

Rebel party organization and durable peace after civil conflict

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JOINT BRIEF SERIES: THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF DDR

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Introduction

Under what conditions does rebel group political inclusion contribute to peace after civil conflict? A central answer to this question lies with the former rebel groups’ organizational structure, and in particular whether former combatants can maintain unity to keep their followers committed to maintaining the peace. As armed groups transform into political parties, tensions often arise that divide the leadership who might be seeking a way to gain power from the rank-and-file who often fought in the war for ideological or ideational reasons. These internal divisions may be subsumed during civil war but are often activated as the rebel group transforms into a political party and no longer faces a common enemy to unify its factions. Such divisions can lead to a split in the rebel party, and in many cases to resumption of civil war. This is especially the case if split occurs during the uncertain period right after the signing of the peace settlement and before demilitarization has been completed. Subsequent party fragmentation may weaken the electoral standing of former rebel parties. Drawing on



the author's extensive research on the political transformation of armed groups, this research brief delves into the question of the conditions under which rebel group inclusion promotes peace after civil conflict. It first discusses the general link between inclusion and peace duration before discussing the importance of the rebel organization to this question. It then focuses on how internal splits in former rebel parties can be avoided, followed by a discussion of what kind of political parties former rebel parties form.² The brief focuses solely on formerly armed groups that have transformed into political parties and competed in elections, defining a political party as an identifiable political group that participates in elections in an organized fashion under an official label.³

Does rebel group inclusion lead to durable peace?

The question of whether rebel group inclusion leads to durable peace is closely linked, to whether the former rebels are committed to and trust the power-sharing arrangements embedded in the peace settlement and whether their formal political inclusion is secured in the long term. Our research into this question finds that the mere opportunity to participate in elections is not enough to secure former rebels' commitment to peace. Crucially, gaining access to power, here taken to mean inclusion into either the legislature or the executive (i.e., the principal policymaking and policy-implementing institutions⁴), is key to long-term sustainable peace.

Importantly, our study – which is based on an original dataset that include all identified negotiated settlements from 1979-2014⁵ – finds that when one or more of the significant former rebel parties are excluded, it dramatically increases the likelihood that civil war will resume. Interestingly, our research finds that the overall level of legislative representation of former rebel parties does not impact the likelihood of conflict resumption – indicating that even a low seat share can have positive impact on peace duration. Therefore, what matters the most is not the

level of representation in a legislature but whether any significant political actors are left out. In other words, just as exclusion from peace negotiations and from initial electoral participation (short-term inclusion) prevents the emergence of 'spoilers', long-term exclusion of any major relevant parties from the legislature dramatically increases the likelihood of a return to civil war. Although access to executive power is also found to be important in dampening the likelihood of civil war and resumed hostilities, the key factor appears to be whether or not major former rebel parties are excluded from representation in governing institutions in general.

What explains the emergence of factions within former rebel parties?

Former rebel parties split up because motivational drivers differ between factions. Like all political parties, armed groups turned political parties have internal fault lines between those who join the party for ideational reasons – that is, attraction to the cause or the psychological benefits of being part of something greater than themselves – and those who seek career advancement and power or material benefits. While these are certainly not mutually exclusive reasons (most participants are motivated by both), each individual member is driven by one or the other to a greater or lesser extent. When rebel groups enter electoral contests, and especially if they win seats in office, it is likely to activate the office-seeking impulse within the party. This means that some existing leaders are transformed into ambitious politicians, and outside individuals are attracted to the party by its potential as a vehicle for their own political ambitions.

However, the differences between ideationally motivated members of the organization and office-seekers are more acute in former rebel parties than in other parties that have not engaged in civil war. Because potential participants face such high risks for participating in the conflict in exchange for limited the personal benefits, it is often the case that the largest proportion of armed group members are those who

are attracted for reasons other than ‘administrative capital’. Offering the social incentive of fighting for a good cause instead of loot is likely to generate highly committed and ideologically oriented members.⁶ These individuals are unlikely to hold a favourable view towards compromising their ideals and values for the sake of electoral gain.

