official structures and subordinating them under unified commands. In September 2014, with the Minsk I ceasefire agreements, the Ukrainian government initiated the formal establishment of these battalions (Bulakh et al. 2017). However, Right Sector with UVC proved to be an exceptional case as the battalion persistently refused all government attempts to formalize them, while all other relevant non-official military groups were either integrated into the Ministry of Interior troops (including NGU) or the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021: 12). On October 21, 2015, UVC was recognized as a legal entity and registered as a non-governmental organization (NGO). Its status as an NGO was confirmed on November 9, 2018, according to the Unified Registry of NGOs. According to official sources of Right Sector webpage, UVC's objective is to liberate Ukraine from Kremlin influence and rid the Ukrainian government of internal oligarchic control (Zabyelina 2019: 286; Pravyi Sektor 2023).

Nonetheless, as recognized by Kähkö (2018), even though the Ukrainian government pushed for the integration strategy, it was fully aware of some benefits from Right Sector's stubbornness. Ukrainian policymakers acknowledged that Right Sector's deniability afforded their military actions in the east greater freedom of action. Moreover, militia's activities could draw fire and attention away from other sections of the front line. Additionally, the group's casualties would not be reflected in official figures, potentially avoiding some political problems and negative public discourse (Kähkö 2018: 16).

As Right Sector units did not integrate into state security forces, they became the go-to choice for focusing on fighting instead of bureaucracy, attracting some former members of other volunteer groups (ibid. 9) Nevertheless, Kyiv recognized the potential dangers of failing to integrate paramilitary fighters into state structures and has been implementing additional measures to legitimize voluntary battalions and bring them under its control. It became increasingly evident that as time passed, unregulated armed groups, regardless of their motives, posed a greater risk of their commanders abusing their

authority for personal or political gain (Zabyelina 2019: 287). On the contrary, the militia consistently demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with the state in instances when national stability and integrity were at risk; "[...] *attempts by anti-state formations to destabilize the situation in the state, [...] we are ready to use all available forces and means to help state law enforcement agencies in suppressing the anti-Ukrainian rebellion [...]*", said Yarosh in 2021 as a response to pro-Russian rallies (Focus.UA 2021).

President Poroshenko made efforts over a long period to demobilize Right Sector's UVC, including campaigns to integrate combatants from Right Sector into Ukraine's army, but the results were disappointing. It was not until September 2019, during President Zelenskyy's term, that he reportedly negotiated a deal with UVC's patron Kolomoisky to disarm and demobilize the last UVC unit and withdraw them from Donbas (Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021: 13, 15).

One final matter on which the ultranationalist UVC/UVA had some impact was national security as a whole. Despite significant military reforms during that time, conscription numbers were surprisingly low. As a result, the government saw the paramilitaries as skilled military forces that could be quickly deployed in the event of a major conflict with Russia, simply by appealing to them and emphasizing nationalist ideologies (Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021: 16). This aspect of the Right Sector's militia provided the government with a highly experienced combat-ready force and can be considered a positive convergence between the militia and the element of state security.

As for the Croatian model, the HOS with Paraga contributed to the initial collaboration with Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina against Serbs. It is estimated that up to 30 percent of HOS members were Muslim. While the cooperation between far-right forces and Bosniak Muslims may seem illogical, this phenomenon had already been embedded in the past. In World War II, Muslims played a role in the military operations that carried out the indiscriminate killing of Serbs in Croatia's expanded wartime territories. These territories extended southward through portions of Herzegovina and towards the Drina. (Ferguson 2020: 80). At the onset of the conflict in Croatia, Paraga declared that BiH and Croatia share the same land, ancestry, and nationality and should merge into a single state. He considered any present discrepancies between Croats and Muslims as superficial, constructed by the Serbs and the communists, and likely to dissolve in due course (Irvine 1997: 36). In 1992, Paraga wrote a letter to HOS's mayor Darko Kraljević, emphasizing

the importance of unity between the Croat and Muslim people, and rejecting any policy that would lead to the division of Herzeg-Bosnia and the creation of a new Serbian state. He stated that such a policy would be disastrous for both Croat and Muslim people, and reiterated his commitment to a united Bosnia and Herzegovina, including Croatia up to the Drina river (Marijan 2004: 270).

In a similar manner, there were multiple attempts by the Croatian government and Bosniaks to establish a mutually beneficial and constructive relationship in fighting against the Serbs in contested areas. While the HOS may have appeared to play a supportive role in this regime policy stance, it is believed that this support a form of legacy from the Independent State of Croatia rather than a genuine socio-political attitude. This is illustrated by the fact that the HOS did not operate cohesively throughout the entire region of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Specifically, in the Mostar area, the HOS had a poor relationship with the HVO but was supportive of the BiH army until the death of their commander. On the other hand, towards the end of June 1992, the Zenica Sector of the State Security Service viewed the HOS as an agent of the HVO in the Novi Travnik area because the HOS had sided with the HVO during a conflict that occurred on June 19, 1992 (Marijan 2004: 269-270).

Therefore, while the HOS initially contributed to the collaboration with Muslims against Serbs, its impact on the state security of Croatia at that time was mixed. It showcased internal divisions and its support for collaboration was seen as more aligned with historical legacies than a genuine commitment to a united Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During the conflict in Croatia, the strained relationship between Bosniaks and Croats engaged in combat against Serbs led to significant consequences. As the situation became increasingly tense, Dobroslav Paraga, the leader of the HSP, instructed his combatants not to cooperate with the HVO in their actions against the Bosniaks. This decision triggered a chain of events, prompting President Franjo Tudjman to enact a conscription law in 1993, compelling all service-ready Croat males to join the HVO (Bellamy 2003: 78). Simultaneously, there was a concerted effort to integrate various paramilitary groups, including the HOS, into the HVO's unified command structure. To consolidate control and restore order, local municipalities were directed to seize the arms of irregular forces, adopting a range of approaches, such as disbanding them, negotiating their disbandment, or resorting to more extreme measures, including lethal force (Ferguson 2015: 91). These developments exemplify the intricate dynamics and strategies employed

during the conflict in Croatia, where political decisions, conscription laws, and the consolidation of armed groups were intricately intertwined in the pursuit of stability and control.

