# Politics Among Rebels: The Causes of Division Among Dissidents

*David Bowden*

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## Contents



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Previous Work on the Structure of Rebel Movements

The existing literature and empirical record suggest that the number of rebel groups active in a conflict is shaped by three broad processes. The number of rebel groups can increase when existing groups splinter into multiple factions. New groups can also emerge when previously non-violent individuals mobilize and join the conflict. Finally, the number of

rebel groups can decrease when previously independent factions form alliances. In the remainder of this chapter, I provide a definition of each process, and review the existing explanations for each.

### 1.1.1 Splintering

Existing rebel groups frequently splinter into multiple successor organizations. In 1968, for example, a faction led by Ahmed Jibril broke away from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) to form a new group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). While the two groups often collaborated against Israel, they maintain distinct organizational structures and membership bases, and operate in different areas. The split was allegedly motivated by differing views of Marxist ideology and military doctrine, with the PFLP pursuing a more extreme strategy of attrition. Similar splits have occurred within dozens of rebel groups, including the Communist Party of Burma, the Free Syrian Army and the Sudan Liberation Army. In many cases the result is more than a nominal separation. In Sri Lanka, for example, the Tamil Peoples Liberation Tigers not only split from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, but also defected to the government side in the conflict (Staniland 2012).

A growing body of literature identifies several key determinants of rebel group splintering. One subset of this research focuses on the role of external actors, and particularly the government. For instance, Theodore McLauchlin and Pearlman (2012) find that government repression provides occasion for groups to evaluate their current leadership structure. Pre-existing divisions within groups are likely to be exacerbated, leading the group to move toward more factionalized leadership structures. When group members are satisfied, however, conflict tends to lead to even greater unity and centralization of authority. Whereas the preceding studies essentially treat government repression as exogenous to the internal politics of dissident groups, Bhavnani, Miodownik, and Choi (2011) present evidence that

governments deliberately stoke tensions among their opponents, as they find that the Israeli government increased conflict between Fatah and Hamas by undermining Hamas' control of the Gaza and by tolerating Fatah's relationship with the Jordanian military.

Another group of scholars emphasizes concerns about post-conflict bargaining as the key determinant of dissident group cohesion. Christia (2012) assumes that the winning coalition in a civil war receives private benefits, which might include any rents available to the state, and having some portion of its interests represented in the new government. Thus, rebels have an incentive to form minimum winning coalitions, so as to limit the number of coalition partners with whom they must share benefits. Wolford, Cunningham, and Reed (2015) develop a similar logic, theorizing that political factions have an interest in joining conflicts so as to maximize the likelihood of their preferences being represented in the post-war government, but the value of fighting decreases as the number of parties with whom they expect to share power increases. Yet, Christia (2012) suggests that this incentive to minimize coalition size is moderated by the risk of being outside the winning coalition, as there is a strong possibility of new waves of violence between victorious rebels and rival rebel factions. She thus expects coalitions to change frequently in response to battlefield events, with factions bandwagoning with battle winners and shifting away from losing coalitions. M. Findley and Rudloff (2012) similarly find fragmentation to be most common among groups that have recently lost battles. This implies that fragmentation is essentially a process of weak actors becoming weaker.

A final category of explanations places the source of rebel group cohesion in underlying social structure. Staniland (2014) argues that insurgent organizations will be most stable when their central leadership is able to exercise both vertical control over its rank-and-file members, and horizontal control over its constituent groups. This is most likely to occur when insurgencies draw from existing organizations with extant social ties of this sort, which might include former anti-colonial movements or ethnic political parties. Organiza-

tions are likely to fragment when constituent groups have a high degree of autonomy or control over individual members is limited (Staniland 2014, Ch. 2-3). Asal, Brown, and Dalton (2012) emphasize similar factors, arguing that organizations with factionalized leadership structures are at risk of fragmentation, while groups with more consolidated power structures will tend to remain cohesive. Finally, Warren and Troy (2015) suggest that group size plays an important role, as small groups are able to police themselves and resolve conflicts, whereas larger groups are more likely to experience infighting.

Each of these studies makes an important contribution to our understanding of conflict complexity, and sheds light on the broader interests and organizational challenges present in rebel movements. Yet, while the fragmentation of existing groups accounts for a substantial portion of multi-rebel conflicts, other processes are at work in the majority of cases. Indeed, only 26.6%[1] of the rebel groups that join ongoing civil wars splintered from an existing group, and only 9.7% are agglomerations of existing groups. Thus, nearly two-thirds of the groups that join conflicts[2] (only 20% of multi-dyadic conflicts have multiple rebel groups from the outset) do not appear to be the product of existing combatants reconfiguring, but rather are the result of an entirely new group of combatants entering the fray. I propose an integrated approach that accounts for both the fragmentation of existing groups, and the entry of new groups to the conflict.

[1]These figures are calculated using data on conflict participation from Pettersson and Wallensteen (2015) and actor attributes from (Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2015). I code a conflict episode as a separate war if it occurs following at least two calendar years of inactivity. Secessionist movements are treated as separate conflicts from bids to overthrow the central government, and separate from each other if they concern different territories.

[2]The pattern is even more stark if one looks at conflict-years, as over 95% of conflict years with multiple government-rebel dyads include at least one rebel group that is neither a splinter organization nor the source of one.

### 1.1.2 Alliance Formation

### 1.1.3 Mobilization

Few, if any, studies directly consider the phenomenon of new rebel groups joining ongoing conflicts. The literature on contagion is perhaps most relevant. Gleditsch (2007) finds that transnational ethnic groups and political and economic linkages between states can provide channels for civil war to spread across international boundaries. Other scholars find that secessionist (Ayres and Saideman 2000) and ethnic (Lane 2016) conflict often spread through processes of contagion, with the rebellion of one group seemingly inspiring those in neighboring areas to take up arms themselves. Such transnational processes might shape opportunities for multiple rebellions to emerge by increasing the availability of weapons, spreading tactical knowledge, or diverting government attention to foreign conflicts. Similarly, transnational motives for conflict may come in the form of grievances becoming clearer and more salient in light of events in neighboring countries, as happened during the Arab Spring, or the expected probability of a successful rebellion shifting upward in response to nearby events. Yet, rebel groups that are themselves transnational, operating in multiple countries [see] Salehyan (2007)] account for only 10.8% of conflict joiners.

# 2 The Entry of New Groups

## 2.1 Introduction

Why do some civil wars have multiple rebel groups, while others have only one? Theories of civil war tend to focus on individual- or group-level motives (e.g. Gurr 1970; Collier and Hoeffler 2004) or opportunities (e.g. Fearon and Laitin 2003) for rebellion, while giving little attention to the organization of dissent into rebel groups and coalitions. Even

those studies which do explicitly consider rebel group formation tend to focus on group attributes such as treatment of civilians (e.g. Weinstein 2007), and do not consider the possibility that rebels do not always form a single group. Yet, at least two rebel groups are active at some point in 44% of civil conflicts.[3] Over the course of the Chadian Civil War, for instance, 25 distinct rebel groups fought against the government at various times. Conflicts in Afghanistan in the 1980's, Somalia in the 1990's, Sudan in the 2000's have been similarly complex. The ongoing civil war in Syria is contested by at least two dozen armed groups. Even ethnically-homogeneous, geographically-concentrated populations with common goals, such as the Karen secessionist movement in Myanmar, often fragment into multiple rebel groups. Furthermore, the number of groups operating in these conflicts often varies greatly over time. The existing literature offers many useful insights to the conditions under which civil war will emerge, but it has relatively few explanations for the structure of rebel movements. The studies that do address some aspect of the phenomenon focus overwhelmingly on the fragmentation of existing groups (e.g. T. McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011; Christia 2012; Staniland 2014), and do not consider the mobilization of entirely new groups. I thus address the question: why do rebel groups join ongoing civil conflicts?