In other words, as the armed group transforms from an organization designed to fight a civil war to one designed to compete in elections, tension emerges between those who believed in the cause and those who participated for reasons of personal ambition. For the former, even the act of participation in a power-sharing agreement can represent a ‘selling out’ of the movement’s principles.

The fact that these parties must expand their organization by incorporating diverse sections of the population to succeed in electoral politics also contributes to internal discord within them. As happened with the Communist Party Maoist in Nepal, the inclusion of the new entrants only exacerbated intra-party conflict, especially when the party won the first post-war general election. While access to resources should give an opportunity to build patronage networks and distribute collective incentives, it is likely to have an adverse effect on the internal cohesion of rebel parties. Most party activists are more concerned with committed ideological goals than they are with immediate benefits. Thus, if a former rebel party depends on different kinds of members, many of whom seek ideological goals, then intra-party conflict may deepen once the party joins the governing coalition.

How to stave off divisions in former rebel parties

There are multiple ways in which all political parties, including former rebel parties, can stave off such divisions. The first is via clientelism, where access to state resources allows parties to expand their organization and maintain internal cohesion

EXAMPLES WHERE INTERNAL SPLITS IN A REBEL PARTY LED TO THE RESUMPTION OF CIVIL WAR: DJIBOUTI AND NEPAL

The 1994 post-war split in Djibouti’s FRUD party

One example of a split in a rebel party leading to a resumption of civil war occurred in 1994 in Djibouti, where the ‘radical wing’ of the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD), led by Ahmed Dini Ahmed, rejected the peace agreement that had been signed by the moderate FRUD leader Ali Mohamed Daoud, and thus perpetuated the civil war. The moderate wing joined the government, and Daoud became a minister as part of a FRUD alliance with the ruling party.

The 2012 and 2014 splits in Nepal’s Communist Party Maoists

Nepal provides another example of a split in a rebel party leading to the resumption of civil war. The Communist Party Maoists effectively won the constituent assembly election in 2008, two years after the end of the 1996-2006 Nepalese Civil War. The Communist Party Maoists became the largest political party in 2008, and their leader, Prachanda, was elected prime minister. However, this success was followed by splits in the party, as radicals accused the party leadership of selling out the revolution. In 2012 and 2014, different splinter groups were formed, fighting irregular wars against the Nepalese government until March 2021

by distributing incentives selectively. A second way that parties can hold disparate groups together is by emphasizing an ideology or program. By emphasizing programs, parties mobilize and unify their disparate constituencies by providing enough of an ideological platform for voters to understand the implications of their vote, beyond the immediate provision of public goods. This creates a much deeper connection to the voter.⁷

A third way to maintain party unity is through personalism – the creation of ties of loyalty to a charismatic leader. However, this is the weakest kind of linkage to bind parties together, because such ties are ultimately unsustainable: once the individual leader is gone, the linkage dissipates.⁸ A fourth way to maintain party cohesion is to develop ‘organizational thickness’ in the party. An organizationally ‘thick’ party is one in which there is a distinct inter-

nal party bureaucracy and a permanent staff with local offices, ensuring that party officeholders toe the ideological line.⁹ A fifth way to overcome the inevitable fissures that arise is to develop mechanisms of internal democracy and a distribution of power among the different levels of leadership. This is one way to provide ‘voice’ to various groups within parties.¹⁰

What kind of political parties do former armed groups form?

