Political Integration and Post-war Elections

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JOINT BRIEF SERIES: THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF DDR

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War in 1989, most peace settlements have been built upon the establishment or extension of multiparty electoral politics. Non-state armed groups have had the opportunity to form political parties and compete in post-war elections after nearly all civil wars that have ended during the last thirty years.

The opportunity for formerly armed groups to participate as full-fledged political actors in post-war politics has important implications for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes and outcomes. For instance, the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) module 2.20 on the Politics of DDR notes that 'if armed groups are to become part of the political process, they should transform themselves into entities able to operate in a transitional political administration, or electoral system'.[1] This module underscores how rebel group leaders' expectations about their ability to perform in peacetime politics may affect their

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commitment to the DDR process. They may be concerned about the fairness of electoral processes, their own ability to make a successful transition from battlefield to political arena or both. The module further notes that DDR practitioners must be aware of these concerns to help foster armed actors' confidence in and commitment to the DDR process.

The findings presented in this brief draw on our research showing that formal, constitutional participation in politics has been an attractive option for most armed opposition groups over the last thirty years.[2] In the aftermath of civil war, most armed opposition groups have had the opportunity to form political parties and to compete in post-war elections. Unless they are legally banned from doing so (a very rare outcome), the overwhelming majority of such groups do form political parties, and nearly all that do form parties go on to participate in the first post-war general elections.

Focusing on national legislative elections, we show that most parties of former rebels that engage in those first elections go on to participate in every available election thereafter. Most rebel groups in the post–Cold War period have formed viable parties that compete consistently and win non-negligible shares of the vote. Additionally, the electoral performance of these parties tends to remain fairly consistent over time. While only a handful of such parties have won national executive power – one such example being the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador – most continue to be active participants in electoral politics decades after the war. These findings generally hold true regardless of a party's prior experience in politics or the quality of democracy in the post-war period.

Such consistent participation and surprisingly robust performance suggest that electoral inclusion has indeed been an effective means to politically integrate non-state armed groups. These results can serve to bolster the confidence of wary armed group leaders about whether they can survive the transition to politics. Ultimately, addressing the political aspirations of conflict actors through electoral inclusion can help support lasting political peace. This positive outcome is most likely to be realized if post-rebel parties participate in the first elections and gain confidence from that experience; and if external actors emphasize – early and often – the importance of elections as the chief mechanism for the allocation of political power and show their willingness to back solid electoral processes through diplomatic, technical and financial support, as appropriate.

The initial step in electoral inclusion: Party formation

The opportunity for armed opposition groups to form political parties at war's end and become legitimate political actors was a core part of the liberal peace paradigm, which held that durable peace depends, in part, on creating channels for peaceful competition and broad political inclusion. Most former rebel groups – 55 per cent – seized on the chance to form parties and compete in the first post-war elections. While we find former-rebel electoral parties in dozens of countries around the globe, the largest share is in Africa, which also has the highest number of civil wars ending in this period (see Figure 1).[4]
For many groups, forming a party meant continuing the struggle, albeit without arms. The rebel-to-party transition might bring international approval, financial support and perhaps a better negotiating position in the post-war context.

What stands out about the post-rebel parties that have become consistent competitors in post-war elections? First, our research finds that parties with prior experience in politics, particularly electoral politics, were more likely to form parties than those without it. Leaders of parties that ran in past elections were likely to feel more confident about their chances in the post-war political arena. Parties with recognizable competitive 'brands', a known constituency and even latent organizational infrastructu-