While little attention has been given to the sources of rebel movement structure, several studies suggest that fragmented rebel movements are associated with particularly concerning conflict attributes. Conflicts with multiple rebel groups last longer than dyadic competitions (Cunningham 2006; Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Akcinaroglu 2012). Furthermore, Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2009) find that the presence of multiple government-rebel dyads decreases the likelihood of peace agreements and increases the likelihood of rebel victories, though M. Findley and Rudloff (2012), find that fragmented rebel movements are often associated with an *increased* likelihood of negotiated settlement. Relatedly, Atlas and Licklider (1999) and Zeigler (2016) find that episodes of conflict renewal often occur between formerly allied rebel factions. Finally, conflicts with

[3]Source: Pettersson and Wallensteen (2015).

multiple dyads feature more fatalities than dyadic ones.[4] Clearly, conflicts with multiple rebel groups comprise one of the most severe subsets of civil wars. Thus, understanding the causes of multi-dyadic conflict is of great normative and policy importance.

This work contributes to the existing literature by advancing our understanding of the complexity of civil conflict in terms of the number of warring parties. In doing so it builds on the growing literature on a related facet of complexity — the fragmentation of existing groups (see Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Pearlman and Cunningham 2011; Staniland 2014). Furthermore, examining the relationships between rebel groups sheds new light on debates about the motives behind rebellion (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler 2004). For instance, if rebellion is fundamentally about ethnic or religious grievances as recent works have asserted (Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010), we might expect to see such concerns influence the structure of rebel coalitions as well. If, by contrast, rebels are motivated by the desire for profits from natural resources or illicit activities, the propensity for new groups to enter conflicts would likely be related to the availability of such resources, and not to political context. Finally, as my theory emphasizes the role of repression in incentivizing new actors to join the conflict, it builds on existing work on wartime civilian targeting (e.g. Kalyvas 2006) to show that repression can shape not only whether individuals elect to join conflicts, but also how they organize themselves when choosing to do so.

I proceed by elaborating a theoretical framework for studying the processes that might lead new rebel groups to join an ongoing civil conflict. Next, I argue that targeted repression is an especially influential force in producing new rebel groups, as it both reduces the relative cost of fighting, and induces individuals to identify more strongly with sub-national groups. After outlining a research design, I use fixed-effects poisson regressions to model the number of rebel groups competing in civil wars worldwide between 1946 and 2015, finding support for my hypotheses. Finally, I summarize the implications of the findings and identify several opportunities for further research.

[4]Source: my own analysis using data from Sundberg (2008).

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

Broadly, a conflict can come to have multiple rebel groups through two processes - the splintering of existing groups into multiple successor organizations, and the formation of an entirely new organization by previously non-violent individuals. At a minimum, then, the creation of new rebel groups requires division among the dissidents who comprise the pool of current and potential rebels. Splinter factions must have a reason for leaving their parent organization, and newly mobilizing individuals must have a reason for forming a new group rather than joining an existing one. At their most benign, these divisions might simply reflect the difficulty of coordinating actions across physical distance or linguistic barriers. In such cases the formation of multiple rebel groups might be a matter of convenience rather than an indicator of animosity or divergent objectives. In other cases, however, divisions may be deeper and more difficult to reconcile. For instance, if some rebels make improving the status of their ethnic group a primary concern, it is unlikely that members of other ethnic groups will join their organization, and any existing members with differing ethnic identities will be likely to leave.

Table 1: Necessary Conditions for the Formation of New Groups

| Splinter Group | Entirely New Group |
|---|---|
| Division among dissidents | Division among dissidents |
| | Change in relative value of fighting |

In addition to divisions with existing groups, the formation of new groups requires that previously non-violent individuals change their mobilizational calculus. This entails either participation in violence becoming more attractive, or remaining non-violent becoming less attractive. The former might occur in situations where an individual found the grievances

that led to the initial violence insufficiently persuasive to justify fighting, but new, more persuasive grievances emerge. For example, violence against civilians might lead new dissidents to mobilize in response. Alternatively, the initial fighting might reveal the government to be weaker than perviously thought, leading some to reconsider their decision to abstain from fighting. Non-violence can become less attractive if, for example, the conflict disrupts economic activity, decreasing the opportunity cost of fighting (see Collier and Hoeffler 1998). Indiscriminate violence against civilians can have similar effects by reducing the the risk of participation in violence relative to that of non-violence (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). If the physical risk of remaining peaceful is not dramatically lower than that of fighting, the cost of participating in rebellion is relatively low. In the following sections, I argue that government repression, particularly when targeted at specific ethnic groups, can satisfy both requirements for the formation of new rebel groups — repression reduces the relative cost of fighting, and targeted repression activiates social identities that can sow division among dissidents.

### 2.2.1 The Perils of Ethnic Politics

Rebellions are organized around a variety of identities, ideologies, and goals. The Communist Party of India advocates a Marxist-Leninist ideology, Darul Islam sought to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia, the National Forces of Liberation challenged the ruling Tutsi minority in Burundi on behalf of ethnic Hutus, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party backs an irredentist goal of creating an independent Kurdish state in parts of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Many scholars have argued that ethnic identities are a particularly useful basis for mobilization. Ethnic groups tend to be among the most salient identities in society, and thus serve as a focal point for mobilization (Hardin 1995; Hechter and Okamoto 2001). Furthermore, coethnics often have overlapping social networks, meaning that their interactions occur under the shadow of the future, mitigating many barriers to cooperation (Habyarimana et

al. 2007). Indeed, several empirical studies find that ethnically-homogeneous groups are better able to cooperate than more diverse ones (Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999; Miguel and Gugerty 2005; Habyarimana et al. 2007). Yet while activating ethnic identities may be advantageous for the initial organization of rebellion, I argue that in diverse societies such identities can have deleterious effects on the cohesion of rebel movement.

Intra-ethnic politics often follows a dynamic known as "outbidding," in which leaders make progressively more extreme proposals in hopes of winning the support of the group (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972; D. L. Horowitz 1985). Key to these models are the assumptions that individuals identify with a single ethnic group, that they care only about ethnic issues, and that ethnic politics is a zero-sum game. This produces a completely polarized bargaining space in which individuals hold positions on ethnic issues in which their group's interests are represented fully (e.g. a preference for a legislature in which group members hold a majority). In a spatial model of voting with such parameters, the optimal strategy for politicians is to adopt the most extreme position possible (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972). Even if a multi-ethnic coalition forms initially by creating uncertainty as to which group will be advantaged, it will eventually be undercut by challengers making more extreme appeals to one ethnic group. Other bases of mobilization, by contrast, tend to produce more heterogenous preferences - some members will actually prefer moderate positions - and thus greater potential for compromise. While the original formulation of the outbidding model assumes competition in an electoral context, it has also been shown to more violent forms of competition such as terrorism (Kydd and Walter 2006; Chenoweth 2010; but see M. G. Findley and Young 2012).

Adding to the zero-sum character of competition between ethnic groups is the fact that ethnic rebellions are far more likely than others to claim specific pieces of territory. Ethnic rebellions often make secessionist or irredentist claims against the government, while such demands are relatively rare among multi-ethnic rebellions in the post-colonial era.

Territorial division is a zero-sum game - any territory gained by the secessionist movement comes at the expense of the state, and vice-versa. Furthermore, while in theory territory can be divided, resulting in compromise solutions, in fact it often takes on symbolic importance that renders it indivisible (Toft 2003). In addition to creating the zero-sum dynamic between an ethnic group and the state common to many ethnic issues, territorial claims can generate competition between different ethnic groups. Many territories are claimed by multiple ethnic groups (Toft 2003), placing secessionist claims into competition. Even in the absence of symbolic value, the territories that form secessionist claims are often remote, making them attractive bases for all rebel groups (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012). The activation of ethnic identities should thus create difficult-to-resolve competitions between dissidents of differing ethnicities, ultimately leading to an increase in the number of factions competing in a civil war.