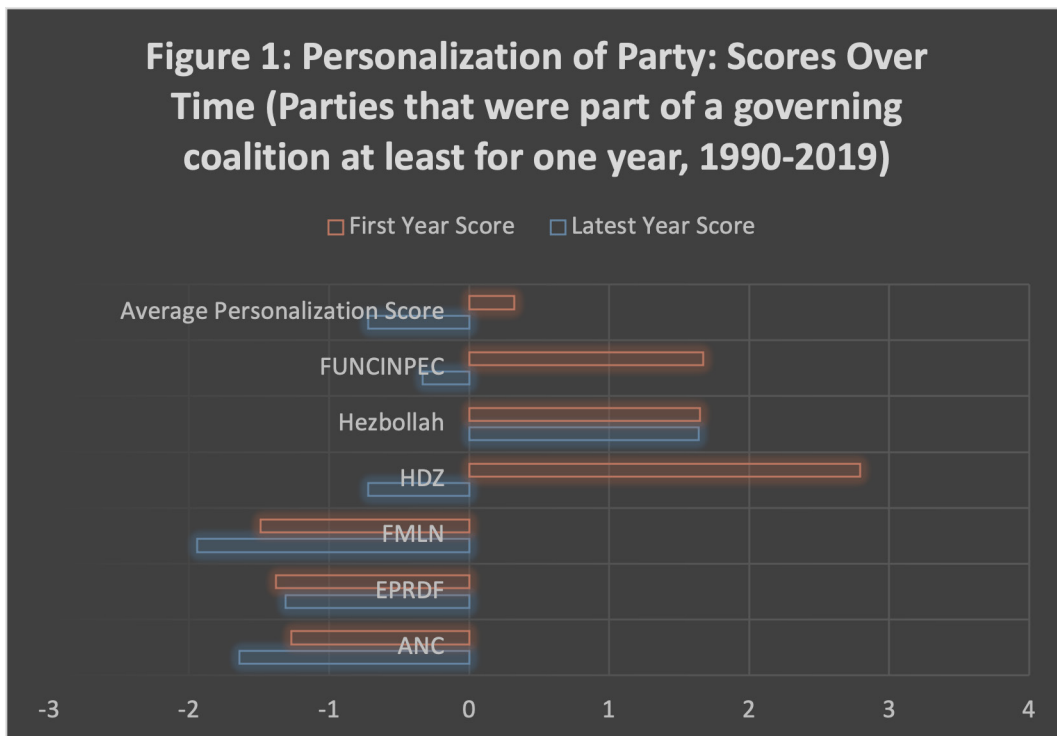
Recent research shows that former rebel parties are more likely to have developed local organizational networks than other kinds of parties in the countries¹² in which they compete. This suggests that former rebel parties start out with a degree of organizational thickness that may help them survive. However, survival involves persistence over time. Former rebel parties that persist over at least five consecutive election cycles are, in most aspects, not different from other political parties in post-civil war countries. Table 1 shows the party characteristics of such persistent parties compared to all other parties in civil war-affected countries, considering a total of 761 cases. Notably, former rebel parties are neither more or less clientelist than other parties,