Returning to the criticism directed at Tudjman's government and the deteriorated relationship between the HOS and Tudjman following the fall of Vukovar, as well as Paraga's order of disobedience regarding HOS cooperation with the HVO against Bosniaks, two notable consequences emerged regarding Croatian state security during that time period. Regarding the first issue, which has already been discussed, the government's hostile reactions towards the HOS indicated that Tudjman was primarily concerned about the political risks posed by the HOS to his own power and influence, rather than the presence of irregular armed groups within Croatia (Ferguson 2020: 78). The latter situation, however, posed a threat to division and fragmentation between the irregular armed forces and the official Croatian military forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Although the armed militia proved useful in the ongoing war with Yugoslavia, Tudjman took decisive steps to justify the forced incorporation of the HOS into the official military structure. Unsurprisingly, this move did not generate any significant backlash or outrage. Empirical evidence suggests that many combatants were more concerned with Croatian independence than the loud political criticism of espoused by Paraga and others (Ferguson 2020; Bellamy 2003).

The Colombian case exhibited a complex and dynamic set of relationships in which the state was not absent or failing, but rather an integral part of a domain where various claims to legitimacy and identity were contested. In contrast, the AUC employed state failure as a tactic to justify their valid existence while working in tandem with the state, particularly the army (Medina Gallego 1990: 170-172, 178-180).

In reality, this meant that during President Alvaro Uribe's Democratic Security Policy against rebelling guerrillas the army and police forces were supported by the AUC. The AUC played a crucial role in providing military assistance to the state, which enabled it to expel the guerrillas, or noncompliant locals, from the contested territories. Moreover, the state utilized violent governance, primarily through the AUC, to safeguard its resources and prevent possible contention from other actors. This approach allowed the state to extend the neoliberal transformation to other areas while enjoying violent governance by paramilitaries to maintain control (Curry and De Vries 2020: 274-275). In practice, this

meant that the land, which was subject to frequent displacement of local populations through violent means, was subsequently made available for purchase by local companies and international corporations, often specializing in monoculture agriculture aimed at foreign markets. Another aspect of this neoliberal conditioning and strengthening was the fact that businesses have employed the AUC to protect their often newly acquired territories against guerrilla forces and maintain order among their labor force, thereby avoiding work stoppages and suppressing requests for better wages and benefits. For instance, banana companies operating in the Urabá area, including prominent global enterprises like Chiquita, provided remuneration to paramilitaries based on the number of banana crates delivered as compensation for their services (Curry and De Vries 2020: 273-274; Gentile 2008; El Espectador 2008; Lobe and Muscara 2011).

Under Carlos Castaño, it became explicit that the organization played a significant role in preventing government failure, as claimed by Castaño himself (Wilson 2001; Aranguren Molina 2001: 261–263). The AUC portrayed itself as a protector of the state and aimed to reinstate its functions. The group justified its existence based on anti-subversive principles, assisting the state in regaining control of its territory. This included the military, which, according to the AUC leadership, had not fulfilled its institutional duty to protect Colombians' lives, property, and honor. Therefore, the AUC considered it their patriotic duty to perform tasks that the military was unwilling or unable to do (Curry and De Vries 2020: 272).

As for the dissolution attempts of the AUC, the initial disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process can be traced back to Medellín, where over 850 members of the *Bloque Cacique Nutibara* (BCN) were demobilized in November 2003. This was achieved through the cooperation of the BCN leadership, the city mayor, and government officials under Uribe's administration. However, this case revealed significant flaws in the process. While the Colombian government was eager to demonstrate action, it was not fully prepared for the DDR process. The city mayor was primarily focused on promoting his newly established peace and reconciliation program (ICG 2004: 11). Moreover, the government's efforts to demobilize paramilitaries between 2004 and 2006 had limited success in preventing the resurgence of criminal and neo-paramilitary groups throughout the country. President Uribe's focus was primarily on dismantling the overt military apparatus of these groups, neglecting their powerful criminal networks. This approach lacked attention to the strength and scope of influence of these

networks (ICG 2006).

This particular case of demobilization was shortsighted, with inadequate attention given to the thorough identification of paramilitaries. A report showed that only 30% of the 855 members who surrendered their weapons were genuine paramilitaries, with the majority belonging to criminal bands and local gangs operating in the area. This also included the poor, who were lured by the material and work opportunities promised by the reintegration program, as well as the appealing promises of pardoning criminal offenses related to paramilitaries, which was seen as an opportunity for crime laundering (Porch and Rasmussen 2008: 529). In addition, there were further issues uncovered. A study exposed a commonly known public secret of collusion and conspiracy between the police forces and ex-paramilitaries in the city. These militias frequently assisted the police in cleaning up the streets of petty criminals or drug addicts. This indicates that the DDR process merely resulted in pushing the paramilitaries further into the role of vigilantes who collude with legitimate actors (law enforcement) in resolving local issues (Civico 2012: 78). Demobilized paramilitaries still controlled city neighborhoods, with other unresolved key problems including drug income, connections with non-demobilized AUC members, and reparations for past crimes' victims (ICG 2004).

The evidence presented in the case of Medellín's DDR supports the notion that these paramilitary groups frequently assisted law enforcement in cleansing the streets of petty criminals and drug addicts. This observation indicates that the deconstruction process of the AUC entrenched the paramilitaries in the role of vigilantes, engaging in collaborative efforts with authorized entities like the police to tackle local issues (Civico 2012: 78).

According to Aldo Civico's (2012) case study on the modes of policing in Medellín, the dynamics between the AUC and the Colombian government, as well as the government's stance towards this paramilitary group, suggest that the collusion between both entities showcased the state's ability to exert control and authority. Civico argues that the intertwining of the state, paramilitaries and organized crime was not a sign of weakness but rather a display of the state's power and presence. Therefore, the AUC was a component of a power alliance with the state's machinery of capture, which the government obtained as a war mechanism and subjected to its political objectives, philosophy, and direct objective of war (Civico 2012: 77).