### 2.2.2 Repression and the Dynamics of Identity

Some theoretical perspectives view ethnic and other social identities as largely immutable, deriving from ancient histories (D. L. Horowitz 1985). Increasingly, however, scholars view identity as a product of individual or collective choice. Posner (2005) argues that individuals choose to prioritize one of several identities such as ethnicity, language, religion, or class, selecting that which is likely to bring them the greatest benefit. Focusing on the realm of electoral politics, he finds that this choice is shaped by an interaction between group size and electoral institutions. In subsequent work Eifert, Miguel, and Posner (2010) find that individuals are more likely to identify with their ethnic group when interviewed near a competitive election. Penn (2008) models a similar calculation in which individuals choose to orient themselves toward a national or ethnic identity. She finds that ethnic identities become more prevalent as ethnic groups become homogenous, and as economic inequality between ethnic groups increases. Christia (2012) extends the argument to

civil wars, arguing that ethnic identities are deployed instrumentally, with rebel elites emphasizing particular identities to justify alignments that are in fact driven by power politics. A key consequence of this malleability of identity is that ethnic outbidding is not inevitable - if political actors can appeal to multiple, overlapping identities, competition is no longer zero-sum (Chandra 2005). The opposite is also true, however - previously cooperative relationships can be undermined by enhancing the salience of ethnic identities.

I argue that selective repression - repression which is targeted at certain individuals or groups while sparing others - should tend to increase the number of rebel groups in a conflict both by decreasing the relative cost of violent mobilization and by increasing the salience of particular identities. Indiscriminate repression, by contrast, should not systematically decrease the cohesiveness of dissident movements. First, repression should have a general effect of increasing the number of individuals participating in a conflict. Some individuals will participate in violence even when doing so comes at high cost. Many, however, will only participate when the cost of doing so is low relative to the cost of remaining non-violent. As one of the primary costs of participation in rebellion is the risk of physical harm, repression should tend to reduce the relative cost of rebellion by bringing the risk of physical harm to non-violent activities. Any form of repression should thus increase the number of individuals in a country willing to participate in violence.

*Hypothesis 1: The number of rebel groups in a country should increase with the level of repression*

The effect of repression on the structure of rebel movements, however, should depend on its form. While indiscriminate repression that targets many individuals within society should expand the pool of individuals willing to participate in rebellion, it should not systematically affect their desire to form new groups rather than joining existing ones. Some individuals may turn to an ethnic or religious group for protection, but in other cases widespread repression may unify citizens in opposition to their government. For example, the citizens of many former colonies banded together to pursue independence,

before subsequently fragmenting along ethnic lines. Thus while indiscriminate repression should in some cases lead to an increased number of rebel groups, the aggregate effect should be of moderate strength.

In comparison, indiscriminate repression should be far more likely to increase the number of rebel groups in a conflict, as it induces individuals to identify with particular subnational groups. While targeted repression can be done on the basis of support for existing rebels (Kalyvas 2006), often it is done on the basis of ethnicity or religion. For example, the Myanmarese government has frequently repressed the Rohingya ethno-religious minority, while being considerably more repsectful of the rights of the Burman majority. I focus on this sort of targeted repression. When individuals are targeted on the basis of group membership, these groups are likely to increase in salience relative to other social cleavages. Furthermore, individuals are highly likely to develop a sense of linked fate with fellow group members. In other words, they are likely to adopt the belief that their prosperity and perhaps even survival depends on their ability to band together and defend themselves. Thus, targeted repression should lead individuals to mobilize on the basis of the targeted group. Unless an existing rebel group was already mobilized on such a basis, this should result previously non-violent individuals forming new groups, and in members of existing groups forming splinter organizations that emphasize their identity.

*Hypothesis 2: The number of rebel groups in a country should increase with the extent to which repression is discriminatory*

In statistical terms, I expect that the relationship between repression and discrimination to be interactive, rather than additive. That is, I expect the effect of increasing the severity repression on the number of rebel groups to be very strong when it is targeted (discriminatory), and more modest when it is deployed indiscriminately. I expect the reverse to hold as well — the effect of discrimination should be greater when as severity of repression increases. While targeted, but weak repression might enhance ethnic identities, I do not

expect that it will dramatically alter the relative cost of fighting. In short, I expect to find a statistically significant, positive interaction term.

*Hypothesis 3: There is a positive interactive effect between the level repression and the extent to which repression is discriminatory*

## 2.3 Research Design

To test the preceding hypotheses I use a dataset of country war-years derived from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and Peace Research Institute Oslo's Dyadic Dataset, version 4-2016 (Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen 2008; Melander, Pettersson, and Themnér 2016). This dataset includes one observation for every government-rebel group dyad for each year in which it produced at least 25 fatalities. I excluded all interstate conflicts from the data, and include all civil wars, anti-colonial wars, and internationalized civil wars. I then aggregate this data to the country-year, producing a count of the number of rebel groups active in each country experiencing a civil war each year. This results in a dataset of 1,501 observations, covering the period 1946–2015. Note that the UCDP data typically allows for the presence of multiple conflicts within the same country-year — rebel groups pursuing secession are considered part of a separate conflict from rebels challenging the central government, and rebels pursuing secession for different territories are considered separate from one another. I ignore these distinctions and aggregate to the country-year for two reasons. First, my theory focuses largely on the role of government behavior in shaping rebel structure, and thus it makes sense to group all rebels facing the same government together. From the government's standpoint, beyond a tactical level it may make little difference whether a new rebel group is challenging the central government or pursuing secession — both outcomes are undesirable. Second, most of my independent variables are measured at the country level, and in many cases it would be difficult to record subnational variation, particularly in a dynamic fashion.

### 2.3.1 Dependent Variables

- **Number of Rebel Groups** My primary dependent variable is the number of rebel groups active in a country-conflict-year. The data comes from the UCDP Dyadic data (Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen 2008; Melander, Pettersson, and Themnér 2016), which considers rebel factions to be separate groups if they have a discernible name. In other words, a faction connected to a larger group would be considered an independent organization and count toward this measure if it had its own name; otherwise, it would be considered part of the larger organization. Name *changes*, however, only result in the entry of a new group to the data if they are accompanied by a substantial change to the organization's composition such as a merger with another group. Note that given the difficulties of determining precisely when many rebel groups ceased operations, this measure includes all groups that appear at any point during the calendar year; it is therefore possible that this measure overstates the number of groups that were active simultaenously in some cases.
- **Number of Non-Splinter Rebel Groups** As the process by which entirely new rebel groups emerge is likely to be somewhat different than the process by which existing rebel groups splinter, I employ an alternate DV that excludes splinter organizations from the count of active rebel groups. The measure is based on my own data collection on rebel origins, with groups being coded as splinter organizations if their leader and majority of members were previously part of a different rebel group, and transitioned directly to operating as an independent group (i.e. there was no period of peace between membership in the previous and new organizations).

### 2.3.2 Independent Variables

- **Human Rights** To measure repression I use the Latent Human Protection Scores, version 2 (Fariss 2014; Schnakenberg and Fariss 2014). This data uses a Bayesian

measurement model to estimate latent human rights scores using several data sources including US State Department and Amnesty International country reports, and several scholarly datasets on repression and mass killing. This data improves on previous approaches to measuring human rights by accounting for the fact that the standards by government and NGO reports have judged countries have generally improved over time. The result is an aggregate measure that ranges from roughly -3 (most repressive) to 3 (most respectful of human rights). Within my data the mean score is -1.19, and no country year has a score higher than 1.51. This measure is lagged by one year.

- **Discrimination** Currently, all major human rights data is measured at the country level. A direct measure of the extent to which repression is targeted at specific ethnic groups, geographic locales, etc. is thus unavailable. I use a measure constructed from the Ethnic Power Relations Core dataset, 2014 version (Vogt et al. 2015). EPR codes the political status of each politically-relevant ethnic group in the world, as well as several group attributes including their size as a percentage of the population. I consider groups coded as "Discriminated" or "Powerless" to be the victims of discrimination, and use the group size measure to calculate the percentage of the total country population that is subjected to discrimination. To aid in interpretation, I use the percentage of the country that is *not* subjected to discrimination in the models. Thus, as the measure increases, the extent to which repression is targeted at a small minority increases. The rare cases where no members of society experience discrimination are recoded to 0, as this indicates a non-discriminatory regime. This measure is lagged by one year.