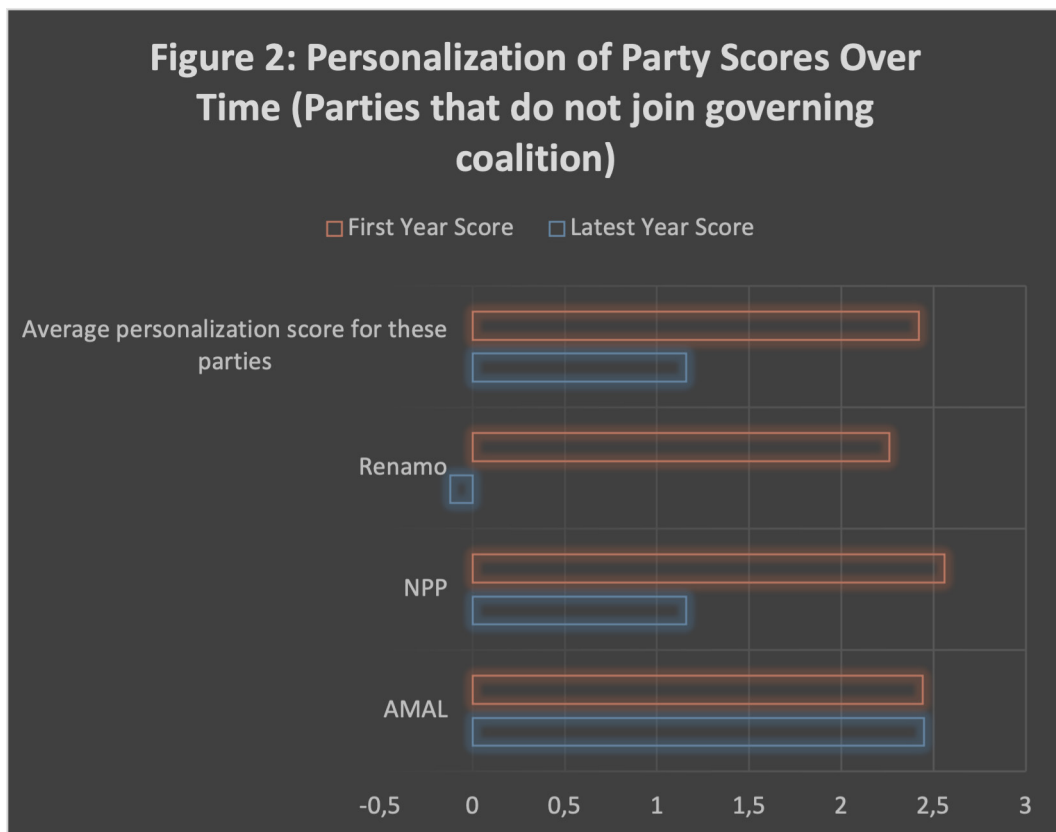
Table 1: Formerly Armed Groups and Political Party Organizational Characteristics.¹³

Variable	Model 1: Clientelism	Model 2: Internal Cohesion on Program	Model 3 Personalism	Model 4 Local Organization	Model 5 Candidate Nomination
Former rebel parties	-.07 (.25)	-.05 (.32)	.68*** (.23)	.47 (.37)	-.31 (.25)
Ethnically based parties	.34 (.36)	-.08 (.34)	.08 (.47)	.21 (.27)	.58 (.42)
Religiously based parties	-.20*** (.07)	.14 (.09)	.19** (.10)	.07 (.10)	.04 (.08)
Left-Right placement	.10* (.05)	.03 (.08)	.18** (.08)	-.15* (.08)	-.06 (.07)
Party vote Share	.01** (.00)	.01 (.00)	.01** (.00)	.03**** (.00)	.00 (.00)
constant	-.02 (.23)	-.04 (.22)	-.24 (.23)	-.43* (.24)	-.23 (.20)
	N=761	N=745	N=745	N=746	N=745

nor are they more or less programmatic. The study findings also show that persistent successor parties are neither more or less organizationally dense than other parties, nor more or less internally democratic. However, interestingly, the research shows that these parties are significantly more personalistic than other parties in the countries in which they compete (see the results marked in yellow in Table 1). One possible interpretation of these results is that one of the survival strategies of a persistent successor party is to be affiliated with a ‘great leader’, and that one key to their persistence is being associated with such a personality. Identification with a personality also makes the party more recognizable to voters.

However, persistent parties follow different paths than other parties. As Figures 1 and 2 show, there are important differences between parties that join a governing coalition and those that do not.¹⁴ The results suggest two different paths for persistent rebel parties. Although on the whole, persistent rebel parties are more personalistic than other parties within the same country, as indicated by the general results in Table 1, persistent rebel parties that enter the governing coalition are less personalistic than parties that do not enter a governing coalition. Indeed, with the notable exception of Hezbollah in Lebanon, governing parties became less personalistic over time. Then again, so do non-governing parties, although these parties remain significantly more personalistic than persistent governing rebel parties.





These results suggest that rebel party persistence can be attained in two distinct ways. First, rebel parties that are able to gain access to governing resources are more likely to persist. Hence, parties that join the governing coalition persist but are also much less personalistic than non-governing rebel parties. Second, rebel parties that maintain loyalty to a charismatic leader can also persist. Nonetheless, the demise or imprisonment of this leader results in reduced personalization of the party. This explains the patterns illustrated by Renamo in Mozambique following the death of its leader, Afonso Dhlakama, in 2018, as well as by the imprisonment of Charles Taylor, former leader of the National Patriotic Party NPP in Liberia.¹⁵

Whether the personalist rebel parties can survive as parties or choose to restart civil conflict remains to be seen. In many ways, these parties are far more likely to be disruptive than parties that have joined the governing coalition.