In the light of the AUC's demise, it is also important to highlight the internal

friction, feuding, instability, and fragmentation trend after the US designated the paramilitary in 2001 as a terrorist organization (Bejarano 2003: 236; Kushner 2003: 385). This dramatic policy change had far-reaching consequences. Leaders of the paramilitary group started to target each other, whereas certain members, including leader Carlos Castaño, implied that they could collaborate with the Bush administration and divulge the inner workings of the group (Sherman 2015: 459). Carlos Castaño was assassinated in 2004, and the murder prompted a significant amount of speculation regarding the perpetrators, with some attributing blame to Uribe's regime, while others posited that the act was a result of internal conflict, potentially involving Castaño's younger brother Vicente (Alsema 2012b; Colombia Reports 2016; BBC 2011).

A new leader took Castaño's place. Salvatore Mancuso shifted the group's agenda to negotiating a peace agreement with the Colombian government, with the willingness to demobilize the paramilitary group. This shift in strategy meant that the AUC began to engage in national-level talks with the government. Notwithstanding, the main conditions emphasized by Mancuso mainly centered around the avoidance of incarceration for committing war crimes and the non-extradition of its leaders to the United States due to the drug trade (ICG 2004: 6-10). The next stage of the demobilization process involved the introduction of the Justice and Peace Law, which was enacted in 2005. The law served as a legal facade for the earlier negotiations between the AUC and President Uribe, who declared it as a crucial step towards achieving peace in the ongoing civil war. However, the reality was reminiscent of the case described earlier in Medellín. The AUC members received inadequate sentences; the legislation failed to dismantle the organization's infrastructure; and profits generated from criminal activities such as drug trafficking and kidnapping were largely unaffected. Furthermore, much like in Medellín, certain violent criminals joined the AUC, taking advantage of the DDR process to evade proper justice (Goffman 2005: 49-50).

In 2006, the official demobilization negotiations concluded, and despite claims that the AUC had completed the process, the exact count of demobilized fighters varied significantly. Optimistic estimates put the number of disarmed and demobilized combatants at around 30,000; however, the actual numbers were subject to much debate and fluctuation (Porch and Rasmussen 2008; HRW 2010; Nussio 2011).

Even after the extradition of some AUC leaders to the US in 2008 to face justice (Grajales 2017: 40), the observed demobilization process and empirical evidence suggest

that while the unified behemoth of paramilitaries under the AUC flag disappeared, little was done to actually destroy the roots and causes of the phenomenon as armed non-state actors continue to exist. With the civil war still unresolved, other right-wing militias have come into existence, such as *The Gaitanistas* or The Popular Revolutionary Anti-Terrorist Army of Colombia (InsightCrime 2017, 2022). An analysis conducted in 2021 concluded that the right-wing paramilitaries had been demobilized, but were still far from being disarmed (Gorder 2021). These paramilitaries continue to operate much like the AUC did in the past, but they lack the centralized structure and strong ideological base of their predecessors. These armed groups are widely referred to in Colombia as BACRIMS (*bandas criminales emergentes*). Others view it simply as the re-paramilitarization of the country (Porch and Rasmussen 2008: 530; Sherman 2015: 460).

In summary, the Colombian AUC exhibited a notably high level of autonomy from the state compared to other observed cases. Not only was there a significant delegation of violence, as evidenced by numerous instances of the official army assigning acts of physical aggression against insurgents and rebellion supporters (UCDP 2023), but the AUC was also acknowledged as the so-called sixth division of the Colombian army, owing to its extensive connections and collaboration against mutual hostile forces (Mariner and Smart 2001). Ironically, among the analyzed cases, the AUC stood as the only illegal organization and was even designated as a terrorist group by external actors such as the USA (US.GOV 2007). Throughout its existence, the AUC functioned as an unlawful armed group, aligning with the consistent trend in the conceptual framework and theoretical assumptions that pro-state militias gradually relinquish their autonomy as they gain legitimacy and subsequently integrate into official structures. However, the AUC's case differed significantly as the process concluded primarily with demobilization and disarmament, with minimal integration taking place. As demonstrated in the previous paragraph, individuals instead continued their involvement in other illegal armed successor groups operating beyond the boundaries of the legal framework.

Ideological Influence, Societal Acceptance and Resilience of the State

The Azov Battalion garnered considerable national and global acclaim through its

instrumental role in recapturing and defending the city of Mariupol against separatist forces in 2014. This victory represented a pivotal moment in the organization's trajectory, solidifying its status as a proficient and efficient military unit while also winning hearts and minds of Ukrainians (MMO 2022).

Interior Minister Arsen Avakov admitted that he and several other political figures had reservations about the volunteer movement, especially the Azov Battalion. As evidenced, some members of this unit held extreme right-wing views and religious beliefs, making them a cause for concern. Nonetheless, Avakov believed that it was better to let them fight for their country than to engage in any destructive behavior without higher motives (Hladka et al. 2016, 431). Moreover, the basis of political agenda of the Azov Battalion aligned with the government's goal of preserving the nation's integrity amid the threat of further territorial loss and Russian-backed separatism in the east (Bukkvoll 2019: 302).

Umland (2019: 122-123) also argues that Azov Battalion's leaders saw themselves as the vanguard of a new Ukrainian nationalist movement. They perceived themselves as the defenders of Ukrainian sovereignty and identity against Russian aggression and what they saw as the corrupt and weak political establishment in Kyiv.

As for the further political endeavors, the Azov Civil Corps, a group consisting of former fighters from the Azov Regiment, evolved into a political movement and eventually a political party called the National Corps in 2016. This transition granted them a certain level of credibility by presenting them as protectors of the Ukrainian nation (Laryš 2022: 487).