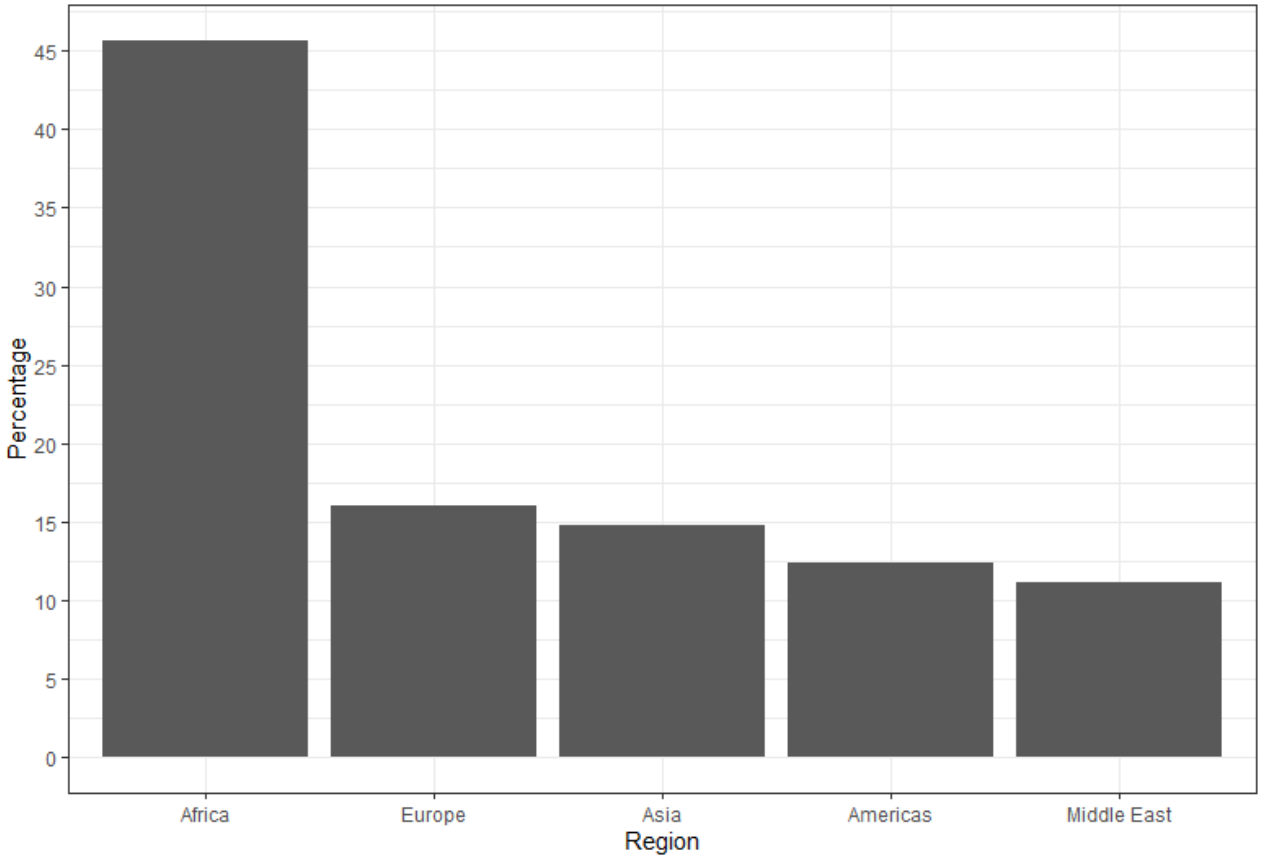

Figure 1. Regional distribution of post-rebel parties from 1990 to 2020 (N = 81 parties)

re that could link them to potential voters can expect to enjoy a competitive advantage over other opposition parties.[5] We also find that post-rebel parties have staying power, with the majority (63 per cent) competing in all subsequent post-war legislative elections.[6]

This finding supports the advice in the IDDRS module that practitioners should be careful when considering how the DDR process might affect the organizational integrity of armed opposition groups. While it is important to dismantle military capabilities, it may be desirable to preserve organizational capacities that could boost political impact. For example, in new democracies, few novice opposition parties have an organizational presence down to the local level, but many former rebel groups do. It may be advantageous to allow groups to retain this organizational structure, even while dismantling their capacity for organizing violence.[7]

The quality of elections in post-conflict countries varies widely, with some meeting the standards of liberal democracies and others having serious flaws and irregularities. More than 50 per cent of legislative elections in which post-rebel parties participated were not free and fair, with foreign election monitors often not present.[8] Yet post-rebel parties seem to find electoral participation valuable, regardless of election quality. Knowing this might make it easier for rebel leaders contemplating the transition to politics to make the initial leap. But it does not necessarily promise a more democratic future for the country.

Early electoral participation shapes the future participation and performance of these parties.

Our research finds that the majority of parties that participated in the first post-war elections went on to participate in all subsequent elections thereafter. Moreover, early electoral participation determines both the future participation and performance of the-

se parties. Parties that did not participate in the first post-war elections rarely entered politics later on. And those with lacklustre performance in the early elections rarely went on to improve this performance, at least not without joining a coalition with other parties.

