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Commander–community ties after civil war

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Abstract

Ex-rebel military commanders play a central role in peacebuilding after civil war. Yet the influence and mobilization power of these actors is not uniform: in some areas commanders retain strong ties to civilian populations after war's end, while in other areas such ties wither away. This article analyses a novel dataset of former rebel-occupied localities in Côte d'Ivoire to investigate why commander–community linkages endure or decline after post-conflict transitions. The findings support a theory of political accountability: commanders retained political capital and access to networks of supporters in areas where insurgents provided essential goods to civilians during war. By contrast, where insurgents' wartime rule involved abuse and coercion, commanders were less likely to sustain strong ties. These findings challenge the conventional wisdom that violent warlordism explains the persistence of rebel commanders' power in peacetime. Rather, effective wartime governance may create regionally embedded strongmen who can in turn disrupt postwar state-building.

Keywords

accountability, Côte d'Ivoire, post-conflict reconstruction, rebel governance, warlords

Introduction

The towns of Sangouiné and Mahapleu in western Côte d'Ivoire were both occupied by the Forces Nouvelles (FN) rebel movement during the Ivorian civil war (2002–11). After defeating Laurent Gbagbo's government and integrating into the national army, however, the trajectories of the FN commanders in these towns diverged starkly. In Sangouiné the former sector commander, known as 'Kassero', remains deeply embedded in local affairs. In the event of an important community decision, or a security problem between residents and local bandits on the roads, Kassero is often sought out for his counsel. 'When you do good for people, for the community', one long-time resident explained, 'the people will hold you in their heart, they will not cross their arms for you'.[1] By contrast, less than 30 kilometers further west in the town of Mahapleu, the former FN commandant – an army captain named 'Ondo' – is rarely seen today. Like Kassero, Ondo was an ethnic Senufo[2] and a stranger to the community at the beginning of the war. But once Ondo integrated into the Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI) after the civil war, his ties to the community in Mahapleu all but vanished. Nobody can recall the last time the village chief sought out Ondo for help, and residents balk at the idea that he would be invited to local social events. 'He [Ondo] did nothing for us here', one village elder said. 'He has no more power. If he came, the population would not welcome him'.[3]

The contrasting anecdotes of Sangouiné and Mahapleu illustrate an underexplored puzzle in post-conflict states: the strength of ex-rebel commanders' ties to formerly occupied communities. Research on civil war recurrence and peacebuilding has traditionally focused on sustaining bargains among national political elites, but recent scholarship underscores that ex-rebel field commanders are key actors in the remobilization of former combatants (Themnér, 2015; Daly, 2016) and the

[1] Bernard (pseudonym). Interview with the author. Sangouiné, 19 November 2017.

[2] The Senufo are considered a 'northern' ethnic group in Côte d'Ivoire.

[3] Eric (pseudonym). Interview with the author. Mahapleu, 20 November 2017.

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implementation of peace accords (Daly, 2014; Reiter, 2015). Warlords and armed strongmen are also essential to the preservation of local social order in fragile states (Blair & Kalmanovitz, 2016; Podder, 2014), and central rulers are often impelled to work through these actors to extend their authority (Driscoll, 2015; Malejacq, 2016; Marten, 2012; Themnér & Utas, 2016). Of course, commanders' local ties are a double-edged sword. In Côte d'Ivoire, ex-FN military officers with strong linkages to former rebel territory have increasingly challenged the regime of Alassane Ouattara that they once allied with (Martin, 2018; Piccolino, 2018). As one official admitted, 'We've tried to cut their branches [...] but their roots run deep'.[4]

Surprisingly, little research has systematically examined the endurance or decline of local-level linkages between commanders and former rebel-ruled populations. Journalists and scholars alike often portray armed group commanders as 'violence entrepreneurs' who accrue and sustain power by plundering natural resources and employing coercion (Bavier, 2015; Driscoll, 2015; Reno, 1998). Yet, as with rebel–civilian relations *during* civil wars (Arjona, 2016; Mampilly, 2011; Weinstein, 2007), the links between ex-rebel commanders and civilian populations *after* conflicts end are grounded in much more than raw power. Where commanders sustain influence and access to support networks, it is often through their involvement in local social life, political governance, and economic development (Marten, 2012; Blair & Kalmanovitz, 2016). These 'commander–community ties' impact ex-rebel commanders' roles in local-level order, their ability to mobilize supporters and bargain with the central state, and ultimately their capacity to sustain peace or return to violence. It is therefore important to ask: why do ex-rebel commanders sometimes maintain strong linkages to communities they ruled during civil war, but sometimes do not?

This article addresses this question by analyzing a unique dataset of former rebel-occupied territory in Côte d'Ivoire. On the basis of extensive fieldwork, I document variation in the quantitity and quality of ex-rebel commander ties to communities controlled by the FN from 2002 to 2011. I then test several causal explanations of postwar commander–community ties derived from the existing literature, which I organize into four themes: coercion, rent-seeking, kinship ties, and prewar cleavages. With the partial exception of the rent-seeking hypothesis, none of these explanations receives strong empirical support.

As an alternative, I advance an accountability-based theory. *Wartime governance* practices, I argue, impose constraints on ex-rebel commanders' postwar ties in a manner consistent with the logic of informal accountability. Effective wartime goods provision facilitates sustained commander–community alliances in peacetime due to the accumulation of trust and political capital among occupied populations, while abusive governance spurs communities to close off ex-rebel commanders' access to local networks. Empirically, I find that even after accounting for a large number of potential confounders, in localities where FN rebels provided more public services during the civil war, and where rebels regularly permitted citizens to voice demands for improved goods provision, commanders were significantly more likely to retain strong local ties after the 2011 peace transition. To account for potential selection effects, I investigate the determinants of wartime rule by the FN and find that governance patterns are not endogenous to pro-rebel political sentiments. Additional robustness checks, including a Heckman selection model to account for nonrandom assignment, and propensity-score matching to address bias from observables, support the theory.

These findings raise novel insights about the role of local accountability in shaping how and why armed actors – and rebel field commanders specifically – become 'embedded' in the context of internal conflicts. Previous accounts of the local support networks of armed movements have stressed insurgents' ethnic and political identities (Staniland, 2014; Kalyvas, 2015), patterns of recruitment and deployment (Daly, 2016), and fear-based coercion (Kriger, 1992; Reno, 2015). In contrast, I find that personalized forms of authority grounded in rebels' responsiveness to citizen interests and brokerage relationships with local elites form the strongest basis for ex-rebel commanders' enduring mobilization power. More generally, to understand the military actors that hold states together after civil war, analysts and policy actors should view these commanders as fundamentally social entities who remain deeply intertwined in local orders.

My analysis also raises questions about the recent scholarly literature arguing that territorial governance and strong local roots by winning armed groups lead to more successful postwar state-building. Huang (2016: 47–48), for instance, argues that for winning rebels, 'institutions built in war time [...] serve the purpose of ensuring regime power in peace time'. Lyons (2016: 170) also argues that armed movements with

[4] National Security Council member. Interview with the author. Abidjan, 28 October 2016.

experience governing territory will make more effective rulers, since governance provides opportunities to develop 'trained, effective and disciplined cadres', while Toft (2010: 114–115) suggests that it is the 'strong domestic support base' of winning insurgent groups that provides the basis for peace and democracy after rebel victory. Yet strong local ties among ex-rebel commanders can also obstruct citizen–state relations and erode commanders' accountability to elected civilian leaders. In Côte d'Ivoire, enduring commander–community ties appear to be associated with reduced citizen uptake of police services and increased willingness among commanders to engage in brinksmanship bargaining with the government. While effective rebel governance in civil war may benefit local communities in the short term, therefore, it may not lead to successful post-conflict reconstruction.