Moreover, Colborne (2022: 109) adds that to this day, Azov movement shapes its political discourse around patriotic words like “veteran” or “volunteers”, continuously framing themselves as long-standing defenders of the nation. As a result, the Azov Battalion's foray into politics may represent a calculated attempt to expand their influence and spread their ideology through more conventional political means. Gomza and Zajackowzski (2019: 775) illustrate this by highlighting that the group has transformed from a volunteer combat unit to a political faction having delegates in both regional councils and the national parliament. Nonetheless, Azov Battalion as defined through earlier framework of PGP, despite its far-right members and ideology, seems to have little impact on the political system in this case. Nonetheless, the Ukrainian government's strategy to integrate the Azov Battalion into its official military structures while leaving the

regiment a degree of autonomy and providing political opportunities for its far-right founders indicates that its organizational structures, military ethos, and ideology continue to exist within Ukraine's political space.

Right Sector's UVC/UVA had a significant reliance on their popularity. A sociological study conducted in December 2014 revealed that over 30% (over 50% in the west) of the Ukrainian public perceived volunteer battalions as the "military-patriotic elite". Merely 10% perceived them as a potential threat to the government. The same study found that the volunteer battalions received 7.3 points out of 10 in terms of public trust. This is in contrast to the government and official security services, which received 4.5 and 3.8 points, respectively (Aliyev 2016: 13). The sentiment of having the highest trust among all institutions was confirmed again in 2020 (Kyiv Post 2020). Despite President Zelensky's open disdain for paramilitaries, he was aware that a violent crackdown on these groups might have further undermined his fragile authority among the security forces. The ultranationalists, particularly those associated with Right Sector, remained untouchable, with any attempt to outlaw them likely causing significant unrest among other paramilitary groups, ultranationalist political organizations, army veterans, and the general public. These people still considered UVC/UVA to be war heroes. An anonymous investigative journalist has stated that the government feared touching ultranationalist groups, as he believed it could lead to a devastating civil war worse than that in Donbas (Aliyev and Odin Shaw 2021: 14-15).

Regarding the aforementioned, the popular support enjoyed by the armed segments of Right Sector and other similar groups effectively constrained the Ukrainian government's attempts to take serious action against them. It was apparent that the Ukrainian regime recognized the fragmentation of its monopoly on violence in Donbas and other regions of Ukraine. However, addressing the role of paramilitary groups was not a top priority, and it may have been even dangerous at the time for the reasons described.

After forming the UVC (later UVA), the first notable venture of Right Sector into the post-Maidan politics can be marked with Yarosh's appearing as the unofficial contender for presidency from the recently registered Right Sector party, which was formed on March 22, 2014. Although he officially ran as an independent candidate, Yarosh unmistakably embodied his political group. Despite this, Yarosh's bid for the presidency only yielded a mere 0.7% of the votes during the elections held on May 25, 2014 (Fedorenko and Umland 2022: 240). On the day of the presidential elections, Yarosh

vehemently declared that he and his party would push for an early parliamentary election in autumn. He further stated that Right Sector would participate in this "reloading of power" (Kyiv Post 2014). Although the parliamentary elections were in fact held on October 25th of that year, the Right Sector only managed to secure a mere 1.8% of the vote. Nevertheless, Yarosh still managed to secure a place in parliament as the sole representative of Right Sector, achieving this feat by winning the single-member district in his home region (Fedorenko and Umland 2022: 240; Puglisi 2015: 8).

In the aftermath of the 2014 revolution, Right Sector appeared to be the primary rallying force for Ukraine's far right politics. However, as outlined above, Right Sector failed to live up to the expectations. The outcome of the 2014 elections indicates a clear failure on the part of Right Sector to assume a meaningful role in electoral politics. This was further evidenced by the similar outcome of the 2019 parliamentary elections, in which Right Sector joined a united radical right nationwide-party list with National Corps, Svoboda, and Yarosh's Governmental Initiative (Glavkom 2019; UKRinform 2019). Unlike Azov, Right Sector opted for a confrontational approach instead of working with the authorities in Kyiv after the Maidan. This decision ultimately led to Right Sector's decline. By 2015, it had become a fragmented and collapsing movement (Colborne 2022: 78). According to Gomza and Zajaczkowski (2019: 782), Right Sector's decisions were characterized by a lack of pragmatism, as they prioritized their ideological reservations vis-à-vis political system. Likhachev (2015: 270) goes even further and argues that Right Sector's collapse was a result of a combination of its far-right ideology and Yarosh's inability to translate initial popular support into political success. Furthermore, he suggests that the primary driving force behind ultra-nationalism in Ukraine's political landscape has been and continues to be the Russian aggression and threat to Ukraine's sovereignty. The violent and extremist actions of the far-right during and after Maidan, including provocative behavior, anti-Semitism, populism, and a failure to advocate for Ukrainian national interests, caused the collapse of political popularity and disqualification of the Right Sector as a political force (Hurska 2016: 4-5).

The prevailing view among experts on the Ukrainian far right is that the Right Sector did not play a substantial role during the Maidan protests, and their violent actions had a negative impact on the movement's objectives in the foreseeable future (Likhachev 2015; Umland and Shekhovtsov 2014; Fedorenko and Umland 2022). Nevertheless, alternative perspectives presented by Ishchenko (2016) and Katchanovski (2019) argue the

contrary, highlighting the importance of far-right ideology and the Right Sector in post-Maidan politics. Therefore, according to this narrative it is essential not to underestimate the significance of the far-right ideology and the Right Sector's role in shaping post-Maidan politics.

From an official political standpoint, Right Sector and UVC was hardly a force to be reckoned with, and did not pose a significant threat to the new democratic regime. Nevertheless, the movement boasted an armed paramilitary wing that did not submit to the regular armed forces of Ukraine. Therefore, although Right Sector's political role was negligible, its military wing carried out actions that arguably had some role and influence in the political system.

Overall, the scholarly debate on the militias and their relationship with the Ukrainian statehood can be broadly categorized into two opinion streams: A) According to Ishchenko (2022), the rise of far-right groups in Ukraine is a consequence of the country's political crisis, characterized by a lack of legitimacy and pervasive corruption. The far-right militias, including the Right Sector and Azov Battalion, have taken advantage of this crisis to promote their nationalist and anti-Russian agenda, using violence and intimidation to advance their political goals. They have exploited the country's weak political establishment to push their agenda forward. B) Despite that, Umland (2019: 106) argues that these militias have manifested themselves and played a crucial role in defending Ukraine against perceived threats from Russia and have gained significant support from Ukrainians who see them as a necessary means of self-defense when official military structures have failed to do so. These militias have also succeeded in garnering a considerable following among Ukrainians who endorse their endeavors and actions in the conflict with Russia in the Donets Basin. (Umland 2020: 261).