### 2.3.3 Control Variables

- **Conflict Intensity** To account for the possibility that human rights scores are simply a function of conflict intensity, rather than discriminatory intent, I include the maximum Conflict Intensity value from the UCDP Dyadic data. The measure is binary, with a value of 1 indicating that the dyad produced between 25 and 999 fatalities in a given year, and a value of 2 indicating that the dyad produced 1,000 or more fatalities. This measure is moderately correlated with the human rights score (Pearson's r = -0.30).
- **Number of UCDP Conflicts** I include the number of distinct UCDP conflicts in a country-year as a control. Recall that all rebels challenging the central government are coded as being part of the same conflict, but each territory that is subject to a secessionist movement is considered distinct.
- **Percentage Territorial Conflicts** To control for the possibility that secessionist conflicts produce different rebel structures, I include percentage of UCDP conflicts in a country-year that are fought over territory rather the central government.
- **Neighboring Civil War** One potential mechanism that might produce increased numbers of rebel groups in a conflict is the movement of groups from neighboring countries into new conflicts. To control for this possibility I construct an indicator for the presence of a civil war in a neighboring state using the UCDP Dyadic data and the Correlates of War Direct Contiguity data, version 3.2 (Stinnett et al. 2002).
- **Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization** To control for the possibility that simple ethnic diversity, rather than the repression of particular ethnic groups, accounts for the number of rebel groups in a country, I include a measure of ethnolinguistic fractionalization from Fearon and Laitin (2003). The measure represents the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a country will speak different languages.
- **Logged Population** Conceivably, the number of rebel groups in a country might simply be a function of the country's size. I thus control for the logged population of

the country using data from Gleditsch (2002).

- **Logged GDP per capita** Economic development correlates with a variety of important political outcomes, including the onset of civil war. I include the logged per capita GDP of each country, with data again from Gleditsch (2002).

Additionally, I have examined the effect of several other control variables. None were statistically significant, nor did they substantially alter the performance of my variables of interest. Thus, I excluded them from the models reported below. This included several country-level variables, as well as several attributes of the largest rebel group active in a country-year.

- **Democracy** A binary indicator for countries with a Polity IV score greater than 5 (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2012).
- **Mountainous Terrain** A measure of the percentage of land in a country that is mountainous (Fearon and Laitin 2003).
- **Oil Revenue** A binary indicator of whether one-third or more of a country's exports come from fossil fuels (Fearon and Laitin 2003).
- **Previous Conflict** A binary indicator of whether the country had experienced a previous episode of conflict separated by at least three calendar years with no fighting reaching the 25 fatality threshold.
- **Rebel Group Central Control** A binary indicator of whether the largest rebel group active during a conflict year had a centralized control structure (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013).
- **Rebel Group Political Wing** A binary indicator of whether the largest rebel group active during a conflict year had a political wing (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013).
- **Rebel Group Stronger** A binary indicator of whether the largest rebel group active during a conflict year was stronger than the government (Cunningham, Gleditsch,

and Salehyan 2013).

- **Rebel Presence in Other States** A binary indicator of whether the largest rebel group active during a conflict year had a presence in other states (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013).
- **Rebel External Support** A binary indicator of whether the largest rebel group active during a conflict year was received any form of support from an outside government (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013).
- **Multi-Ethnic Rebel Group** An indicator of whether a rebel group draws support from more than one ethnic group, constructed from the ACD2EPR version 4-2014 dataset (Vogt et al. 2015).

### 2.3.4 Statistical Model

As the dependent variable in this study is a count of rebel groups, Ordinary Least Squares regression would be inappropriate. A Cameron and Travedi test shows no evidence of overdispersion in any model specification, meaning that Poisson regression is an appropriate model, rather than negative binomial. I include fixed effects for both country and year. However, the time fixed effects do not substantially alter the results, and I exclude them frmo the models presented here. Additionally, I cluster the standard errors by country.

## 2.4 Results

The poisson regression results are reported in Table 2. Models 1 and 2 use a dependent variable that includes all rebel groups active in a given year. Models 3 and 4 exclude splinter organizations. The "Human Rights" coefficient in Model 1 provides a test of *H1* which predicted that the number of rebel groups should increase with the level of repression. I am able to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship between repression and the number of rebel groups, as the latent respect for human rights measure has a negative relationship

that is statiscally signficant at the 99.9% level. As respect for human rights improves, the expected number of rebel groups declines. As a country becomes more repressive, by contrast, the expected number of rebel groups increases. Model 3 shows similar results (though only at a 95% significance level), suggesting that the relationship is not driven by the fragmentation of existing groups, but rather includes the mobilization of many new groups. Substantively, the effect of repression is large. As Figure 1 shows, the predicted number of rebel groups at the most repressive end of the spectrum is roughly 3. In the country-years where respect for human rights is highest (moderately high, in absolute terms), the expected number of groups is around 1.

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | $-2.17^{***}$ | $-2.03^{***}$ | $-15.19^{***}$ | $-15.09^{***}$ |
| | (0.59) | (0.60) | (0.71) | (0.85) |
| Human Rights | $-0.26^{***}$ | $-0.08$ | $-0.27^{***}$ | $-0.15^{*}$ |
| | (0.03) | (0.05) | (0.04) | (0.07) |
| Discrimination | $0.40^{***}$ | $-0.00$ | $0.43^{**}$ | 0.15 |
| | (0.11) | (0.11) | (0.14) | (0.20) |
| Human Rights X Discrimination | | $-0.31^{***}$ | | $-0.19$ |
| | | (0.08) | | (0.10) |
| Intensity Level | 0.01 | 0.02 | $0.17^{***}$ | $0.17^{***}$ |
| | (0.03) | (0.03) | (0.04) | (0.04) |
| Number of Conflicts | $0.38^{***}$ | $0.38^{***}$ | $0.33^{***}$ | $0.33^{***}$ |
| | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) |
| % Conflicts Over Territory | $-0.22^{***}$ | $-0.21^{***}$ | $-0.26^{***}$ | $-0.25^{***}$ |
| | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.07) | (0.07) |
| Logged GDP per capita | $0.10^{**}$ | $0.10^{**}$ | $-0.10^{*}$ | $-0.10^{*}$ |
| | (0.03) | (0.03) | (0.05) | (0.05) |
| Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization | $-1.21^{***}$ | $-1.42^{***}$ | $-0.21$ | $-0.33$ |
| | (0.28) | (0.29) | (0.42) | (0.42) |
| Contiguous Civil War | 0.02 | 0.01 | $-0.01$ | $-0.01$ |
| | (0.04) | (0.04) | (0.05) | (0.05) |
| Logged Population | 0.07 | 0.09 | $-0.14^{*}$ | $-0.13$ |
| | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.07) | (0.07) |
| AIC | 3084.14 | 3082.34 | 2828.59 | 2829.58 |
| BIC | 3503.30 | 3506.55 | 3247.75 | 3253.79 |
| Log Likelihood | -1459.07 | -1457.17 | -1331.30 | -1330.79 |
| Deviance | 210.38 | 206.59 | 406.70 | 405.69 |
| Num. obs. | 1153 | 1153 | 1153 | 1153 |

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 2: Poisson Regression Models of Rebel Group Count

Models 1 and 3 also provide tests of *H2*, which expects that the number of rebel groups should increase with the extent to which repression is targeted in a discriminatory fashion. Again I am able to reject the null hypothesis, as the effect of discrimination is positive and statistically significant at the 99.9% level in Model 1, and at the 99% level in Model 3. As the percentage of a country's population that is *not* subjected to discrimination (i.e. discrimination becomes more targeted), the expected number of rebel groups increases. The substantive effect is smaller than that for Human Rights, however (see Figure 1).

