

**When Organizations Rebel:  
Introducing the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (FORGE) Dataset**

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ABSTRACT: Scholars have spent decades investigating various sources of rebellion, from societal and institutional explanations to individual motivations to take up arms against one's government. One element of the civil war process that has gone largely unstudied from a cross-national perspective is the role pre-existing organizations in society play in the formation of rebel groups, principally due to a lack of comparable data on the origins of these armed actors across conflicts. In an effort to fill this gap, we present the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (FORGE) dataset, which offers information on the "parent" organizations and the founding processes that gave rise to rebel groups active between 1946 and 2011 in intrastate conflicts included in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Armed Conflict Database. The new information on rebel foundations introduced in this research note should help scholars to reconsider and newly explore a variety of conditions before, during, and after civil wars including rebel-civilian interactions, structures of rebel organizations, bargaining processes with the government, participation in post-war governance, and more.

Dissident organizations that wage civil wars against their government rarely arise from nothing; over 95% of rebel groups active during intrastate conflicts included in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) Armed Conflict Database drew their initial membership from some sort of pre-existing named organization, or at the very least, from an identifiable ethnic or refugee community. Some governments like those in Chile and Ghana have only ever faced significant anti-government violence from within their own militaries. Conversely, countries like Myanmar, Ethiopia, and India combat a considerable number of insurgencies with myriad organizational backgrounds, from university student groups and opposition political parties to pre-existing rebel groups and terrorist organizations. These varied societal foundations should have bearings on dynamics of rebel organizational structures, governance, diplomacy, alliances, and so on. Yet, while we may know a considerable amount about the formation processes of major organizations like the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone or Fidel Castro's *Movimiento 26 de Julio*, there are countless other rebel groups where little to nothing is known regarding their origin stories.

Thanks to a growing amount of group-level data collection projects, we have an ever-improving sense of rebel characteristics and activities during civil wars around the world, from gender composition and leadership dynamics to service provision, diplomacy, and maintenance of political and judicial institutions (see, e.g., Cunningham and Sawyer 2019; Huang 2016a, 2016b; Loyle and Binningsbø 2018; Prorok 2016; Stewart 2018; Wood and Thomas 2017). We also know an increasing amount about the post-conflict activities of former rebel groups including electoral participation and transitional justice mechanisms (e.g. Binningsbø et al. 2012; Matanock 2016). However, one critical gap that remains in appreciating the "life cycle" of rebel groups pertains to their origins: which actors in society gave rise to these violent non-state groups? Do different conditions motivate different types of organizations to eschew legal and nonviolent strategies and

instead take up arms in pursuit of some desired change to the political order? How do different foundations of rebel groups shape their trajectories within the course of a conflict, and beyond?

In order to address these and many other questions related to civil wars, we collected information on the organizations that gave rise to rebellion. The Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (FORGE) dataset provides information about the formation and pre-war traits of 428 rebel groups included in the UCDP Actor List and the Non-State Actor Dataset from 1946 to 2011 (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013).<sup>1</sup> In this research note we summarize some of the existing literature that provided our motivation for collecting the FORGE data, describe the process by which we gathered information and constructed key variables, present some interesting patterns in the dataset, and offer examples and discussion of how the FORGE dataset could be used in future studies of civil wars around the world.

### **Theoretical motivations for the FORGE project**

The creation of FORGE was originally motivated by two trends in conflict studies. First, recent work in comparative politics demonstrates that the micro-foundations of rebellion—especially a rebel group’s social “embeddedness” and ties to the broader population—have important bearings on conflict dynamics (e.g. Larson and Lewis 2018; Lewis 2017; Parkinson 2013; Reno 2007; Sarbahi 2014; Staniland 2012, 2014; Weinstein 2006). These relationships presumably