Despite decreasing trust in major political leaders and parties, public trust in paramilitaries remained high. The conflict between ruling elites and paramilitary groups, supported by public opinion, further undermined the already-fragile Ukrainian state in the absence of democratic reforms and ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Malyarenko and Galbreath 2015: 124). The political legitimacy and widespread support of the volunteer battalions also subsequently enabled them to stage large-scale demonstrations and intimidate the government (Aliyev 2016: 13).

Overall, the relationship between the Right Sector and Azov militias and Ukrainian politics has been complex and diverse, with the support of some political parties on the one

hand and distancing of other parties on the other hand. Despite the complexities surrounding the issue, it is undeniable that the presence and actions of these militias have had a discernible impact on Ukrainian politics. They have participated in political protests, influenced the political process, and even formed their own political parties or participated in elections. Some militias have been more autonomous, while others have been closely linked to specific political parties. For instance, Azov had ties to the dissolved ultra-nationalist organization PU, while Right Sector has managed to establish its own political segment right away. Despite this effort, the organization did not receive significant support from the electorate (Fedorenko and Umland 2022: 238-239). In 2016, the political wing known as the National Corps emerged from the support network of volunteers for the Azov Battalion, which was initially established and led by Andriy Biletskyy, the Azov Battalion's founder and original commander (Rękawek 2023: 55).

To conclude the Ukrainian case, far-right militias enjoyed significant social acceptance due to their reputation as defenders of the nation. Nevertheless, as evidenced, this represented the peak of their influence within society and potential impact in the political realm. In different cases, this influence may be reflected in electoral outcomes and gains, although this scenario did not prove to be true here. Despite the prevailing social acceptance, there was a declining willingness among the general population to support these militias in elections, as indicated by outlined empirical evidence, especially the election results of far-right cliques. Therefore, it should be noted that in the case of far-right pro-state militias, having a positive reputation does not necessarily translate into electoral success and, subsequently, making a meaningful dent in the state system as a whole. While Right Sector and Azov legitimized their presence in Ukrainian politics, they have failed to translate their heroic popularity in the war into political popularity. In the case of Azov, the attempts of the militia to impact the political system were abruptly disqualified when the regiment was practically depoliticized through its incorporation into the NGU, which generally prohibits active military personnel from entering politics. (Likhachev 2019a, 2019b, 2022b). Additionally, these militias and their political ventures experienced a gradual decline, partly because they prioritized engaging in conflict rather than focusing on strategic electoral campaigns, for instance. Their emphasis on radical ideologies also failed to resonate with the majority, making their pursuits incompatible with prevailing societal antagonism towards radical ideology (Likhachev 2017; Sinowitz 2020).

Croatian leadership attempted to distance the country from extremist views in order to gain positive publicity on the international stage. However, at the same time, the political establishment played to populist sentiments among the population and the Croatian diaspora by celebrating the country's past, which was rooted in Axis power politics. The language used by Tudjman and his government was often bitter and focused on historical grievances. This rhetoric created a sense of division between "us" (the Croats) and "them" (other groups) and promoted a feeling of nationalistic impunity, where the country felt that it could act without consequences (Ferguson 2020: 78).

Through the radical antagonistic stance towards Tudjman the HSP/HOS sought to position themselves as champions of a more uncompromising and assertive stance towards the defense of Croatia's sovereignty (Bellamy 2003: 84). This created ample recruitment potential and opportunities for many Croats who were eager to fight for independence but opposed Tudjman for similar reasons. At that time, the HOS were often regarded as true loyalists and defenders of the nation. Consequently, it was much easier and quicker to join the militia units and engage in combat compared to enlisting in the Croatian National Guard, which could take weeks to reach the battlefield (Milekić 2020). Similarly, in the Bosnia war, many Bosnian Muslims enlisted in the HOS in order to combat the Serbs at a time when Alija Izetbegovic's administration seemed unresponsive to safeguard the BiH against the BSA and its Serbian and JNA supporters (Vulliamy 1994: 215). However, similar to the situation in Ukraine, the ordinary Croat respected HOS for its firm patriotic stance, willingness, and effectiveness in defending the state during dire situations of conflict. Yet, this popular support did not translate into significant electoral gains. Just as in the Ukrainian scenario, the presence of a far-right ideology more or less harmed the HSP/HOS, making it an easier target for the opposition. The opposition offered a practically similar political program, mainly centered on a sovereign Croatia, but without the radical ideology that simply, as outlined evidence shows, did not appeal to, or did not provide enough incentive for most voters.

As stated, the HOS served as armed volunteers for the political organization of the HSP. However, upon closer examination of the election results, it becomes apparent that the HSP lacked significant political support. For example, during the initial democratic elections in 1990, the party abstained from participating in parliamentary candidacy. In 1992, HSP gained 7.07% votes, securing mere five seats in the Croatian parliament.

Moreover, the HSP has undergone multiple divisions and reunifications with its factions, which can be attributed to internal ideological differences, notably the persistent division between fascism and anti-fascism. (Kasapović 2000: 11, 14-15). This indicates that the far-right opposition was politically feeble, fragmented, and nearly nonexistent (Milekić 2022). The HSP's paramilitary force therefore represented the primary source of potential impact or threat towards the government in regard to radical ideology and coup d'état.

Similar to the HSP political party, the HOS took pride in militant nationalism, firm opposition to communism, and strong anti-Yugoslavian sentiments. The group refused to acknowledge the country's anti-fascist history, attributing it to Yugoslavian communism. Additionally, the HOS regarded Bosnia as an integral part of Croatian territory and believed that Bosniaks were Croatian Muslims. The organization donned black uniforms, named its units after Ustasha commanders, greeted each other using "*Za dom spremni*" accompanied by the Nazi salute, and expressed a clear affinity for the Ustasha legacy and nostalgia for the Independent Croatian State during 1944-45 (Soucy 2023). With regards to the ideological foundations, it is unequivocally possible to classify the HOS as a far-right entity with clear elements of neo-fascism.