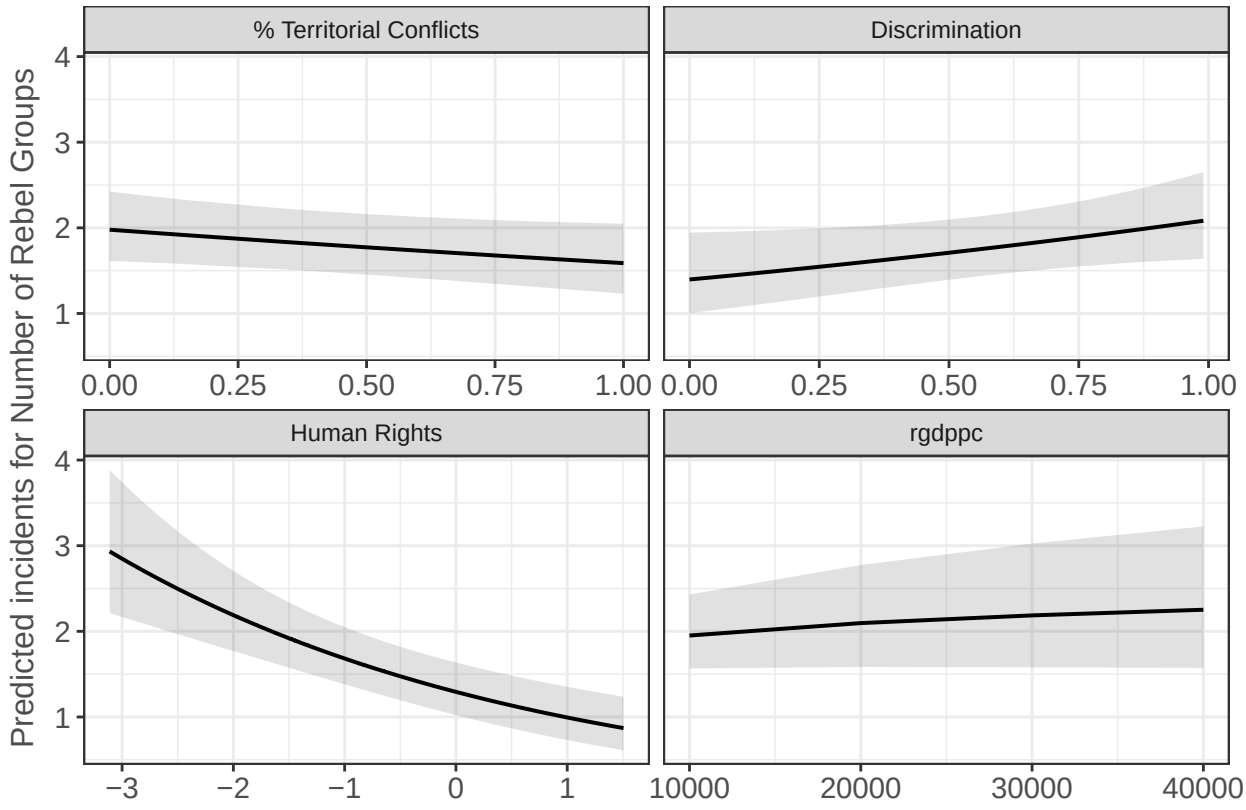


Figure 1: Effect Plots for Model 1

Moving from perfectly indiscriminate policies to the most finely targeted increases the expected number of rebel groups from roughly 1.4 to slightly over 2.

*H3*, which predicts an interactive effect between repression and discrimination, is tested in Models 2 and 4. In Model 2 the interaction is positive and statistically signficant at the 99.9% level. The marginal effects are plotted in Figure 2. The red line shows the predicted effect of Human Rights at the lowest observed value (i.e. the most repressive). At the lowest values of Discrimination (i.e. a perfectly indiscriminate political system) and most repressive values of Human Rights, the expected number of rebel groups is slightly below 2. As discrimination increases, however, the effect of repression increases. When 50% of the population is subject to discrimination, the expected number of rebel groups is roughly 2.8. When discrimination is at its highest, with 99% of the population being free from political discrimination, the effect of repression is quite strong, with a prediction of roughly 4.3

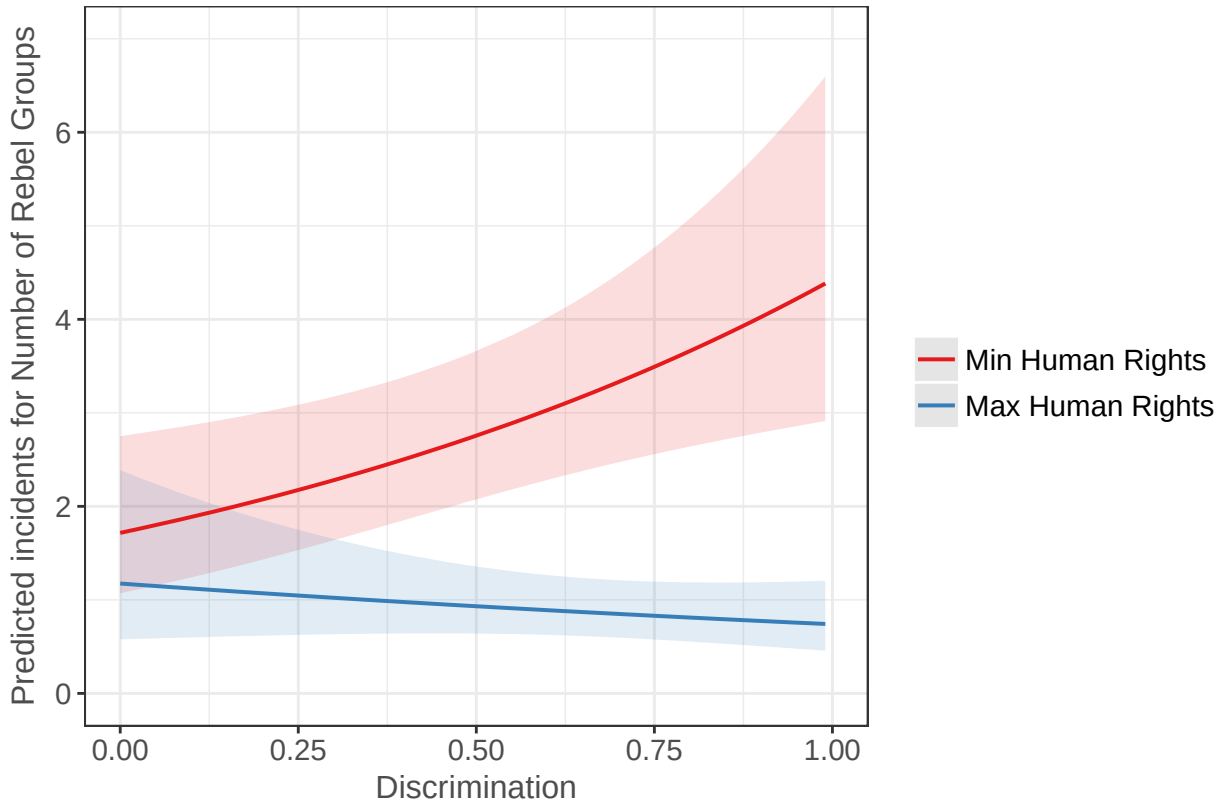


Figure 2: Marginal Effects Plots for Repression X Discrimination Interaction (Model 2)

rebel groups. At the highest observed levels of human rights, the expected number of rebel groups is consistently around 1, and not affected by the level of Discrimination. In short, the interaction result suggests that we should see the greatest number of rebel groups when governments use strongly repressive tactics, but deploy such repression in a highly targeted fashion. When used indiscriminately, repression has little effect on the number of rebel groups. In Model 4, the interaction term is just shy of statistical significance. This suggests that splintering accounts for some of the interaction effect.

While the results are largely consistent with my hypotheses, this analysis does have limitations. Perhaps most notably, it does not use a perfect measure of targeted repression, instead relying on political discrimination as a proxy. I would argue, however, that this limitations is more likely to create bias *against* my hypotheses than for them. There may be people who are not part of an excluded minority group, but nevertheless are subjected

to human rights violations. Indeed, as factors such as judicial independence and press freedom are significant components of the Latent Human Rights Scores, such patterns are likely. In such a case my measure would detect discrimination, but there would be many individuals behaving as if repression was indiscriminate. Conversely, some individuals may face limited political opportunities as a result of discrimination against their ethnic group, while avoiding threats to their physical integrity. This combination should produce individuals who are discinclined to cooperate with other members of society, but are not especially incentivized to resort to violence due to the absence of physical repression. Nevertheless, more precise measures should be pursued.

Additionally, this analysis does not facilitate causal claims. It is possible that government repression strategy is endogenous to the expectation that multiple rebel groups will emerge, for example. While lagging the repression and discrimination variables may mitigate this concern slightly, the addition of an instrumental variable or other quasi-experimental technique would greatly improve the validity of the analysis.