Explaining commander–community ties after civil war

Postwar commander–community ties are the peacetime social and political linkages that tether the local-level field commanders of former armed groups to communities ruled by rebels. These ties manifest in diverse war-torn countries where ex-rebel commanders emerge as sources of peacetime employment and goods provision, and as political brokers (Daly, 2016; Marten, 2012; Themnér & Utas, 2016). The nature of political settlements that end civil wars may shape how commander–community ties are sustained.[5] When rebel forces are integrated into the post-conflict military, ex-rebels can leverage their new positions in the state to accrue patronage opportunities (Glassmyer & Sambanis, 2008). In other cases, commanders may capitalize on the opening of post-conflict elections to solidify their territorial bases while launching electoral careers (Themnér, 2017).

Perhaps the most important consequence of ex-rebel commanders' enduring local ties is the preservation of their capacity for the remobilization of armed networks outside of the regular army. By remaining embedded in the social and political fabric of formerly occupied communities, commanders can stay in contact with former rebel group members who remain attached to ex-combatant organizations, or members of other local networks – such as youth associations or self-defense militia – that can be repurposed in service of commanders' interests (Themnér, 2015). This mobilization potential is a valuable asset during war-to-peace transitions, when political coalitions are fluid and the future for rebel commanders is uncertain (Christia, 2012). By preserving extra-military networks beyond the control of the center, ex-rebel commanders can bargain with state rulers by threatening to activate their supporters to upend stability, or in the extreme case, to launch a bid to remove political elites from power (Harkness, 2016; Roessler, 2011). As one ex-FN unit leader in Côte d'Ivoire put it, 'Everyone knows that if we turn over our arms [. . .] each of us will pay the price. Therefore it is necessary to stay cohesive to make sure everything goes well'.[6]

Despite strong incentives for ex-rebel commanders to preserve and expand their territorial support networks, not all commanders succeed in sustaining local ties once peacetime politics take hold. As Themnér (2015) notes, the demobilization process following civil war is often accompanied by a detachment of rebel commanders from their subordinate networks, as military and political power is transfigured and rank-and-file combatants seek new sources of patronage. Commanders who are selected for military integration are likely to be relocated away from their zones of wartime administration. Other local political and business elites, once displaced from conflict-affected zones, will return to compete for power and influence in localities where commanders previously reigned supreme. As a result, ex-commanders may find it difficult to retain local support bases in peacetime. Those who fail to sustain local ties become vulnerable to the capriciousness of the postwar central state.

No previous studies, to the author's knowledge, have attempted to explain why some occupied communities but not others maintain strong ties to ex-rebel commanders in peacetime. Several theoretical logics in the existing literature extrapolate naturally to the puzzle, however. I group these explanations into four main themes: coercion, rent-seeking, kinship ties, and prewar cleavages.

Several accounts of insurgency and armed 'warlords' suggest that in the context of weak or collapsed states, militant group commanders establish authority and power primarily through means of coercion and violent intimidation (Kriger, 1992; Driscoll, 2015; Marten, 2012). While warlords may also serve communities with patronage and goods provision (Marten, 2012), these actors are fundamentally understood as 'amoral and interchangeable violence entrepreneurs' (Driscoll,

[5] Total government victories fall outside the scope of my analysis, since ex-rebel commanders are likely to be exiled or imprisoned in those cases.

[6] Interview with Issouf. Korhogo, 21 October 2017.

2015: 174) whose authority hinges on a demonstrated capacity to apply deadly force against local rivals. Adapting this logic to peacetime, ex-commanders might continue to predominate in communities where rebels previously exercised high amounts of coercion. First, local civilians may be psychologically intimidated or resign themselves to accepting ex-commanders as the only actors capable of restoring security.[7] Second, ex-commanders' reputations for violence may deter other local elites from challenging their positions.

H1 (Coercion hypothesis): In localities where wartime rule involved more violent coercion, there will be a higher probability of ex-rebel commanders having strong postwar linkages.

A related set of arguments depict territorial rebel groups as extraction-maximizing organizations who predate upon occupied populations for their own self-enrichment (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Ross, 2004). In this view, rebel commanders' incentives to establish long-term control in a locality ought to be driven largely by the availability of natural resources that can be exploited for personal profits. Resource revenues can also expand commanders' patronage power, further entrenching them into the local political economy (Reno, 1998). If so, localities with abundant lootable resources (especially mineral resources) should be more likely to attract sustained attention from ex-rebel commanders who seek to continue capturing economic rents in peacetime.

H2 (Rent-seeking hypothesis): In localities with lootable resources, there will be a higher probability of ex-rebel commanders having strong postwar linkages.

Kinship-based ties are also frequently cited as important elements of rebels' grassroots infrastructure (Staniland, 2014). Familial ties are thought to facilitate trust, information-sharing, and the expectation of continued interactions (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2006). Ex-rebel commanders who share kinship or familial bonds with formerly occupied populations may be embedded in strong social and tribal networks, and therefore will be more likely to sustain strong postwar ties compared to commanders who governed outside of their home areas.

H3 (Kinship hypothesis): In localities where ex-rebel commanders are native residents, there will be a higher probability of strong postwar linkages.

Finally, pre-existing political cleavages among occupied populations may explain the strength of commander–community ties after war. Partisan identification with occupying armed groups may bias civilians' assessments of commanders in a favorable direction, encouraging trust-building and rapport. Moreover, as Balcells (2017) argues in the case of conventional civil wars with stable front lines, occupying rebels have less incentive to abuse local populations in order to eliminate rearguard threats when civilians support the group along the conflict's 'master cleavage'. By contrast, where prewar cleavages favor the government, rebel commanders may be unable to establish political capital and sustain mobilization power in peacetime.

H4 (Prewar cleavages hypothesis): In localities where prewar political identities favor the rebel side, there will be a higher probability of strong postwar linkages.

The critical role of wartime governance

I propose an alternative argument: the quality of wartime *governance* is the key factor that shapes ex-commanders' abilities to sustain local ties and tap into peacetime support networks. Independent of prewar political alignments, local governance practices vary widely under rebel occupations in civil war. The sizable literature on the subject suggests that governance practices are shaped by myriad factors, including the ideologies and political agendas of insurgents (Stewart, 2018), the recruitment and disciplinary structures of units (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2006), levels of armed competition (Arjona, 2016; Mampilly, 2011; Kalyvas, 2006), and the strength of local communal institutions (Arjona, 2016; Rubin, 2020). While the causes of wartime governance practices have been theorized extensively, their consequences have not. I suggest that the emergence of a welfare-enhancing social contract not only facilitates recruitment and taxation during wartime occupations, but it can also bolster the reputations of commanders as valuable allies in peacetime.

Two mechanisms connect wartime governance to postwar commander–community ties. First, local residents who benefit from effective goods provision under rebel occupiers can reward commanders with social recognition that increases commanders' political capital. As Daly (2016: 28) argues, the local standing of former armed groups after war varies according to 'the duration

[7] In Liberia, for example, Harris (1999: 450–451) argues that Charles Taylor and his associates in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia wielded their violent reputations after the First Liberian Civil War to win votes and retain control over clandestine resource networks around the country.

of the group's presence, the nature of its rule, and whether it brought positive changes to the neighborhoods, sparking a sort of retrospective voting'. Tsai (2007: 356) similarly argues that in contexts of weak formal accountability, residents can award 'moral standing, esteem or respect' to governing officials as rewards for providing above-average goods and services. Social recognition among residents in turn endows ex-rebels with perceived legitimacy and permits them to remain embedded in local social life (Tajima, 2018).