Similar to the case of Ukraine, particularly Right Sector, it can be argued that the HOS units were pro-state rather than pro-government. This assertion is supported by the latest PGMD publication by Carey et al. (2022). The HSP/HOS opposed Tudjman and his party due to their lack of radical nationalism, previous service in the communist army, and willingness to compromise with the Serb minority in Croatia. Another reason why Paraga, Paradžik, and others opposed the government was their disagreement over Tudjman's policy of collaborating with the international community to resolve the Yugoslav crisis. Additionally, they posited that the Croatian state required a more radical defense than what was being offered by President Tudjman. To support their argument, the party drew upon the works of figures such as Ante Starčević and Ustasha ideologues like Mile Budak. Through this rhetorical strategy, the HSP/HOS sought to position themselves as champions of a more uncompromising and assertive stance towards the defense of Croatia's sovereignty (Bellamy 2003: 84).

Tudjman perceived the radical tendencies of HSP, accompanied by armed fighters in the HOS, as problematic. Consequently, he utilized their fervent Ustasha glorification against them, labeling them as fascists and discrediting, harassing, and obstructing their political and military activities. Nonetheless, the over-radicalized nature of the HOS

provided President Tudjman with a formidable tool to inflict violence and political oppression on his opposition from HOS/HSP (Bellamy 2003: 78).

By dealing with this opposition, Croatian government eventually achieved ideological hegemony, today also referred to as *Tudjmanism*. A diluted far-right narrative, that emphasized Croatian nationalism, a centralized state, and the use of force to achieve independence, but also marginalized ethnic minorities, particularly Serbs (MacDonald 2002). Eventually, even the most hardcore HOS veterans became allies of the currently ruling HDZ party. Once independent, fierce critics became the HDZ's puppets in the irrelevant far-right cliques of Croatia, also depending on state funds and support (Milekić 2020).

Unlike previous cases, the AUC did not have an official political party connected to the paramilitary conglomerate. Moreover, given the circumstances of its formation, the militia practically gained popular support right from the beginning. The initial formation and its effectiveness in combating the guerrillas that terrorized the state, and even ordinary Colombians (such as farmers), were wholeheartedly welcomed. Regarding the impact of the militia on the state, as hinted in the second chapter, instead of using its own political party, the influential leaders of the AUC opted to utilize their power, influence, and control over state institutions to co-opt individual politicians or parties in order to advance their ideological and, more frequently, business agenda.

For example, in prior municipal elections, the AUC demonstrated a strong level of organization in their attempts to bribe potential candidates. In Colombia's central Magdalena region, which is considered the AUC's core territory, hundreds of politicians were invited to a meeting in 2000 by the paramilitary leader, Rodrigo Tovar, also known as "Jorge 40," where he personally selected candidates to run for office. Comparable gatherings were also held by other AUC commanders in Uraba, situated near the Panama border, and the Eastern Plains, where they financed and picked their chosen candidates (Pachico 2011).

With regards to the ideological underpinnings of the AUC, it should be noted that this organization emerged as a conglomeration of regional militias that had been initially financed and established by individuals who harbored staunch opposition to the communist ideology and aggression emanating from leftist insurgent groups. The AUC was established to protect the economic interests of its supporters, including community

members, political leaders, and influential individuals (Global Security 2023). Therefore, its ideology can be classified as right-wing rather than far-right; nevertheless, it is often argued that its ideological anchorage only served as a façade for the group's criminal activities and its allied political actors. (Bargent 2014).

However, the objective to garner more social acceptance amongst population was further vocalized through the propaganda of the AUC. Their rhetoric was not limited to news or websites; they also produced and promoted testimonies highlighting the heroics of their leaders, such as Castaño or Salvatore Mancuso. Historically, testimonies have focused on the experiences of victims of state violence. In Columbia, however, this narrative form has begun to circulate unmoored from its original political foundation, and was used by the narrators from the right who hoped to position themselves as marginalized and oppressed (Tate 2018: 430).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to emphasize that Colombian democracy was significantly flawed during the period under consideration. The state's democratic institutions and electoral politics underwent a unique development amid a civil war, which resulted in "voting amid violence." This was taking place alongside the multi-year peace negotiations with rebel forces, making Colombia an intriguing case study (see Taylor 2009, 2016). William Avilés (2008) describes the amalgamation of political violence, neoliberal aspirations, and political elite modernization in Colombia as a low intensity democracy. A democratic regime advocated globally, serving as an indispensable component in the dissemination of open markets (Avilés 2008: 380).

Additionally, turning back to the criminal character of the AUC, the "narcotization" of numerous paramilitary factions under the AUC's umbrella diluted and distorted the right-wing ideological essence of the paramilitary groups (Cívico 2009: 31), thereby creating ambiguous situations in which AUC units shared territories with guerrillas. In these scenarios, the AUC was more concerned with ensuring the functionality and fluency of drug routes than with engaging in conflict with the guerrillas (Gutiérrez-Sanín 2022: 88).

Discussion

The research aimed to analyze the impact of pro-state militias with a distinct political ideology on the stability and functioning of the democratic system. Specifically, the study sought to comprehend the potential consequences of these militias' activities and influence on democratic processes and institutions within a country undergoing a civil war. Moreover, it aimed to evaluate the impact and threat posed by these pro-state militias against the state, especially considering their radical ideological background. Additionally, the research explored the extent of integration of these militias into the state, encompassing aspects such as patronage ties, incorporation into official military structures, and other forms of interaction. By addressing these research objectives, the study aimed to make a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge by providing a nuanced understanding of the implications and dynamics involved when such groups operate within a democratic framework.