## 2.5 Conclusion

I have argued that targeted repression should increase the number of rebel groups active in a civil war by reducing the relative cost of participation in rebellion, and by activating ethnic and other subnational identities that provoke divisions among dissidents. In my empirical analyses I find support for this theory, as both repression and discrimination are associated with an increase in the expected number of rebel groups in a conflict. Furthermore, an interaction effect shows that repression has the greatest effect on the number of rebel groups when it is most targeted.

These results suggest that the government plays a surprisingly large role in shaping rebel movement structure. Existing work on rebel structure tends to focus on the social context from which rebels emerge (Staniland 2014), and studies that do consider the role of the

government have often found that repression increases cohesion among target groups (Simmel 1955), though the effect may be contingent on internal group dynamics (Theodore McLauchlin and Pearlman 2012). Future work should examine the government's strategic calculus in more detail. My theory gives little agency to the government, treating as a largely exogenous source of repression. While it is quite plausible that governments would prefer to fight a divided opponent rather than a unified one, my theory and findings suggest that the source of this division is often new individuals entering the conflict. As this is a seemingly undesirable outcome, the government's use of targeted repression in conflict settings is puzzling.

There are also significant opportunities for methodological improvements to this line of research. First, my empirical analysis does not directly test my theoretical mechanism - the reorientation of individuals away from national identities and toward ethnic and other subnational ones. Survey or experimental research on individuals who have been targeted by repression would provide a much more direct test of the mechanism. Additionally, a better measure of targeted repression would improve the validity of the study. It may be possible to construct such a measure from geocoded events data. Finally, an instrumental variable or other causal inference technique would greatly improve the analysis.

A final direction for new research would examine the relationship between original and joining rebel groups. If my theory is correct, joining groups should tend to have different ethnic make-ups, and likely a stronger emphasis on ethnic identity than originating groups. I do not make any predictions about the relationship between rebel groups when multiple are present. Surprisingly few works explore conflict between rebel groups (but see Fjelde and Nilsson 2012), nor do many explore alliances between rebels (but see Bapat and Bond 2012). If the results presented here are to be believed, such work will be relevant so long as governments repress.

# 3 Alliance Formation

## 3.1 Introduction

Theories of civil war tend to focus on individual- or group-level motives (e.g. Gurr 1970; Collier and Hoeffler 2004) or opportunities (e.g. Fearon and Laitin 2003) for rebellion, while giving little attention to the organization of dissent into rebel groups and coalitions. Even those studies which do explicitly consider rebel group formation tend to focus on group attributes such as discipline (e.g. Weinstein 2007), and do not consider the possibility that rebels do not always form a single group. Yet, 44% of civil conflicts feature at least two rebel groups challenging the government.[5] Over the course of the Chadian Civil War, for instance, 25 distinct rebel groups fought against the government. Conflicts in Afghanistan in the 1980's, Somalia in the 1990's, and Sudan in the 2000's have been similarly complex. The ongoing civil war in Syria is contested by at least two dozen armed groups. Even ethnically-homogeneous, geographically-concentrated movements with common goals, such as the Karen secessionist campaign in Myanmar, often fragment into multiple rebel groups. Furthermore, the number of groups operating in these conflicts often varies greatly over time. The existing literature offers many useful insights to the conditions under which civil war will emerge, but it has few explanations of the structure of rebel movements.

While little attention has been given to the sources of rebel movement structure, several studies suggest that such configurations can have deleterious consequences. Conflicts with multiple rebel groups last longer than dyadic competitions (Cunningham 2006; Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Akcinaroglu 2012). Furthermore, Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2009) find that the presence of multiple government-rebel dyads decreases the likelihood of peace agreements and increases the likelihood of rebel victories, though M. Findley and Rudloff (2012), find that fragmented rebel movements are often

[5]Source: Pettersson and Wallensteen (2015).

associated with an *increased* likelihood of negotiated settlement. Relatedly, Atlas and Licklider (1999) and Zeigler (2016) find that episodes of conflict renewal often occur between formerly allied rebel factions. Finally, conflicts with multiple dyads feature more fatalities than dyadic ones.[6] Clearly, conflicts with multiple rebel groups comprise one of the most severe subsets of civil wars. Thus, understanding the causes of multi-dyadic conflict is of great normative and policy importance.

I seek to address this gap by explaining one of the primary determinants of rebel movement structure — the formation of alliances between rebel factions. Which rebel groups are likely to form alliances? With whom are they likely to ally? While alliances cannot account for all of the variation in the number of rebel groups in a conflict — the fragmentation of existing groups and the entry of previously non-violent groups to the conflict are also important processes — alliance ties tend to predict deeper integration between rebel groups. Many rebel alliances evolve into umbrella organizations with shared command, and weak rebel groups are frequently absorbed by alliance partners. Thus, alliance formation is a crucial determinant of whether conflicts become less complex over time.

First and foremost, this work advances our understanding of the complexity of civil conflict in terms of the number and arrangement of actors. This builds on the growing literature on another facet of complexity — the fragmentation of existing groups (see Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Pearlman and Cunningham 2011; Staniland 2014) — and presents contrasting evidence to the few existing studies of rebel alliances (Christia 2012; Bapat and Bond 2012), which focus on relative capability as the key driver of coalition building. Furthermore, examining the relationships between rebel groups sheds new light on debates about the motives behind rebellion (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler 2004). For instance, if rebellion is fundamentally about ethnic or religious grievances, we might expect to see the emergence of coalitions with homogeneous identities. If, by contrast, rebels are motivated by the desire for profits from natural resources or illicit activities, we might see groups

[6]Source: my own analysis using data from Sundberg (2008).

with access to such revenues seek to limit the number of combatants with whom they share their spoils, irrespective of common identity.

I proceed with a review of the literature on relations between rebel groups. Next, I outline the potential benefits rebels might receive by forming alliances. Subsequently, I explore the conditions under which rebels will elect to engage in such cooperation. Finally, I present results from an inferential network model applied to the Syrian Civil War.

## 3.2 Relations Among Rebels

Relations among rebel groups remains one of the most underexplored aspects of civil war. The vast majority of existing studies focus on conflict between non-state actors. A few studies have, however, examined conflict between rebel groups. In the most comprehensive study to date, Fjelde and Nilsson (2012) suggest that rebels fight each other for control over resources such drug supplies or valuable terrain. Greater resource endowments should lead to better postwar bargains with the government in the long run, and greater ability to sustain a rebellion in the short run. The authors find that this logic is most likely to prevail in the presence of natural resources, territories that are not controlled by the government, militarily weak governments, and significant power asymmetries among rebels. Atlas and Licklider (1999) and Zeigler (2016) find that this dynamic can also arise in the aftermath of conflicts, as the main fighting in renewed civil wars is often between previously allied rebel groups.

Another strand of literature examines the emergence of conflict within previously coherent movements. Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour (2012) conceptualize the fragmentation of rebels movements as varying in terms of the raw number of organizations, the degree of institutionalization unifying the organizations, and the distribution of power among them. They expect a greater general likelihood of infighting in more fragmented movements, particularly those with large numbers of groups and low degrees of institutionalization.

Asal, Brown, and Dalton (2012) find evidence that largely supports this claim, showing that ethnopolitical movements with factionalized leadership structures are most likely to experience splits. Similarly, Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour (2012) find that infighting is most likely in self-determination movements with large numbers of factions, and that the emergence of new factions is especially likely to trigger violence. Staniland (2014) similarly emphasizes pre-existing social structure, arguing that the probability of an insurgent group splintering is shaped by the strength of social ties in the organization from which it emerged. Others see infighting as contingent on the conflict process. Christia (2012) finds that rebel groups and coalitions tend to fragment when battlefield losses exacerbate divisions between faction leaders, while Theodore McLauchlin and Pearlman (2012) find that repression can deepen rifts within movements that are already divided, but cohesive movements may become further solidified by repression.