Second, a collaborative system of wartime rule encourages local elites to facilitate ex-rebel commanders' continued access to human networks within the community. These 'gatekeepers' – including customary authorities, party organizers, or local commercial elites – function as a strong social filter in many post-conflict communities, determining which external actors get through to the other side (Themnér & Utas, 2016). When community elites forge wartime partnerships with local insurgent commanders as 'co-producers' of social order (Weinstein, 2007), they may develop a degree of dependency on the patronage resources and services that commanders provide. In exchange for the continuation of these benefits, gatekeepers can help ex-rebel commanders to sustain connections with potential supporters, for instance through invitations to ceremonial events, soliciting commanders' input on local security matters, or facilitating introductions between commanders and other community members.

Where wartime governance is predatory and abusive, by contrast, residents and gatekeepers are more likely to shutter ex-rebel commanders' local access after the occupation ends. Residents exposed to coercive governance practices in the past may develop negative mental associations between the armed movement and the well-being of their community, creating social stigma for individuals who continue associating with the group and its commanders (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018; Tajima, 2018). Local gatekeepers who were expelled or sidelined from governance roles during the war, meanwhile, may seek to re-establish their authority and 'box out' ex-rebel commanders' continued presence.

The theoretical logic of the argument is diagrammed in Figure 1. In the first pathway, collaborative wartime governance helps ex-rebel commanders to sustain local influence and mobilization power in the postwar period, even after commanders are relocated away from the community. Residents and community leaders value their alliance with the commander, endow the commander with a degree of moral standing, and help the commander to sustain contacts and information. Commanders' ready access to trusted networks and information in these zones

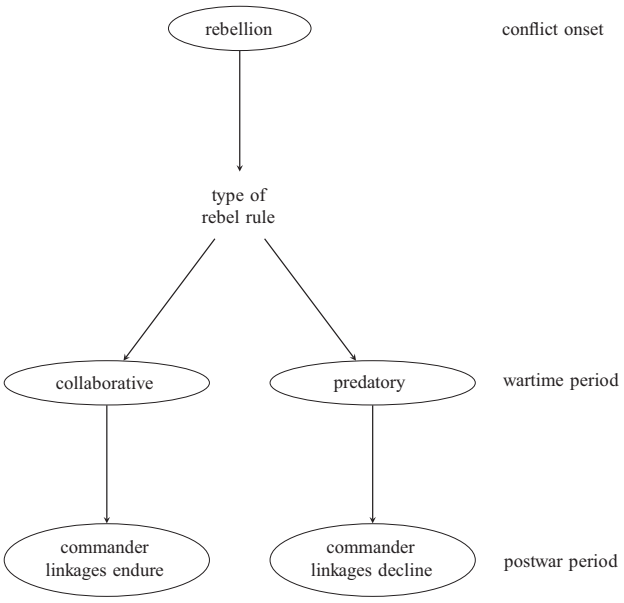

Figure 1. Accountability theory of ex-rebel commander linkages.

– sustained through frequent visits, social calls, and continued provision of services and employment – in turn allows them to reach back into communities to efficiently assemble semi-organized militia forces under their control (Daly, 2016). In the second pathway, predatory wartime rule creates an imposing social barrier between ex-rebel commanders and formerly occupied localities. Occupied populations reject the continued presence of ex-rebel commanders, reducing their access to local social networks. Once commanders become physically separated from these communities, they are likely to struggle to sustain local ties.[8]

The discussion above suggests the following testable predictions:

H5 (Accountability hypothesis (a)): In localities where wartime rule was collaborative, there will be a higher probability of ex-rebel commanders having strong postwar linkages.

H6 (Accountability hypothesis (b)): In localities where wartime rule involved violent coercion, there will be a lower probability of ex-rebel commanders having strong postwar linkages.

[8] Even predatory and unpopular commanders may attempt to purchase private armed supporters in a purely transactional manner. However, such cases are likely to be exceptional. Within the FRCI, mid-ranking officers generally do not possess the resources to consistently auto-finance extra-military networks.

How does my argument differ from the explanations discussed above? The accountability hypothesis clearly represents a distinct logic from H1 (coercion hypothesis). Rather than enabling postwar commander influence, my argument holds that wartime coercion should reduce it. Second, while other explanations are potentially complementary (for example, wartime governance practices may matter, *and* commander–community ties may be influenced by the presence of natural resources, kinship ties, or prewar cleavages), I contend that wartime governance practices are likely to have effects that are independent of these factors alone. Finally, unlike accounts that focus on ex-rebels' personal strategies (e.g. H2), my argument underscores the agency of *civilians* to reward or punish former commanders for past governance performance. Given the uncertainties of post-conflict politics, nearly all ex-rebel commanders have some incentive to sustain territorial power bases that enhance their bargaining position and personal security (Christia, 2012; Themnér, 2015; Driscoll, 2015). Yet the legacies of wartime governance create constraints on their ability to do so.

Côte d'Ivoire: The persistence of ex-rebel networks

To study postwar commander–community relations systematically, I analyze a dataset of formerly rebel-ruled localities in northern Côte d'Ivoire. The Ivorian conflict (2002–11) originated from an insurrection among army officers in September 2002, who capitalized on grievances in northern Côte d'Ivoire against the exclusionary government of Laurent Gbagbo (Akindès, 2004). Within two months, the mutiny evolved into a rebellion controlling some 60% of the national territory. An electoral crisis in December 2010 triggered the downfall of Gbagbo's government and a military victory for the FN rebels; by late 2011 the rebel organization was disbanded and nearly all senior FN commanders had integrated into the national army (Fofana, 2011). Despite efforts by the new government of Alassane Ouattara to professionalize the security sector, many ex-FN commandants remained independent and resisted oversight from civilian leaders (Martin, 2018).

The decentralized administration of the FN occupation from 2002 to 2011 provides an ideal comparative laboratory for assessing the impact of wartime governance on postwar commander–community ties.[9] Accounts from former FN leaders suggest that commanders were typically assigned to govern regions on a rather ad hoc basis, a process reflecting the general confusion of the early months of the rebellion.[10] As a result, many officers came to govern areas where they happened to be located when the FN system of territorial administration was rolled out in early 2003.[11] While in theory each commander answered to the FN headquarters in Bouaké, day-to-day operations were delegated with limited central oversight (Heitz-Tokpa, 2013; Speight, 2016). Individual zone and sector commanders thus enjoyed significant latitude to recruit, tax, and govern within their fiefdoms in highly varied ways.

Data collection

Between July and November 2017, a survey of community informants was fielded to measure a range of variables related to the FN occupation and commanders' networks and influence in the postwar period.[12] Data were collected at the subprefecture level. Under the system of territorial administration by the Forces Nouvelles, zone commanders (*com-zones*) divided FN territory into ten administrative areas. Each zone was further divided into sectors (governed by a *com-secteur*), which roughly aligned with the boundaries of modern subprefectures. To ensure the survey captured meaningful variation on variables of interest, a sample of subprefectures was created through a stratified approach. Data were collected from 90 subprefectures and three urban quartiers in the larger cities of Bouaké and Korhogo (see Figure 2). The sample of localities is representative of FN-controlled territory in terms of important demographic and socio-economic characteristics (see Online appendix for details).