Conclusions and implications

This research brief has identified organizational factors that help clarify the conditions under which rebel group inclusion helps promote durable peace after conflict. As the brief has also highlighted, gaining access to power is key to sustainable peace in the long run, but it is also important to note that even a low seat share can have positive impact on the durability of peace. What matters the most is not the level of representation in the legislature but whether any significant political actors are left out.

The brief has also identified ways in which former rebel parties can stave off internal division. An important reason why policymakers should be interested in maintaining the cohesion of these groups is because they are often partners to a peace agreement. If that partner dissolves – and not just in the short term – it makes it more difficult to hold

members of the former armed group to the terms of the agreement and can lead to the resumption of civil war. This happened in Nepal and could possibly happen in Colombia as well, depending on the future of FARC.

But as this research brief has shown, inclusion in competitive politics may actually exacerbate the tendency to split, particularly due to the way it can pit the political leadership against the party's rank and file. The findings show that personalistic parties may survive this transition better than other parties. But even if this is the case, inclusion does appear to stave off severe splits. For example, even with the Maoists in Nepal, the bulk of the party's followers did not return to armed conflict, which might suggest that access to resources allowed leaders such as Prachanda to contain any further splintering of the party.

This may mean that a 'devil's bargain' is required in the initial peace settlement. For many rebel parties, survival is associated with connections to a charismatic leader, so keeping such leaders in positions of authority – even those that may be implicated in war crimes – may be key to maintaining the unity of former rebel parties and hence peace. However, such charismatically oriented parties are unlikely to survive in the long run, particularly after the demise of the leader. Ultimately, political inclusion of the former rebel party, particularly in governing coalitions, may be the most effective way to co-opt the group, moderate its political positions, enhance its organizational capacities and persuade it to participate in the political process as a constructive partner in building peace. In particular, access to patronage resources with which leaders can reward their followers and draw them into the political process will help to build peace. Inclusion can come in many forms, such as guaranteeing positions in cabinet or assisting former rebel parties to develop electoral resources and technologies to assist in their campaigns.

But whether inclusion works ultimately depends on the party. There is always the danger that a former

rebel party may use inclusion as a way to buy time to rearm for a future resumption of hostilities. Thus, although inclusion into the executive – which, unlike reserved seats in parliament, guarantees access to patronage resources – may be the best remedy for the resumption of conflict, such inclusion should be dependent on certain conditions, such as the official renunciation of violence and verifiable disarmament. By doing so, a renunciation of violence significantly increases the likelihood of both increased seat shares and inclusion in the executive.¹⁶ A key part of this solution, however, is to persuade rebel party leaders that they are secure enough to put away their weapons and renounce violence.

Endnotes

¹ See more about IDDRS:

<https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-2.20-The-Politics-of-DDR.pdf>

² E.g. John Ishiyama. 2019. 'Identity change and rebel party political success.' *Government and Opposition* 54(3): 454-484; John Ishiyama and Michael Marshall. 2015. 'Candidate recruitment and former rebel parties.' *Party Politics* 21, 4; Michael Marshall and John Ishiyama, 2016. 'Does political inclusion of rebel parties promote peace after civil conflict?' *Democratization* 23 (6): 1009-1025.

³ C.f. John Ishiyama and Michael Marshall. 2015. 'Candidate Recruitment and Former Rebel Parties.' *Party Politics* 21(4): 591-602; Gyda M. Sindre. 2014. 'Rebels and aid in the context of peacebuilding and humanitarian disaster: A comparison of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Tamil Tigers (LTTE).' *Forum for Development Studies* 41: 1-21.