There is also a substantial literature on intra-ethnic violence. Lilja and Hultman (2011) find that that Tamil rebels used violence against co-ethnic civilians to control populations and the resources they hold, and against coethnic armed groups to establish dominance within the ethnic group. Staniland (2012) finds that these patterns intra-ethnic violence tend to be self-reinforcing, as violence within ethnic insurgencies is the primary cause of the defection of some subsets of ethnic groups to the opposing side in the conflict. (Warren and Troy 2015) seek to explain which ethnic groups are likely to experience such fragmentation, finding a curvilinear relationship between the size of an ethnic group and its probably of experiencing infighting. Small ethnic groups have the ability to police themselves, limiting violence, and intra-ethnic violence in large groups is likely to be met with government intervention. Thus, only moderate-sized groups tend to experience internal violence.

Finally, a few studies consider the formation of alliances among various types of militant organizations. Asal and Rethemeyer (2008) and M. C. Horowitz and Potter (2013) conduct network analyses of alliance formation among terrorist groups, arguing that such arrange-

ment are used to aggregate capabilities and share tactics. Bapat and Bond (2012) model the logic of alliance formation among rebel groups. They assume that alliances carry two significant costs: the dilution of each constituent group's agenda, and the risk of having one's private information sold to the government by an ally. Consistent with this theory, they find alliances to be most common when an outside state can enforce agreements, and when all rebel groups involved are strong enough to avoid the temptation of defecting to the government side Christia (2012) similarly emphasizes capability, arguing that neorealist balancing theory from international relations explains alignments in civil wars. When one coalition - a group of rebels or government-aligned forces - becomes too powerful, other groups will band together to prevent their own destruction. But similar Bapat and Bond (2012), Christia (2012) argues that this mechanism is constrained by a desire to maximize one's share of the post-war spoils. Thus, rebels realign frequently, seeking to form minimum winning coalitions. While shared identity appears on the surface to be an important determinant of rebel alignments, Christia views these narratives as post-hoc justifications aimed at legitimizing decisions that are really driven mostly by power. Some important aspects of alliance formation are beyond the scope of the existing studies, however. Namely, while relative power considerations can potentially account for why rebel groups form alliances, and when they will alter their ties, it does not explain why groups choose a particular partner when multiple options are available. Christia suggests that these decisions are shaped by personal relationships between rebel elites, but does not give this question extended consideration in her empirical analysis. M. C. Horowitz and Potter (2013) find that militants prefer to ally with powerful groups, but their focus is largely on transnational networks of terrorists and insurgents, rather than alliance formation within a particular conflict. I seek to resolve this gap by explaining not only whether, but also with whom rebel groups will choose to form alliances.

## 3.3 A Theory of Rebel Alliance Formation

### 3.3.1 Rebel Factions and Their Interests

I start from the assumption that governments in civil wars are opposed by one or more dissident factions. I define a faction as a set of people with relatively homogeneous beliefs and identities, that is capable of acting as a group. For example, a communist party might have Leninist and Maoist factions, and an ethnonationalist movement might have Christian and Muslim factions. Faction members likely will not share identical beliefs on every political question, and may not have identical racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. This might be especially true of factions organized around loyalty to a specific individual or locale. A faction will, however, tend to be unified on the most salient political and identity issues of the moment.

In some contexts, the faction may not be an appropriate unit of analysis. For example, rebel groups often do engage in recruiting new members on an individual basis, and an individual-level approach would be appropriate for studying such a phenomenon. For the formation and restructuring of rebel groups, however, decisions tend to be made by collectives. Staniland (2014) argues that rebel groups tend to emerge from existing organizations, rather than spontaneous collections of individuals. My own data collection shows similar patterns, with 97% of rebel groups since 1946 having origins in a pre-existing organization. When rebel groups fragment, abandonment of the existing group is often done by entire sub-units. For example Staniland (2014) finds that fragmentation often takes the form of local brigades breaking away from a central organization, as was the case for with al-Qaeda in Iraq, which saw many local Sunni militias defect and begin cooperating with the US. Similarly, Christia (2012) sees realignment as being driven by mid-level rebel commanders, who generally take a cadre of loyal forces with them when initiating and breaking alliances.

Factions can structured in a variety of arrangements during a conflict. A faction can resort to violence on an individual basis, resulting in a rebel group with mostly homogeneous preferences and identities. In other cases a faction may ally with others to former a larger, but more heterogeneous rebel group. Finally, factions may remain non-violent, using peaceful tactics to oppose the government. These arrangement are dynamic, however. Previously independent factions may form alliances, previusly aligned factions may choose to break alliances, previously non-violent factions may choose to enter a conflict, and previously violent factions may choose to demobilize. I argue that two broad concerns shape each these decisions.

First, I assume that factions have genuine political interests. This assumption is not necessarily obvious in light of the long-running debate as to whether rebellion is motivated by public or private concerns (see Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Indeed, some scholars have gone as far as to posit that rebellion is little more than glorified criminal activity aimed at controlling natural resources and illicit trades (Mueller 2000), or that individual participation is often motivated by a desire to settle personal disputes (Kalyvas 2006). I do not reject the notion that rebels value such things (indeed, see the second assumption below); I simply contend that greed and grievance are a false dichotomy. Most rebel groups articulate a political platform of some variety. This might take the form of a comprehensive ideological program such as a communist revolution, or a more narrow concern such as land reform or self-determination for a particular ethnic group. While earlier work found greater support for the greed hypothesis, suggesting that such political rhetoric is merely a veneer on more selfish motives, recent studies using higher-quality data have found that political grievances, and particularly ethnic discrimination, to be among the strongest predictors of civil war (Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010).

Second, however, I expect that factions will seek to maximize their individual power. Even if rebels are primarily motivated by political interests, material resources are an important

means to achieving such goals. A faction's influence in any postwar order is likely to be shaped in large part by its power. If a faction retains enough fighting capability to re-open violence, other actors interested in peace will have an interest in accommodating many of their demands. Relatedly, a faction will have difficulty trusting any concessions it wins from more powerful actors. Thus, retaining capability at the end of a conflict is likely to be advantageous with respect to advancing one's political goals (Nygård and Weintraub 2015). Furthermore, greater power allows a faction greater autonomy from fellow rebels. Political power is a finite good, and as a group's capabilities increase, the number of other rebels with whom they must share it decreases (Christia 2012; Bapat and Bond 2012). Finally, even if it is not their primary motive, rebels do use material resources to incentivize recruitment and retention efforts (Weinstein 2007), and to enrich top leadership.

### 3.3.2 The Value of Rebel Alliances

Frequently, rebel factions engage in military collaboration with other non-state actors. This can range from an agreement not to target each other, to a divisions of territory, to joint campaigns on the battlefield, to full mergers. These alliances can be valuable for a number of reasons. First, alliances aggregate capabilities. This is perhaps the most common conception of alliances in international politics (see Bennett 1997), and it has been proposed as a motive for rebel alliances as well [Bapat and Bond (2012); M. C. Horowitz and Potter (2013). The logic of capability aggregation differs somewhat between international and civil conflicts. Whereas international alliances aggregate capabilities by bringing states into a conflict in which they might not otherwise participate, rebel groups by definition are already participating in conflict. Nevertheless, these alliances can bring great value because rather than simply aggregating, they can concentrate capabilities in space and time. For example, two rebel groups might be unable to capture a government-held town on their own, but in a joint operation would be sufficiently powerful to do so.

Second, alliances can allow for burden-sharing and specialization. Burden-sharing has been offered as an explanation for international alliances such as NATO (Sandler and Forbes 1980), though it may not occur under all circumstances (see Olson and Zeckhauser 1966). Alliances can ensure that a single rebel group is not responsible for defeating the government, and might serve as a mechanism for reigning in the temptation to free ride off of another group's efforts. Relatedly, alliances can facilitate specialization by rebel groups. For instance, one alliance partner might specialize in holding territory, while another specializes in launching offensives in new areas. Furthermore, they can share strategies and technical information. For example, Hamas is believed to have learned how to use suicide bombings through its alliance with Hezbollah (M. C. Horowitz and Potter 2013).