How civil conflict ends is also important. When wars end in negotiated settlements, post-rebel party performance ranges across the full spectrum. But when armed opposition groups end the war through military victory, the political parties they form tend to become dominant, winning 60 per cent or more of legislative seats across all elections. Parties formed out of rebel groups that lost their wars are rare, and they usually win few or no seats.

Post-rebel parties also perform better, and for longer, when their wartime rallying cry retains political salience after the war. Such parties do not have to work as hard to adapt to electoral politics, because their political agendas still remain attractive to voters, and they can present themselves as the party that fought for these ideals. In country contexts where these appeals are no longer salient, as was the case with the Serbian Democratic Party in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, parties must work to identify new appeals along different issue lines to compete for votes.[9]

LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND: THE CASE OF SINN FEIN

Leaving the 'Armalite and ballot box' strategy behind, Sinn Fein has responded to the policy preferences of new generations. The party no longer solely identifies with Irish Republicanism but also pursues political objectives focused on climate change, gender equality and social welfare. These changes in policy emphasis enabled the party to appeal to a larger audience and capture the vote of young generations who did not witness or suffer from violence from the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The party leadership also underwent a massive change, given the IRA's fading influence. Gerry Adams' cult of personality has been dismissed, as Mary Lou McDonald became the party's new leader in 2018 and the opposition leader in 2020. She is the first female to occupy such a position, and she has received massive support from the party's supporters.

Finally, the presence of older parties that predate the transition to peace means post-rebel parties will face stronger competitive challenges in politics. Another key aspect of political context – the design of the electoral system – had less impact on post-rebel party performance than expected. This suggests that other factors can trump institutional effects in post-war contexts.

What are the long-term effects of electoral participation?

Does electoral inclusion create the necessary foundation for lasting peace? Research shows that it can, even though the path might not be direct. Electoral inclusion solves the short-term problem of getting insurgents to trade bullets for ballots. Electoral politics has been accepted as a substitute for armed conflict over the long-term by around one-quarter of the parties we studied. And over the long term, by regularly competing in elections, winning enough seats to gain representation and establishing linkages with voters, post-rebel parties can help build institutionalized party systems that can anchor durable peace. Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland is an example of a party that pursued long-lasting peace and has made critical adaptations in recent years.

The story is not all positive, however. The most stable of these systems revolve around the same social, economic or political cleavages which belligerents used to mobilize support during wartime. In some cases, the terms of the peace accord helped to entrench these cleavages, as in Bosnia, where ethnonationalism is baked into the constitution's design. In these and other cases, successful and determined post-rebel party competitors work hard to ensure that the legacies of the war remain front and centre. Instead of shifting their campaign appeals to issues of economic development or addressing other pressing current-day problems, these parties are more likely to direct voters' attention back to the issues that divide them. Lastly, elections do not guarantee enduring peace for these post-rebel parties. Around 12 per cent

of groups that formed a party and participated in elections returned to armed conflict at some point in the post-war period. The majority of this small group (8 parties out of 10) never returned to politics, while both Renamo in Mozambique and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in Angola came back to address their political aspirations through electoral politics.

Moreover, elections are not always guarantors of democracy. Autocrats also use elections to legitimize their power or to exercise control within their ruling party.[11] The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) in Cambodia are cases in point. In addition, corruption and fraud are routine parts of post-war politics in many electoral democracies, including Kosovo, Bosnia and El Salvador, for example. The quality of democratic processes depends on a wide range of factors: the behaviour of post-rebel and other parties, especially incumbents, the strength and quality of election administration, and so on.

Finally, as Mozambique's experience shows, even if post-rebel parties embrace electoral politics wholeheartedly, they may still retain the capacity to organize violence against the state. External interveners can help to delegitimize the practice of treating politics and violence as complementary strategies. Thus, external actors should be united in their commitment to the promotion of peaceful politics as truly 'the only game in town'.