⁴ We do not include the judiciary because, unlike other political institutions, the judiciary is not a primary policymaking or policy-implementing body. For the legislature, we conceive of inclusion as involving the proportion of seats in the entire legislature held by rebel groups (see Michael Marshall and John Ishiyama. 2016. 'Does political inclusion of rebel parties promote peace

after civil conflict.' *Democratization* 23(6):1009-1025.

⁵ The dataset is based on all identified negotiated settlements from the Uppsala-PRIO Armed Conflict Data Project (UCDP). The study does not consider civil wars that ended in victory of the government or the rebels, nor does it include non-settlement cases (Marshall and Ishiyama, op. cit.)

⁶ Jeremy Weinstein. 2017 *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

⁷ Herbert Kitschelt. 2009. 'Linkages between citizens and politicians in democratic politics.' *Comparative Political Studies* 33(6-7): 854.

⁸ *Ibid*, 855.

⁹ Gunther and Diamond. 2003. See also Ozlem Tuncel, Carrie Manning and Ian Smith. 'Political integration and post war politics.' 2022. Joint brief series on the Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW and UN DPO/OROLSI/DDR.

¹⁰ Maurice Duverger. Janda 1980. *Political Parties*. London: Methuen, 1963, p. 52

¹¹ John Ishiyama and Post Basnet. April 2021. 'What kinds of parties do

former rebel groups become?' Paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association annual conference, Chicago Illinois. USA. This research employed a cross-national dataset developed by the Varieties of Democracy's (V-Dem) Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V-Party) (Anna Lührmann et al. *Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V-Party) Dataset V1*, 2020. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. <https://doi.org/10.23696/vpartydsv1>) To identify all of the former rebel parties, Daly's (2020) dataset was used to derive a list of 129 former rebel groups (Daly, Sarah Zukerman. 'Political life after civil wars: Introducing the Civil War Successor Party dataset.' *Journal of Peace Research* 58(4): 839-848).

¹² The author draws on Carrie Manning and Ian Smith 2019. 'Electoral performance by post-rebel parties.' *Government and Opposition* 54(3): 415-453, who identify 16 former rebel parties that have persisted across at least five consecutive elections. Out of those 16 parties, 9 were recorded in the V-DemP dataset that the author has used to conduct the analysis. The nine parties were the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), Hezbollah, Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Farabundo Marti

National Liberation Front (FMLN), Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), African National Congress (ANC), Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), National Patriotic Party (NPP- Liberia) and AMAL Movement (Lebanon).

¹³ * = P < .10, ** = P < .05, *** = P < .01, **** = P < .001.

. Table 1 reports the results of a regression analysis where several control variables are introduced that represent alternative explanations for organizational characteristics. These include: (1) whether the party was an ethnically based party, (2) whether the party was a religiously based party, (3) the ideological orientation of the party, and (4) the size of the party in terms of vote share. Since organizational characteristics change over time, the unit of analysis is party year (as recorded in VdemP), which yielded 745 cases.

¹⁴ I.e., results for the nine parties that were both persistent and had reported personalism scores in VdemP.

¹⁵ It is rumored that Charles Taylor still directs the NPP from prison, which might explain the level of personalization of the NPP.

¹⁶ John Ishiyama. 2019. 'Identity change and rebel party political success.' *Government and Opposition* 54(3): 454-484.

How to refer to this brief:

Ishiyama, John. 2022. Rebel party organization and durable peace after civil conflict. Joint brief series: The Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW and UNDP/OORLSI DDR Sectio

Author biography

John Ishiyama is a University Distinguished Research Professor at the University of North Texas and the president of the American Political Science Association. A leading expert on political parties, he has conducted extensive research on rebel-to-party transformation. A founding member of the PAW-network, he is also the editor of the special issue of *Democratization*, *From Bullets to Ballots* (2016) and the co-editor of the book *From Guns to Governing* (forthcoming, Routledge).

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. These are composed of well-merited scholars from universities and research institutes worldwide who conduct scientific research on issues related to FBA's areas of expertise.

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 (UNDP/OORLSI/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.