Third, alliances can manage conflict between members and ensure that their resources are directed toward common enemies. Weitsman (1997) argues that alliances often serve to tether powerful states to one another, so as to reduce the probability of conflict between them. Gibler (1996) finds that alliance treaties are often used to settle territorial disputes between the signatories. Similar alliances can be seen in civil wars, for example as a number of Syrian rebel groups agreed to focus their efforts in different regions of the country. This allows rebels to avoid conflict with each other. Compliance with such agreements is incentivized by the fact that reneging on the territorial arrangement would likely result in the loss of the other benefits of the alliance, such as capability aggregation.

Fourth, operating as an alliance bloc may be beneficial to the members groups in bargaining situations. An alliance with a set of coordinated demands might command greater bargaining leverage than individual members, who collectively have similar power, but a more disparate set of demands. Perhaps more crucially, alliances might mitigate credible commitment problems. Peaceful settlements to conflicts can be derailed by concerns that the other side will not adhere to the agreement (Fearon 1995). In civil wars, this is often

borne out by extreme "spoiler" factions. A rebel commitment to a peace agreement is more likely to be viewed as credible if it has formal control over other factions.

### 3.3.3 The Costs of Alliances

While the benefits are often many, most alliances between rebel groups are not without cost. The post-war political outcome, whether it comes in the form of a rebel victory or a compromise with the incumbent government, is likely to be shaped by all factions within the winning coalition. Thus, allying with another group holding differing ideologies and interests will tend to force a rebel faction to compromise on at least some issues, or to de-emphasize certain priorities. If, as I assume, rebels are motivated by political goals, the value of an alliance will decrease as its ideological similarity to its alliance partners decreases (Bapat and Bond 2012). Furthermore, any private benefits deriving from the conflict outcome (such as seats in a post-war legistlature) must be divided among the members of the winning alliance (Christia 2012). These concerns should tend to constrain the value of alliances in civil war. The existing literature finds that these concerns limit the size of rebel coalitions (Christia 2012). Logically, they should also shape the choice of partners with whom rebels ally.

### 3.3.4 The Choice of Alliance Partners

I expect that the decision to form an alliance with a particular group is shaped by two broad considerations. The first is the ideological similarity of the two groups. The second is the potential gain in capability. Consistent with the existing literature, I view the current material capabilities of a potential ally as a crucial factor, with more powerful groups making more attractive alliance partners. I depart from the literature (e.g. Christia 2012), however, by also considering the importance of access to future sources of power. Specifically, I expect that a group will evaluate a potential alliance partner not only on its current level of

capability, but also on the extent to which the group is a rival for access to future sources of power, such as natural resources or civilian populations. In other words, a rebel group with enough power to normally be an attractive partner may not be if it's strength is drawn from similar support bases as one's own group. By contrast, a relatively weak group with a completely non-overlapping support base might be an attractive ally.

A rebel group's support base is shaped by a mix of external factors such as the presence of natural resources and foreign sponsors, as well as its objectives. Some ideological objectives provide rebel groups with somewhat malleable support bases, such as those that entail the provision of public, non-rival goods to society. It is comparatively easy for groups of this sort to minimize the overlap between their support bases. By contrast, rebels that pursue private, rival goods or interests specific to certain societal groups are likely to be in competition with rebels advancing similar objectives. In the remainder of this section I classify various rebel objectives on this dimension.

Most non-sectarian ideological interests should fall into the category of public, non-rival goods. If two groups each prefer a similar goal, such as a redistributive welfare system, a greater role for Islam in government, or a devolution of power to regional governments, they will be able to enjoy the benefits of such policies regardless of which group enacts them. All else equal, goals of this sort should create common interests among the rebels who share them. Furthermore, policies of this sort tend not to have pre-defined constituencies. A rebel group based on ideology could potential convert new members or civilian supporters to its cause by spreading its beliefs. As ideologies of this sort are generally not tied to a specific ethnicity, religion, or geographic area, the pool of potential converts is quite large. Thus, groups centered around ideologies of this sort should have high potential for cooperation, as they are relatively unlikely to be rivals for support. The value of cooperation will be especially high for groups that have similar non-sectarian ideologies.

*H1: Rebel groups with similar non-sectarian ideologies should be more likely to form alliances than*

*other rebel dyads*

While groups with similar non-sectarian interests should tend not to come into competition until late in conflicts, for groups representing identity-based interests, the effect is contingent on the size of the group and malleability of group boundaries. The reason for this lies in the fact that many rebel groups rely on civilian populations for material support (Weinstein 2007), and the types of goals a group pursues is an important determinant of the malleability of civilian support coalitions. A group with broad-based policy goals might be able to persuade or coerce almost any group of citizens to support it. Thus, until a very large portion of the civilian population has been captured, groups sharing these types of goals will not be in competition over support as they can simply carve out different coalitions. Similar dynamics should occur among groups pursuing the interests of large or social groups, such as the majority ethnic or religious group. For example two Syrian rebel groups seeking to replace the Alawite-dominated Assad regime with one that embraces Sunni doctrine should find that civilian support is not particularly scarce given that Syria is majority-Sunni. Similarly, groups advocating the interests of social groups with fluid boundaries should tend to have opportunities to capture new civilian support rather than competing with similar groups over existing support. For instance, for a group advocating a Salafi-Jihadi ideology, any Sunni Muslim might serve as a potential convert.

Rebels representing minority social groups, however, should tend to come into conflict more quickly. Groups of this sort must draw their support from a social base that is both smaller and more likely to be tapped out than the bases of more broadly defined groups, and that is more rigidly bounded. A rebel group aimed at advancing the interests of a particular ethnic or religious group is unlikely to attract support from non-group members. Even if it was able to do so, this might its standing with co-ethnics/co-religionists, as rival groups could claim that it is watering down its agenda. In other words, socially-defined rebel groups seeking to expand the pool of potential support might be vulnerable to outbidding

appeals. In short, I expect that groups with the agenda of advancing the interests of majority ethnic or religious groups will be likely to cooperate with groups holding similar interests. Groups representing social minorities, however, should be unlikely to cooperate.[7]

*H2: Rebel groups representing the same majority ethnic or religious groups will be more likely to form alliances than other dyads*

Groups seeking to control the same territory should face a similar problem of rival consumption. Because secessionist claims tend to have well-defined geographic and/or ethnic boundaries, rebel groups representing such claims are likely to be in competition over a fixed pool of support. Thus, I expect that groups making similar territorial claims will be unlikely to cooperate.

*H3: Rebel groups with overlapping territorial claims will be less likely to form alliances than other dyads*

## 3.4 Conclusion

I have argued that contrary to some theoretical treatments, rebel groups do care about political aims. This fact should lead alliance ties to be most common among groups sharing similar goals. Indeed, I find that in the Syrian Civil War, shared political goals are the single most important determinant of alliance partners. I do not find support for the notion that more powerful groups should be more likely to form alliances. While I do not find evidence of religious homophily, that may be an artifact of the limited diversity of Syrian rebels. Finally, I find a null relationship between shared territorial ambitions and alliances, where I expected a negative relationship.

The finding on the importance of political goals contrasts with multiple existing theories

[7] In the present analysis, however, the Kurds are the only group to whom this logic is likely to apply, and thus I do not test this hypothesis as it would essentially be a dummy variable for the one Kurdish-Kurdish dyad.

of rebellion. The importance of political goals contrasts with the greed model of civil war, which views rebellion as being primarily aimed at procuring private material benefits for members. It also calls into question purely power-based accounts (Christia 2012), which expect rebels to be concerned with little else but winning. In addition, these results can help us to predict the dynamics of civil conflicts. If we observe a conflict with many rebel factions, but these groups share similar goals, we might expect the movement to aggregate over time. If these groups have disparate interests, however, there is a strong possibility that the conflict will remain highly fragmented. Given the severity associated with more complex conflicts, the ability to make predictions of this sort is highly valuable.

Further research in this area is needed. My hypothesized effects may simply be conditional on factors that I have yet to account for. For example, access to material support from an outside actor should reduce competition over civilian support bases or territory. In addition, this work should be replicated in other cases. As one of the most complex civil wars on record, it is possible that the dynamics in Syria do not apply in other conflicts. Finally, future work should move beyond explaining the formation of networks and explore the effects of network structure on rebel behavior. For instance, are more densely networked rebel coalitions more resilient to anti-insurgent campaigns? Do certain tactics diffuse across rebel networks?

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