Conclusions and implications

Can electoral politics be a viable alternative to civil war? We argue that it can, and our research supports several practical recommendations for practitioners. First, the political integration of former insurgents must begin in the first post-war election or it is unlikely to happen at all. After their initial involvement, these parties tend to have considerable staying power. Thus, we recommend that practitioners give transitional elections careful consideration. How might the DDR process build confidence and help reduce practical obstacles to the rebel-to-party transition? Comprehensive peace agreements should make it clear

ELECTIONS REMAIN KEY TO DURABLE PEACE IN MOZAMBIQUE, DESPITE THE RESUMPTION OF HOSTILITIES

Mozambique's experience highlights how elections became and remained the essential core of any peace deal after armed hostilities resumed. This is all the more striking due to the fact that Renamo had no prior experience as a political party at the war's end. From the end of the civil war in 1992 until 2009, Renamo ran on the identity it had established in wartime – as the representative of all those excluded from the ruling Frelimo party's monopoly on political and economic opportunity. This allowed the party to garner an average of more than 40 per cent of legislative seats in the first three post-war elections. The party's legislative seat share fell as new electoral parties entered the game and a lucrative new economy increased the legitimacy of the ruling party.

While would-be democratic reformers in the party pushed for changes to make it more competitive, the ruling party's willingness to manipulate elections weakened those voices. Meanwhile, as the economic stakes of maintaining political power spiked with the extractive resource boom, Frelimo's commitment to electoral politics also waned. As it become clear to Renamo militants that elections were no longer a reliable avenue to political inclusion, the party returned instead to violence. In 2013, it returned to arms and began a seven-year, low-intensity insurgency. Both Renamo and Frelimo proved willing to return to war to revise their 1992 political settlement. But both parties also took pains to secure a ceasefire that would allow the next general elections to go forward in 2014.

Voter support for Renamo surged in the next election, earning the party 36 per cent of legislative seats. This result seemed to validate Renamo's return to arms. But it also boosted the party's confidence that elections could work for them. Negotiations between Renamo and the government continued, now focused on reintegration and improving the inclusion of Renamo members in the defence and security forces.

Ultimately, the new peace deal – brokered in 2019 with the help of the Swiss government and other external partners – reaffirmed electoral politics as the core of the settlement, putting an end to this violent interlude. It should be noted that both Renamo and the ruling Frelimo party were willing to use violence as an alternative to politics. Mozambique's ultimately positive outcome highlights the importance of outside actors using diplomatic pressure to urge governments to hew to international standards of free and fair elections.

that elections are a central part of the peace process and outline how they will be protected as such. Practitioners should remain steadfast and united in their refusal to accept violence as an alternative or complement to peaceful politics. Instead, they should make an early and enduring commitment to promoting democratic norms and procedures as the only basis for peace that they are willing to support.

Next, without guaranteeing a secure and fair electoral environment, we cannot expect these parties to accept electoral politics as a legitimate alternative to war. While even imperfect elections can play a key role in building a stable political settlement, a pattern of poor election administration, outright electoral fraud, or manipulation of rules to limit competition in undemocratic ways can fatally undermine trust in electoral politics. As our second recommendation, we therefore argue that international and domestic actors must continue to work to strengthen election administration and electoral processes. In addition, comprehensive peace agreements should aim to support parties in the development of transparent mechanisms of internal party governance and reduce the availability of violence as a 'complementary' route to political integration in addition to the existing IDDRS suggestions. Electoral politics helps to build strong, resilient parties only when leaders believe that elections are the decisive (or at least the most important) means of accessing political power and when they believe that they have a reasonable chance of winning votes.

International actors have successfully supported post-rebel parties through challenges of demilitarization after war's end. In a few cases, as with Renamo in Mozambique, financial support by donors was both extensive and critical to the transition. As a third recommendation, we suggest that international organizations should produce novel mechanisms that can aid these political parties to develop and institutionalize a stable party structure. All post-rebel parties can benefit from expert opinions, consultancy services and exposure to practices of deliberative and participatory democracy that can expand on mobilizing non-supporter voters, campaign financing, policy recommendations, social media education, party recruitment or canvassing. In doing this work, external actors should work closely with organizations that hold local knowledge (such as women's organizations, local and youth leaders or civil society organisations). Support for civil society actors builds a political space that accommodates a variety of interests, creates space for a plurality of voices and different political coalitions around a range of issues. Over time, the development of civil society can dilute the power of former armed actors to dominate the political space.