Informants

The survey targeted local historical experts within each locality. These were key informants – normally

[9] Past studies have documented Forces Nouvelles governance practices within specific towns, but none have gathered data systematically across localities. See for example Heitz-Tokpa (2013) and Speight (2016).

[10] Issiaka Ouattara, Commander of the Republican Guard and former FN zone commander. Interview with the author. Abidjan, 19 July 2017. Kanigui Soro, MP and former FN civilian delegate to Korhogo. Interview with the author. Abidjan, 15 July 2017.

[11] One exception is that rebel commanders tended to be posted away from their home regions. The FN administration thus mirrored the practice of the Ivorian prefectoral corps, which routinely assigns prefects to 'foreign' areas of the country as a method of political control. Kathrin Heitz-Tokpa. Interview with the author. Abidjan, 5 November 2017.

[12] I thank Giulia Piccolino and Jeremy Speight for their collaboration in designing and implementing the survey. The questionnaire is available at: https://www.philipandrewmartin.com/ongoing-research.

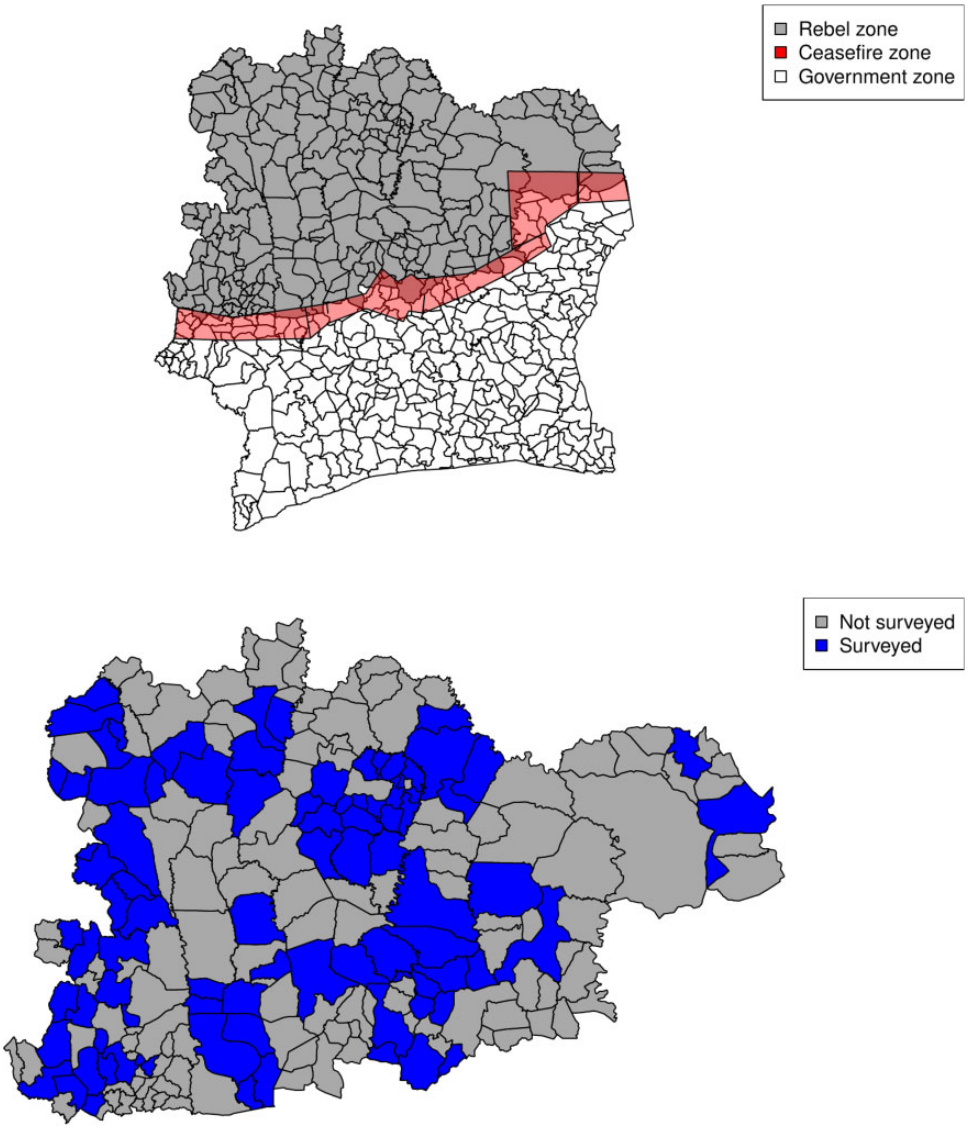

Figure 2. Surveyed localities in FN-controlled territory

The territorial division of Côte d'Ivoire during the civil war (2002–11) appears above.

customary authorities, leaders of youth or women's associations, or civil society leaders – who possessed deep knowledge about local history and the relevant political actors within the community. In each locality, the survey enumerator interviewed one or, in many cases, multiple such informants in order to fill out the questionnaire.[13]

Interviewing community informants posed both advantages and drawbacks. As repositories of local knowledge, informants were able to respond to questions relating to the entire subprefecture (or quartier), and to questions about the interactions between rebel commanders and community authorities. On the other hand, informants tended to be older males, whose knowledge of local history is sure to have blindspots. Informants might also present events in a skewed manner, either to place themselves in a favorable light or to conform to a narrative they expect will attract resources.

To minimize the risks of bias, the questionnaire was designed to capture information considered 'common

[13] After each interview, the interviewer rated the perceived knowledgeability, sincerity, and level of comprehension of the informant on a three-point scale ('low', 'medium', 'high'). If any of these ratings were scored 'low', we would conduct a second interview with a different informant.

knowledge' among politically informed persons in the community, rather than subjective assessments or opinions. To this end, the questionnaire was refined through multiple rounds of piloting and extensive feedback from Ivorian scholars and an experienced local survey firm.[14] Moreover, we took pains to emphasize to informants that we, as researchers, did not represent any development organization or government, and that the research would only be used for academic purposes. On the whole, informants were remarkably open and frank, and many relished the opportunity to contribute to the study. In areas where we conducted multiple interviews with different informants at different times, there was a high degree of consistency in how informants recollected key facts.[15]

Outcome variable: Ex-rebel commander influence

Measuring local linkages between ex-rebel commanders and formerly occupied communities poses a significant challenge. Some linkages – such as ties to irregular armed fighters or illicit businesses – are clandestine and cannot always be observed even by knowledgeable and honest community informants. Survey questions therefore focused on four readily observable indicators of ex-commanders' influence.