The key findings of the research indicated an ambivalent nature of the relationship between pro-state militias and the state during civil conflicts. On one hand, militias engaged in conflict with the state due to ideological differences, perceiving the state as lacking patriotism, being inadequate in safeguarding national sovereignty, and demonstrating insufficient preparedness or motivation to counter the common enemy. On the other hand, despite this conflict, militias managed to establish patronage ties with the state, encompassing shared interests in the political sphere, business activities, personal goals, and pre-existing connections.

The analysis highlighted the complex dynamics involving conflict, patronage ties, and integration between militias and the state. While the militias challenged the state, they also significantly contributed to the defense of the weakened state during civil conflicts. The research findings demonstrated that granting militias a portion of monopoly on violence ultimately aided the country against belligerent forces. However, as militias collaborated with state units such as the army or police, they tended to lose the autonomy they previously enjoyed.

Furthermore, the research emphasized the noteworthy popular support that militias gained through their heroic wartime actions. However, this support did not necessarily translate into meaningful electoral gains, as some militias prioritized their focus on combat rather than strategic election campaigns. The study revealed that the radical far-right

ideology of these militias diminished their desirability for significant segments of the population to elect militia commanders to higher political positions.

The research underscored the state's resilience towards the ideological nature of these militias. During civil conflicts the state conveniently embraced ultra-nationalistic sentiments to rally the nation. Beyond this, however, the militias often lacked substantial political contributions that resonated with significant portions of the population. The research also indicated that the state forcefully integrated militias under unified commands or into specific military structures, effectively depoliticizing their units and diminishing their ideological sentiments.

Additionally, the analysis of the AUC case highlighted a different scenario where the conflict between pro-state militias and the government was not as prominent. Instead, organized crime infiltrated various structures within the state, leading to issues related to patronage ties, security, and the economy.

Another significant finding was the notable upsurge of political violence, targeted killings, and violent protests or uprisings when pro-state militias became hostile or antagonistic towards the government. While the challenge posed by these militias did not involve rebellion or restructuring of the existing order, it reflected a desire for a sovereign and strong nation, often criticizing the specific government for insufficient nationalism, lack of action against insurgents, corruption, and nepotism.

Returning to the initial conceptualization of "Militia-State Ambivalence Nexus," the outlined framework, together with the theoretical assumptions, has proven to be a valid contribution to the existing knowledge in this field of study. In all four observed cases, the governments adhered to the blueprint presented in my research. Both Ukraine and Croatia at that time resolutely distanced themselves from radical sentiments of these militias, yet they successfully adopted and promoted aspects of patriotism and nationalism in relation to the common enemy of the state, such as pro-Russian separatists, JNA, and Serbs. In the case of Colombia, the state structures employed a slightly different rhetoric, characterized by a strong anti-communism stance and adherence to right-wing principles firmly linked with economic development, which would have otherwise been impeded by rebellion and terrorizing of the common populace by guerrillas. Furthermore, in all cases, the democratic systems conceded a portion of their autonomy over violence to pro-state militias, as discussed by Carey et al. (2013) and Aliyev (2016). These articles shed light on the

delegation of authority to militias and highlight how this arrangement provided them with a degree of freedom to combat belligerent forces in scenarios where conventional forces either failed or lacked the capacity to do so alone (e.g., Vukovar siege, Mariupol liberation). The partial disentanglement from the official army provided militias with legitimate stakes in presenting themselves as heroic defenders of the homeland to the general populace. At the same time, the states in the observed cases significantly and quickly bolstered their combat potential, which would have otherwise required numerous bureaucratic and legitimacy-concerned procedures for the militias to operate on the frontlines. Lastly, in all analyzed cases, this concession of violence was accompanied by a governmental strategy to employ forceful incorporation (Croatia case), disarmament/demobilization (Colombia case), or premeditated integration into official law enforcement structures (Ukraine case). The concept's final step of state cohesion and integration ultimately reduced any possible threats to the system itself from both a radical ideological standpoint and challenges to the ruling structure. The ideological core of former pro-state militias diminished within the armed segments, and in some cases, transcended into the political arena. Nevertheless, as already outlined in the empirical findings, the radicalism of hardline members had limited success, if any, in elections or influencing movements.

In comparison to the works of Aliyev (2016) and Carey et al. (2013), my concept and findings offer a unique and comprehensive perspective on the relationship between authorities and ultra-nationalist pro-state militias. While drawing inspiration from their research, my approach delves into the intricate dynamics of integration, confrontation, patronage ties, and the impact of ideologically driven militias on the democratic state system. By exploring these factors, my framework not only recognizes the resilience of the state but also acknowledges the popularity of pro-state militias within political circles. It sheds light on the distinct characteristics of these militias and highlights the inherent tension that arises from their simultaneous loyalty to the state and autonomous identity.

Importantly, the observed findings from my research underscore the contradictory nature of far-right radicalism within militias and the democratic foundations of the analyzed cases. Furthermore, my research emphasizes the strategies employed by democratic governments, such as cooperation, disarmament/demobilization, and the incorporation of militias into law enforcement structures. These measures were implemented to mitigate potential threats by diminishing the radicalism within the militias

and integrating them into the state apparatus.

It is important to note that the analyzed empirical findings consistently indicate a decrease in the threat posed by radical pro-state militias in relation to the government. The strategic implementation of the "Militia-State Ambivalence Nexus" framework, including promotion of patriotism and nationalism, controlled delegation, and state integration, has proven effective in regulating and mitigating the potential risks associated with these militias. By adopting these measures, governments can minimize the likelihood of confrontations, disloyalty, and challenges to the political order, thereby ensuring enhanced stability and security.

To conclude, as my initial hypothesis suggested, the impact of radical cliques within pro-state militias on democratic state systems is relatively insignificant. The oft-cited danger of right-wing militias' ideological foundations may be overstated, and the recurring discussion surrounding the presence of hazardous extremist beliefs in a nation with relatively stable democratic governance provides a sensationalized narrative with limited relevance to substantive political and military matters. Therefore, the impact of ultra-nationalist pro-state militias with a radical political ideology on the stability and functioning of the democratic system may be less significant than often portrayed.