Sooner or later, all parties face a moment when the strategies, electoral appeals and organizational routines that had worked for them in the past begin to falter. Electoral inclusion over the long term may involve a trade-off between stability and conflict transformation. As the case of Renamo reminds us, some of these parties still retain the military capacity and the willingness to use violence to achieve their goals. Especially when such parties have been regular participants over decades, their choices at this moment can be decisive for the future of electoral politics. Does the party renew its commitment to electoral politics, adapt its ideological appeals, improve its candidate selection or seek new alliances? Or does it withdraw from elections and resort to violence to regain relevance? This may constitute a critical juncture for carefully considered engagement by international actors to strengthen electoral processes, support organizational development for parties and provide support for conflict management. Hence, practitioners could support local and international efforts to increase transparency and professionalize election administration, offer opportunities for parties to learn from the experience of successful rebel-to-party transitions in other countries and share knowledge and experiences about processes for managing electoral conflict that have been successful in similar contexts.

Endnotes

[1] See more about IDDRS: https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-2.20-The-Politics-of-DDR.pdf

[2] Carrie Manning. 2004. 'Armed opposition groups into political parties: Comparing Bosnia, Kosovo, and Mozambique.' Studies in Comparative International Development, 39(1): 54–76; Carrie Manning. 2007. 'Party-building on the heels of war: El Salvador, Bosnia, Kosovo and Mozambique.' Democratisation, 14(2): 253–272; Carrie Manning and Ian Smith. 2016. 'Political party formation by former armed opposition groups after civil war.' Democratization, 23(6), 972–989; Carrie Manning and Ian Smith. 2019. 'Electoral performance by post-rebel parties.' Government and Opposition, 54(3): 415–453; Carrie Manning, Ian Smith and Ozlem Tuncel. 'Rebel with a cause: Introducing the Post-Rebel Electoral Parties Dataset.' Manuscript submitted; Carrie Manning and Ozlem Tuncel. 'Building democracy after war? Post-rebel electoral parties and the construction of stable party systems.' Unpublished manuscript.

[3] For a brief overview of liberal peacebuilding in critical perspective, see Roland Paris, 'Saving Liberal Peacebuilding.' Review of International Studies 36(2): 337-365.

[4] Aila M. Matanock and Paul Staniland. 2018. 'How and why armed groups participate in elections.' Perspectives on Politics 16(3): 710–727; Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs and Sophia Hatz. 2016. 'Rebel-to-party transformations in civil war peace processes 1975–2011.' Democratization 23(6): 990–1008.

[5] Jennifer Raymond Dresden. 2017. 'From combatants to candidates: Electoral competition and the legacy of armed conflict.' Conflict Management and Peace Science 34(3): 240–263.

[6] More than 20 per cent of these parties have competed in at least five electoral contests over two decades or more. Only around 13 per cent of these parties never contest a single election.

[7] Organizational structure is also discussed in John Ishiyama's 'Rebel party organization and durable peace after civil conflict'; Matthew Whiting and Sophie Whiting's 'DDR and post-war politics: lessons from Northern Ireland ' and Véronique Dudouet and Claudia Cruz Almeida's 'Political engagement by former armed groups outside party politics'. 2022. Joint brief series on the Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW and UNDPO/OROLSI/DDR.

[8] We used the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset for this information. To read more about NELDA, see Susan D. Hyde and Nikolay Marinov. 2012. 'Which elections can be lost?' Political Analysis, 20(2), 191-201.

[9] For a discussion of how wartime cleavages are moderated, reconfigured, and abandoned through intersecting electoral, patrimonial, and state-building logics, see Jacqui Cho and Gyda Sindre. 2022. 'Ideological moderation in armed groups turned political parties. Joint brief series on the Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW and UNDPO/OROLSI/DDR.

[10] Scott Mainwaring (ed.). 2018. Party Systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, Decay, and Collapse. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan. 1990 [1967]. 'Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments. In Peter Mair (ed.), The West European Party System. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[11] Yonatan Morse. 2020. How Autocrats Compete: Parties, Patrons, and Unfair Elections in Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development. FBA has since 2005 supported research primarily through its international Research Working Groups.
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The Politics After War (PAW) is a research network for collaborative activities and knowledge sharing among researchers interested in dynamics of party politics, political mobilisation, state-society relations and the state in post-civil war contexts.

The United Nations Department of Peace Operations, Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions: DDR Section (UNDPO/OROLSI/DDR) established in 2007, deploys peacekeepers who, as early peacebuilders, assist conflict-affected countries in re-establishing the rule of law and security institutions necessary to build and sustain peace. It includes five components: Police Division; Justice and Corrections Service; Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Section; Security Sector Reform Unit; and UN Mine Action Service.