First, I measured whether former FN commanders continued to make regular visits to the community in a private capacity after 2011 (*Commander visits*). In over half (53%) of the localities surveyed, ex-commanders made such visits. The purpose of these visits ranged from attending ceremonial events (such as marriages, funerals, and religious celebrations), visiting the homes of customary authorities, and in some cases bringing donations to local development projects such as schools, health clinics, or mosques. In the context of Ivorian social and political life, these kinds of face-to-face visits are an essential ingredient of sustained political capital and an important signal of local alliances. Second, among localities that received private visits from commanders, in over half of them (52%) commanders were known to provide material support – such as food, spending money, and jobs – directly to their former armed supporters or youth (*Material support*). Third, in over a third of surveyed localities (38%), community members continued to call on the former FN commander to help resolve problems

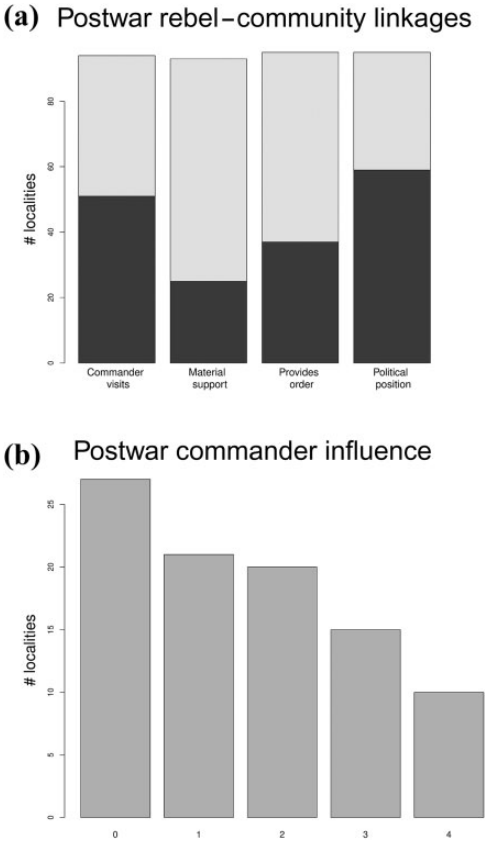

Figure 3. Postwar rebel–community linkages

Index receives one point for each of *Commander visits*, *Material support*, *Provides order*, and *Political position*.

of criminality and public order after the 2011 transition (*Provides order*). Finally, in a majority of localities (58%) a former rebel group member occupied a formal political office, such as legislative deputy, mayor or deputy mayor, regional councillor, or another type of bureaucratic post (*Political position*). For the main analysis I combine these indicators into a summary index, *Postwar commander influence*, shown in Figure 3(b).

Explanatory variables

To test my accountability theory, I measured rebels' wartime rule in two main ways: the provision of goods and services by the FN, and the existence of mechanisms for rebel–civilian dialogue.[16] Throughout rebel-occupied territory, FN involvement in service provision varied widely by sector (Figure 4(a)). Policing and security

[14] I am grateful to Abel Gbala, Bakary Soro, Arthur Banga, Joseph Koné, Francois Defourny, and the Centre de Recherche et de Formation sur le Développement Intégré in Abidjan.

[15] In the Air France quartier of Korhogo, survey interviews with 12 separate informants – conducted by three different interviewers – yielded practically identical responses to questions concerning patterns of wartime rule and postwar roles of commanders.

[16] I conceptualize rebel goods provision and the existence of regular meetings for rebel–civilian dialogue as indicators of the same underlying concept. The indicators are strongly correlated ($r = 0.35$).

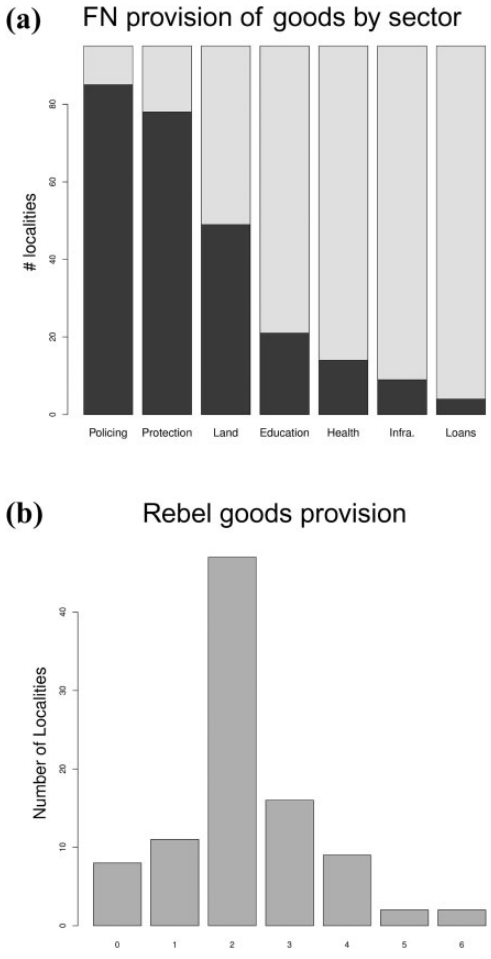

Figure 4. Wartime goods provision by Forces Nouvelles

Index receives one point for each good provided by FN rebels within locality during 2002–11 occupation.

functions were fairly universal: in 90% and 82% of sampled localities, FN rebels were the primary actor involved in policing against criminality (including issuing sentences through informal 'courts') and protecting the community from external attacks, respectively. By contrast, commanders were involved in regulating issues of land governance and property disputes in only 54% of localities. And less frequently, rebel commanders provided direct assistance to the education sector (e.g. donations for schools and teachers), health care services (e.g. recruitment of doctors and donations for clinics), local infrastructure (e.g. repairing roads and bridges), and providing loans for local businesses and traders.[17] Figure 4(b) shows the distribution of these indicators expressed as an aggregated index (*Rebel goods provision*).

In addition to these direct forms of goods provision, FN commanders displayed responsiveness to community needs during the civil war through direct dialogue. An especially important mechanism for this rebel–civilian dialogue was the practice of organizing regular public meetings (*Organized meetings*) chaired by the local commander or his representative. As the anthropologist Kathrin Heitz-Tokpa notes, such meetings (attended by village leaders but also ordinary residents) were significant because they 'provided an important platform for face-to-face interactions, an important means of building trust'.[18]

To test H1 and H6, I measured the degree of FN coercion against civilians during the war. Aggression by rebels against unarmed civilians was the most common form of violence reported by informants (76% of localities), followed by government–rebel combat (25%) and intracommunal violence (15%). The majority of localities (81%) also reported experiencing pillage and looting at the hands of rebel forces, while in 78% informants indicated that significant tensions arose between community members and the FN either 'occasionally' or 'frequently' due to the violent actions of rebel soldiers. These indicators are summarized in the measure *Predation index*.

I test H2 (rent-seeking) by constructing the variable *Mining site*, a dummy variable indicating whether there is significant gold or diamond mining in the subprefecture. To test H3 (kinship ties), I constructed a dummy variable for whether the commander is a native resident of the region (*Commander native*). Finally, to test H4 (prewar cleavages), I constructed a dummy variable for whether the primary ethnic group within the locality is Senufo or Malinké (*Ethnicity northern*). These 'nordiste' groups were generally viewed as the political support base for the FN (Akindès, 2004), and almost all FN commanders were themselves of northern origin.

I also collected data on additional covariates. To account for the accessibility of localities and the size of potential recruitment networks, I control for logged population size, an index of the number of government infrastructure services available within the subprefecture, and whether or not the locality is accessible by a paved road. To account for the strategic importance of the territory, I include binary indicators for whether armed

[17] Informants were asked to indicate whether these services were provided to all community members, not only members of their own ethnic group or tribe.

[18] Kathrin Heitz-Tokpa. Interview with the author. Bingerville, Côte d'Ivoire, 5 November 2017.