Examining the potential threat posed by ultra-nationalist pro-state militias with a radical political ideology to the democratic system, including their integration through patronage ties, sheds light on the complex relationship between these militant groups and the stability of democracy. The integration of ultra-nationalist pro-state militias with a radical political ideology into the democratic system, particularly through patronage ties, may still introduce marginal threats to its stability. These militias may challenge the government and engage in conflicts that can disrupt democratic processes and institutions. However, the research findings indicate that the state shows substantial resilience towards the ideological nature of these militias. The state may establish patronage ties with the militias, sharing political interests, business activities, and pre-existing connections. Additionally, the state can exert control and integration over the militias through forceful measures such as incorporating them into official military structures. By depoliticizing the militias and diminishing their ideological sentiments, the state mitigates the threat they pose to the democratic system. However, it should be noted that the infiltration of

organized crime within the state can present different challenges related to patronage ties, security, and the economy, potentially affecting democratic stability.

As my initial argumentation hinted, in the short-term perspective nationalist militias can significantly strengthen a state's security and defense, particularly during times of military conflict. However, for such dynamics to benefit the state in the long run, these armed groups must be successfully integrated into the official military structures, which would diminish the influence of radical ideology within the militias. Although the presence of radical ideology and the loss of the state's monopoly over violence may have consequences, the correct decision-making processes can allow a regime to secure its defense and augment its combat potential. Therefore, the threat posed by ultra-nationalist pro-state militias with a radical political ideology to the democratic system is mitigated when these groups are integrated into official military structures and their ideological sentiments fade away.

In terms of integration into the democratic system, the research shows that pro-state militias can establish patronage ties with the state, encompassing shared interests in the political sphere, business activities, personal goals, and pre-existing connections. However, as the militias collaborate with state units such as the army or the police, they tend to lose the autonomy they previously enjoyed. Therefore, the extent of integration of such militant groups into the democratic system varies, and their level of integration can be influenced by factors such as patronage ties and incorporation into official military structures.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this diploma thesis has made a significant contribution to the academic discourse by providing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the impact of ultra-nationalist pro-state militias with a radical political ideology on the stability and functioning of democratic systems. Through a rigorous qualitative approach and meticulous examination of multiple case studies, the research has effectively investigated the multifaceted consequences of these militias' activities, their integration into the state apparatus, and the potential threats they pose to democratic processes.

The findings of this study have shed valuable light on the complex and dynamic relationship between pro-state militias and the state during civil conflicts. The research has unveiled the intricate dual nature of this relationship, in which militias engage in direct conflict with the state due to ideological differences, often criticized the state for its perceived lack of patriotism or failure to safeguard national sovereignty. Paradoxically, these militias have also managed to forge patronage ties and establish shared interests within the political sphere, indicating a certain level of integration within the state apparatus itself.

Importantly, the analysis has demonstrated the significant role played by pro-state militias in defending the weakened state during civil conflicts. By granting these militias a degree of autonomy over the use of violence and engaging them in combat, the state has effectively harnessed their expertise and commitment to combat belligerent forces. This strategic delegation of authority has ensured the nation's defense, albeit at the cost of a temporary relinquishment of the state's monopoly on violence.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that as these militias collaborate more closely with official military structures, their autonomy gradually diminishes, thus limiting their ability to pursue independent objectives and potentially compromising their ideological foundations. The integration of militias into the state's military apparatus is often accompanied by deliberate de-politicization measures, effectively dampening their ideological fervor and mitigating their potential threat to the democratic system. This integration process, characterized by forceful incorporation, disarmament/demobilization,

or premeditated integration, is designed to align the militias with the state's interests while curbing their independent influence and sense of indispensability.

Moreover, the research findings have underscored the significance of popular support garnered by these militias through their heroic actions during times of war. However, it is important to note that this popular support does not necessarily translate into meaningful electoral gains or substantial influence on the political landscape. The militias' radical far-right ideology, coupled with their primary focus on combat rather than strategic electoral campaigns, has limited their appeal to a broader segment of the population. Consequently, although pro-state militias may enjoy support within specific circles, their capacity to exert significant political influence within the democratic system remains constrained.

The analysis of the AUC case has revealed an alternative scenario, in which the infiltration of organized crime within the state introduces distinct challenges related to patronage ties, security, and economy. This underscores the necessity for a nuanced understanding of the varied dynamics that can emerge when examining the integration of pro-state militias into the democratic system.

Furthermore, the conceptual framework of the "Militia-State Ambivalence Nexus" developed in this thesis represents a notable contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this field of study. By effectively capturing the intricate interplay between pro-state militias and democratic governments, this framework provides insightful perspectives into the strategies employed by governments to harness the militias' capabilities while simultaneously mitigating potential threats. The framework acknowledges the state's resilience towards the ideological nature of these militias and highlights the measures implemented to integrate them into official military structures, thereby minimizing the potential destabilizing effects on the democratic system.

Although this research has shed considerable light on the impact of ultra-nationalist pro-state militias with a radical political ideology on the stability and functioning of the democratic system, there are several avenues for further exploration. Future studies could place greater emphasis on the political wings of these militias, as they possess the potential to exert a more substantial impact on the state system. By delving deeper into the political dynamics and strategies employed by these militias,

researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of their influence on democratic processes and institutions, thus enriching our comprehension of the implications and challenges posed by these groups within a democratic framework.

The research findings highlight the intricate and multifaceted dynamics involved in the relationship between these militias and the state, emphasizing the imperative for strategic integration and the mitigation of ideological threats. Through an insightful exploration of the interplay between militias and democratic systems, this thesis enhances our understanding of the complex implications and challenges posed by these groups within the framework of a democratic society. Future research should continue to explore the political wings of these militias, shedding further light on their potential influence on the state system and advancing our knowledge in this field. Moreover, it is important to note that the conceptual framework developed in this thesis holds promise for broader applicability. The model can potentially extend beyond far-right militias to encompass other radicalized armed pro-state formations within democratic environments, allowing for similar observations and analyses. By expanding the scope of inquiry to include a wider range of radical ideologies, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between these militias and the democratic system. This expanded approach would contribute to advancing our knowledge and deepening our insights into the implications of radical militia groups within democratic frameworks.

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