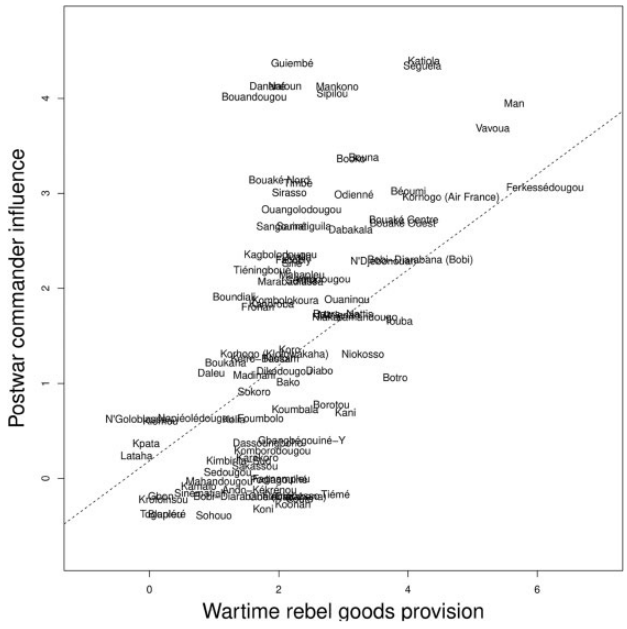

Figure 5. Rebel goods provision and postwar commander influence

combat between organized military forces occurred in the locality and whether the FN recruited fighters during the civil war. Finally, all analyses include department-level fixed effects to account for potential spatial dependence among neighboring localities.

Empirical analysis

According to my central hypothesis, ex-rebel commanders' local ties should be strongest in areas where insurgents responded to citizen interests by providing goods and services and institutionalizing mechanisms of rebel-civilian dialogue. On first inspection of a simple scatterplot (Figure 5), the link between rebel goods provision and commanders' postwar influence appears clear: localities tend to have a higher number of postwar ties to ex-rebel commanders where FN rebels provided more services during the occupation. Moreover, many cases that appear near the line of best fit meet the basic plausibility test: Man and Korhogo, for example, two areas where the wartime governance of the Forces Nouvelles has been documented extensively (Heitz-Tokpa, 2013; Speight, 2016), both appear in the upper-right quadrant.

Table I shows the results of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses with *Postwar commander influence* as the outcome variable. Consistent with H5, rebel investment in collaborative wartime governance has a substantial positive impact on commanders' postwar community linkages. Model 1 shows that a one-unit increase in the number of wartime goods provided by FN rebels is associated with an average increase in the postwar commander influence index of approximately 0.41 ($p < 0.01$). Model 2 includes *Organized meetings* as an alternative measure of collaborative wartime rule. Once again, this variable is a strong predictor of commanders' postwar influence: the coefficient for *Organized meetings* is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). These findings are robust to the inclusion of all predictors (Models 7 and 8).

Alternative hypotheses perform relatively poorly. I examine the effects of rebel coercion (H1) in Model 3. The variable *Predation index* has a (weakly) negative association with postwar commander influence, suggesting that wartime coercion spurs civilian populations to reject the continued presence of commanders in peacetime. Model 4 shows that there is a positive but insignificant association between *Mining site* and ex-rebel commander influence. The coefficients for *Commander native* and *Ethnicity northern* are also negative and statistically insignificant, suggesting that neither personal kinship ties nor prewar political cleavages outweigh the impact of rebels' wartime governance performance. In terms of other covariates, *Infrastructure index* is a consistently positive predictor of postwar commander–community linkages, suggesting that commanders may seek to retain ties in areas with greater development.

In supplementary analyses (see Tables VII and VIII in the Online appendix) I use binomial logistic regression to examine the disaggregated components of ex-rebel commander influence. Consistent with the findings reported above, both *Rebel goods provision* and *Organized meetings* are positive and statistically significant predictors of *Commander visits* ($p < 0.05$). Estimating the probability of *Material support*, the coefficients point in the expected direction, but do not reach statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level. In part this is likely a problem of statistical power, since there is a relatively small amount of variation in the outcome variable (*Material support* takes a value of 1 in only 25 surveyed localities). However, when estimating the likelihood of *Provides order* and *Political position*, wartime rebel goods provision is again positive and statistically significant.

These disaggregated analyses are consistent with H5: localities that experienced collaborative rebel governance were more likely to remain receptive to ex-FN commanders' presence. The logic of H6 is also again supported: in areas where rebel rulership involved predatory violence, armed group members lost political capital and were less likely to remain welcome public figures in the area. *Mining site* is positively associated with *Material*

Table I. Determinants of postwar commander influence (OLS)

	Dependent variable: Postwar commander influence index							
	Goods (1)	*Meetings* (2)	*Coercion* (3)	*Rents* (4)	*Kinship* (5)	*Cleavages* (6)	*Full model* (7)	*Full model* (8)
Rebel goods provision	0.412**						0.376*	
	(0.145)						(0.149)	
Organized meetings		0.941**						0.815*
		(0.284)						(0.305)
Predation index			−0.215				−0.211	−0.146
			(0.138)				(0.138)	(0.140)
Mining site				0.726			0.447	0.428
				(0.576)			(0.576)	(0.572)
Commander native					−0.121		−0.138	−0.058
					(0.473)		(0.462)	(0.459)
Ethnicity northern						−0.335	−0.549	−0.438
						(0.625)	(0.601)	(0.599)
Population (ln)	0.084	0.306	0.077	0.233	0.200	0.199	−0.010	0.225
	(0.192)	(0.186)	(0.212)	(0.200)	(0.201)	(0.201)	(0.211)	(0.210)
Infrastructure index	0.210	0.218*	0.376**	0.316**	0.312**	0.308**	0.295*	0.283*
	(0.108)	(0.103)	(0.116)	(0.108)	(0.110)	(0.109)	(0.118)	(0.118)
Paved road	−0.038	−0.025	0.060	−0.126	0.006	0.053	−0.029	−0.030
	(0.378)	(0.369)	(0.396)	(0.414)	(0.406)	(0.409)	(0.407)	(0.404)
Combat	−0.593	−0.403	−0.309	−0.312	−0.434	−0.475	−0.484	−0.329
	(0.343)	(0.330)	(0.362)	(0.367)	(0.362)	(0.372)	(0.372)	(0.361)
Recruitment	0.456	0.543	0.863*	0.888*	0.911*	0.908*	0.532	0.611
	(0.417)	(0.394)	(0.408)	(0.411)	(0.427)	(0.417)	(0.432)	(0.417)
Constant	−1.438	−2.937	−0.835	−2.495	−2.217	−2.259	−0.312	−2.069
	(1.727)	(1.680)	(2.001)	(1.811)	(1.825)	(1.821)	(1.961)	(1.963)
Observations	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93
R^2	0.661	0.676	0.627	0.622	0.612	0.613	0.683	0.688
Adjusted R^2	0.433	0.458	0.377	0.368	0.350	0.353	0.428	0.436

Department fixed effects not shown. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

support and *Provides order* at the $p < 0.05$ level, providing some support for the rent-seeking hypothesis.

Addressing endogeneity

To interpret the association between wartime governance and postwar commander–community linkages as a causal relationship, it is important to consider carefully why the quality of rebel rule varies across locations in the first place. Skeptics could argue, for example, that rebels who govern in areas that are initially sympathetic to the insurgency – and therefore are more likely to sustain ties with commanders in peacetime – may also choose to collaborate with local residents and provide wartime goods.

I address this endogeneity concern in several ways. First, I examine the determinants of collaborative rule by the FN to see if 'selection' into collaborative governance is indeed confounded by local partisan sentiments (Figure 6). To proxy for pro-rebel sympathies, I measure the *nordiste* ethnic demography of each locality. Given the high political salience of ethnicity in Côte d'Ivoire since the mid 1990s, I consider this to be the best available measure of the likely prewar political support for the FN at the time of rebel arrival. Since rebel governance tactics may also be affected by other strategic conditions of the territory (Arjona, 2016), I control for the variables *Combat*, *Population (ln)*, *Infrastructure index*, and *Paved road*.

The results indicate that collaborative wartime governance is *not* predicted by favorable ethnic demography. In fact, the estimated coefficient for *Ethnicity northern (%)* is negative in both models: in areas where a greater share of households identified as Senufo or Malinké, informants reported that FN rebels were involved in the provision of fewer services for the community ($p < 0.05$) and were no more or less likely to hold

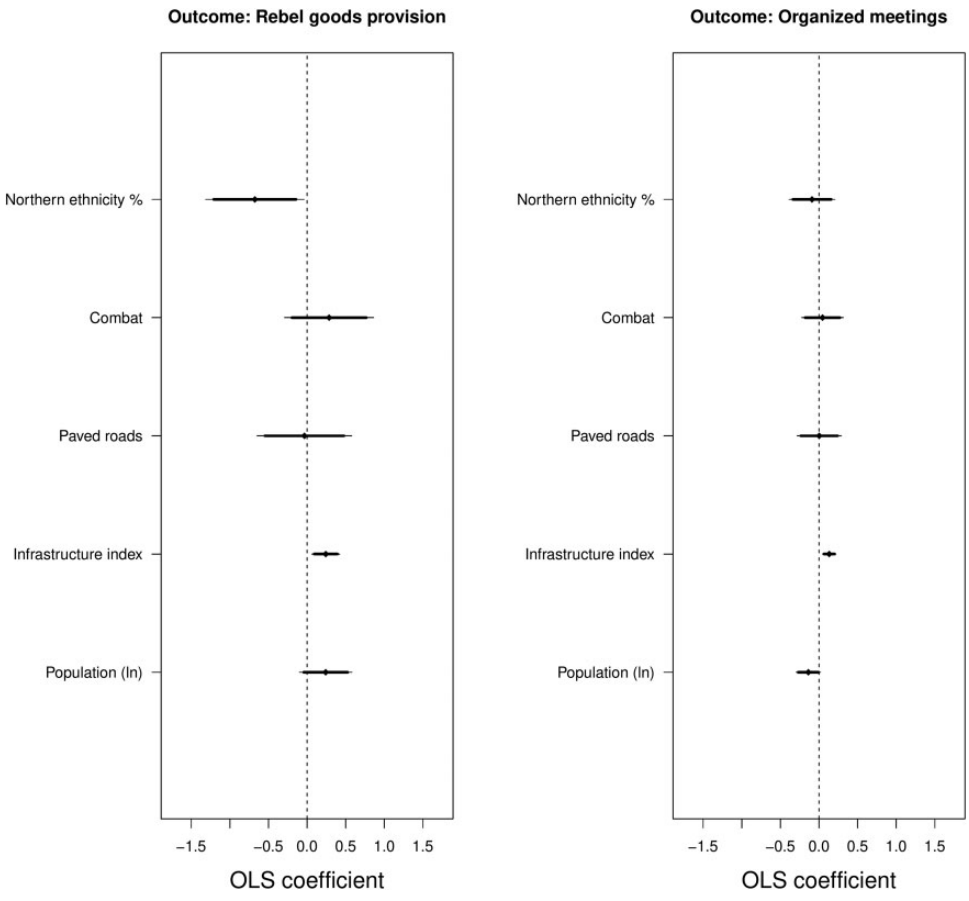

Figure 6. Determinants of FN collaborative rule
Lines show 95% confidence intervals.

regular meetings. Thus, while one might presume that collaborative governance only occurs in areas where pre-existing political sentiments are already favorable to rebel commanders, the evidence from my dataset does not support this claim. If anything, it appears that FN rebels often invested in collaborative governance in 'hard cases' (i.e. non-coethnic areas), where the relative payoffs of local goods provision may have been higher.

I employ two additional strategies to address concerns about selection effects (see Online appendix for details). First, I use a two-stage Heckman probit model to estimate the effects of the binary variable *Organized meetings*. In the selection equation I include several variables related to local armed contestation (government–rebel combat, levels of victimization) and geography (distance to the ceasefire zone), drawing on existing theory linking armed competition to rebel governance practices (Arjona, 2016; Kalyvas, 2006). Second, I use propensity-score matching to compare subsets of highly similar subprefectures that vary in terms of wartime governance, relying on the preprocessing step to account for potential bias from a large number of observables (Ho et al., 2007). In both models, the substantive results remain unchanged: measures of collaborative rebel rule have a positive and statistically significant association with *Postwar commander influence*. Thus, wartime governance practices appear to exert an independent effect on postwar commander–community linkages, even after accounting for the non-random assignment of governance patterns.

Additional robustness checks

To verify that the results reported above are robust to other potential omitted variables and alternative data sources, I introduce a series of additional controls. For the baseline models in Table I, I control for continuous measures of ethnic demography, measures of war-related victimization and household poverty from the 2008 ENV survey, and geographic variables including distance from the ceasefire boundary. Since rebel–civilian

relations might be affected by the strength of existing institutions (Arjona, 2016; Rubin, 2020), I control for the sociopolitical cohesion of localities as measured through 'block voting' in the 2011 legislative and 2013 municipal elections. To ensure the findings are not sensitive to covariates measured on the same survey instrument as the outcome variable, I use independently collected data from a 2018 USAID-commissioned survey of Ivorian citizens to control for department-level rates of wartime violence, recruitment, rebel taxation, local support for the FN, and support for pro-government militia and army forces. Since I conceptualize wartime governance theoretically as a spectrum, I construct an index of collaborative rule that incorporates all three measures of *Rebel goods Provision*, *Organized meetings*, and *Predation index*. To verify the findings are not driven only by security-related actions of rebels during the civil war, I construct an indicator of rebel goods provision limited to policing and protection. Finally, I estimate *Postwar commander influence* using an ordered logit model to verify robustness to different model specifications.

Across all of these robustness checks, the key findings of this article were upheld. Full results are found in the Online appendix. The inclusion of additional controls from alternative data sources does not substantially change the relationship between collaborative rule indicators and postwar commander influence, and the spectrum-based measure of collaborative rule was positively and significantly associated with stronger postwar commander influence ($p < 0.01$). The security-only indicator of rebel goods provision was not significantly associated with postwar commander influence, suggesting an important break between 'security only' and 'security plus' for whether FN commanders established lasting local alliances.

Finally, it might be argued that the link between wartime governance and postwar commander–community ties is explained by a different mechanism than the logic of civilian agency and informal accountability. It is possible, for instance, that unobserved commander-specific attributes (e.g. ambition) could account for both wartime governance practices *and* commanders' willingness to expend effort to sustain local postwar ties. To partially account for this concern I code all observations in terms of commander rank (zone or sector commander), which may loosely proxy for the ambition of individual commanders. I find there is no significant association between commanders' rank and postwar commander–community ties. Moreover, even after removing all subprefectures that were governed by a zone commander – the most powerful and well-connected FN field commanders (Fofana, 2011) where ambition might confound my argument – both *Rebel goods provision* and *Organized meetings* retain positive and statistically significant associations with *Postwar commander influence*. While the potential impact of unobserved commander attributes cannot be ruled out given the data limitations of the present study, these findings reinforce the idea that commander–community relationships in peacetime are shaped by the agency of civilian populations to reward or punish past governance performance.

So what? Implications for state-building after civil war

The analyses above support the notion that collaborative rebel governance – and not coercion or predation – permit ex-rebel commanders to sustain strong local ties to insurgent-ruled communities after civil war. These findings are meaningful and interesting in their own right. Importantly, they suggest a greater degree of political agency among local communities to accept or reject the presence of former rebel actors on the basis of past governance performance than previously assumed. They also cast doubt on conventional narratives about predatory warlordism. If anything, rebel commanders who employ violent coercion within their areas of rule appear to be *less* likely to sustain local influence after integrating into state armies.

But does this mean that effective wartime governance will bolster state-building when rebels take power? Previous work suggests that strong ties to local populations constitute an important source of power, legitimacy, and accountability for post-conflict regimes (Huang, 2016; Toft, 2010). In this view, socially embedded ex-rebel commanders are an important resource for the postwar state, providing powerful political brokers who can connect the periphery to the center and allow the ruling regime to exert influence on the ground. However, I provide suggestive evidence that enduring commander–community ties have carried two negative externalities for centralized state-building in Côte d'Ivoire: (1) ex-rebel commanders can disrupt citizen–state relations by continuing to substitute for regular police forces, and (2) ex-rebel commanders gain the bargaining leverage needed to resist the authority of elected civilian leaders.

First, ex-rebel commanders with strong local ties can disrupt the normalization of citizen–state relations after civil war by substituting for regular police services. To investigate this dynamic, I analyze data from the 2014 Enquête Niveau de Vie des Ménages (ENV) household

survey on citizen uptake of police services in areas covered by my community informant survey (n = 2,724). The Online appendix contains a description of these data and full statistical analyses. The findings confirm that, even after accounting for a large number of individual- and subprefecture-level covariates that are likely to influence baseline crime rates and police service availability, there is a significant negative association between the strength of commander–community linkages (as measured on my survey) and household-head use of police services (as measured on the ENV survey): respondents in areas with strong commander–community linkages were approximately three percentage points less likely [–0.01, –0.05] to report visiting the police commissariat than respondents in areas with weak ex-rebel commander linkages. These findings, though preliminary, corroborate the notion that strong commander–community linkages in the postwar period lead ex-rebel commanders to 'substitute' for the state in the security domain. Given previous research on the important role of robust local policing for the success of postwar reconstruction (Wozniak, 2017), this evidence suggests one pathway through which ex-rebel commander ties may disrupt state-building.

Qualitative evidence collected during field research in northern Côte d'Ivoire also suggests that enduring commander–community linkages grant ex-rebel commanders the bargaining leverage needed to resist elected post-conflict leaders. For example, when mutinies broke out among ex-rebel soldiers in January 2017, demanding payouts and promotions from the government, Kassero's strong local linkages in Sangouiné allowed him to rapidly mobilize his supporters to join in the protests.[19] Similarly, in the city of Korhogo, the popular ex-zone commander Fofié Kouakou Martin has maintained ties to large networks of armed supporters, bringing him into conflict with the government and allowing him to ignore orders from the FRCI Chief of Staff to resign from his post in 2015.[20] As one journalist in Korhogo explained,

> [a]mong the local authorities and even up to the highest level [e.g. President Ouattara], one of the major preoccupations today, it is really the problem of ex-rebel combatants and especially those who are tied to Fofié [. . .] the regime views them as a latent menace. They are afraid that their enemies will turn them against the government.[21]

By contrast, ex-rebel commanders with weaker local ties have generally shown more deference towards the government. In Mahapleu, for example, none of the former combatants I interviewed had participated in the ex-combatant protests in 2017. One explained, '[m]aybe if you have a *grand frère* in the army, you will get something. For me, the fight is over. Our *grand frère* [Ondo] does not see us'.[22] Without the option of retaining an independent power base, Ondo relies on his position within the military hierarchy and serves as a 'loyal officer' of the regime.[23]

Overall, then, while strong vertical linkages between militant groups and local populations are believed to contribute to rebel group cohesion during civil wars (Staniland, 2014), they may not contribute to successful state-building after war's end. Embedded ex-rebel commanders can sustain local protection rackets and challenge the authority of elected civilian leaders, disrupting the project of postwar reconstruction. Rather than preparing armed groups to be state-builders or democratizers, collaborative rebel governance may empower regional strongmen and exacerbate the 'weak states–strong societies' problem that has long frustrated post-colonial state-builders (Migdal, 1988).

Conclusion

This article has argued that understanding the social bases of ex-rebel commanders' power and influence in post-conflict states demands an appreciation of wartime dynamics and the agency of local communities to reward or punish commanders in response to their past governance performance. Evidence from an original dataset of rebel-ruled localities in Côte d'Ivoire supports this accountability-based theory. In localities where rebel occupiers demonstrated concern for the well-being of populations by providing public goods and organizing

[19] Charles (pseudonym), member of demobilized soldiers' association. Interview with the author. Sangouiné, 3 August 2017; Djehe Claude, Sous-Prefet of Man. Interview with the author. Man, 8 August 2017.

[20] United States Embassy staff member. Interview with the author. Abidjan, 15 October 2016. In 2013, a UN Group of Experts report estimated that Fofié's private army rivaled that of the rest of the FRCI in terms of firepower. See S/2016/254, 'Final report of the Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire pursuant to paragraph 27 of Security Council resolution 2219 (2015)', (16 March 2016), pp. 4, 41.

[21] Nord-Sud journalist. Interview with the author. Korhogo, 28 October 2017.

[22] Joseph (pseudonym), demobilized soldier. Interview with the author. Mahapleu, 18 November 2017.

[23] Djehe Claude, Sous-Prefet of Man. Interview with the author. Man, 8 August 2017.

regular face-to-face meetings, commanders were able to reach back into these communities to exercise influence and sustain support networks. Evidence for explanations based on coercion, kinship ties or prewar cleavages, by contrast, was mixed or cut against these hypotheses, while the rent-seeking hypothesis received some support. These findings underscore that ex-rebel commanders should be viewed as more than 'violence entrepreneurs'. Local social contracts and nuanced accountability relationships built during civil wars deserve greater attention by analysts and policy actors seeking to understand post-conflict orders and peacebuilding.

While this article has drawn on evidence from the case of Côte d'Ivoire, similar commander–community dynamics abound in places like South Sudan, Afghanistan, and the Central African Republic. Given the limited capacity of central governments in these conflict-torn states to provide essential services, it is perhaps inevitable that some ex-rebel commanders will sustain authority and influence that go well beyond their formal job descriptions as military officers. The alternative may be a vacuum of political order and goods provision, with worse outcomes for human security and development (Blair & Kalmanovitz, 2016).

Yet the acquisition of strong local linkages by these military actors also comes with significant policy risks. Ironically, ex-rebel commanders who acquire local political capital during civil war may be among the largest threats to the state-building projects of the regimes they help to install. If ex-rebel commanders continue to substitute for the functions of regular police forces into the peacetime period, or threaten to mobilize private armed networks against the government, then the very legitimacy of the postwar state and its right to rule may be called into question. Policy actors who wish to stabilize post-conflict states should account for these commander–community ties – which often persist out of public view – as serious risk factors for ex-combatant remobilization and as potential barriers to rebuilding citizen confidence in central governments. Empirical evidence for these downstream effects is, of course, preliminary. This article invites further research into how state-building and peace are secured against the backdrop of enduring commander–community ties.

Replication data

The dataset, codebook, and replication code for the empirical analysis in this article, along with the Online appendix, can be found at http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets. Statistics were produced using R.

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