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<sup>1</sup> Armed non-state actors included in the UCDP Actor List that were not clearly identifiable as a named rebel organization, such as “Croatian Irregulars” or “Kashmiri Insurgents” are not included in this version of FORGE, because it was not possible to identify foundational organizations for undefined groups of this nature. We also did not include rebel groups that only participated in anti-colonial conflicts, such as the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) which fought against the United Kingdom. However, groups that fought both anti-colonial conflicts as well as subsequent civil wars against their own independent government, like UNITA in Angola, are included in this initial version of FORGE. We plan to add exclusively anti-colonial groups in a future version of the database.

enable rebel groups to recruit troops, fight longer campaigns, and survive government counterinsurgency efforts. It is very likely that rebel connections to local communities are not merely a function of geographic proximity, but instead feed from the foundations of the rebel group itself.

Second, quantitative work on actor fragmentation and splintering established that the dynamic process of how rebels emerge (or fall apart) is central to our understanding of civil war and conflict resolution (c.f. Cunningham 2006, Cunningham 2013, Fjelde and Nilsson 2012). Several questions emerged at the intersection of these works. Are rebels with different types of connections to civilians more resistant to counterinsurgency and splintering? Do specific patterns of civilian-rebel connections make splintering more likely even without effective counterinsurgency? Do the lessons we draw from cases like the Kashmir war, which is incredibly fragmented on a variety of dimensions, hold in other contexts? We have previously lacked comparable cross-conflict data on rebel group origins that would allow us to assess questions like these across time and space – to determine whether the social roots of these armed actors systematically shape their war-fighting behaviors and civil war outcomes.<sup>2</sup> One way to examine these roots of rebellion is to identify the organizations that gave rise to rebel groups around the world. This is the primary task of our FORGE dataset.

This project also developed out of the extensive work on civil war bargaining, which increasingly recognized (both empirically and theoretically) that all rebel groups are not equivalent. As the literature expanded with detailed information about the nature of rebel actors, their behavior during conflict, and the details of war settlements, these factors have been integrated into our understanding of the strategic interactions between rebels and the governments they challenge. The FORGE project responds to these developments, and we contend that rebel group origins are likely

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<sup>2</sup> Lemke and Carter (2016) demonstrate that “birth legacies” of sovereign states impact when and how governments fight wars, and we expect a similar process is relevant to rebel groups as well.

to affect many of the key mechanisms of interest in this broader bargaining framework, such as rebel credibility as bargaining partners as well as their war-fighting capabilities. These characteristics should influence outcomes related to negotiations during conflicts such as the timing and success of peace talks, third-party mediation, and government concessions to rebels (e.g. Braithwaite and Cunningham 2018; Clayton 2013; Grieg and Regan 2008; Thomas 2014). The degree to which rebels have pre-existing relationships with locals through the formal organizations from which the rebel group emerged should also condition the group's ability and need to engage in various behaviors towards the civilian population, including the provision of social services or the maintenance of political and legal institutions, as well as more coercive interactions such as sexual violence and targeted killings (e.g. Chu and Braithwaite 2018; Cunningham and Sawyer 2019; Loyle and Binningsbø 2018; Pettersen and Eck 2018; Stewart 2018).

In addition to the impact of rebel foundations on conflict processes, we might expect that knowing more about the organizations from which rebel groups emerge will help us better understand the conditions under which civil war is likely to begin, and even to inspire conflicts to break out in other countries – perhaps especially where particular types of organizations face opportunities or restrictions comparable in nature to their counterparts that took up arms elsewhere (Linebarger 2015; Maves and Braithwaite 2013). One could also anticipate that rebel origins influence the duration and termination of conflict by providing some groups with ready-made organizational structures, previous combat experiences, and recruitment bases that would affect the ability to survive and even succeed in conflicts against the government.

## Definitions and data collection

The FORGE dataset builds upon the population of rebel groups included in the Non-State Actor Database (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013), which was initially derived from the UCDP Armed Conflict Database (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Themner and Wallensteen 2012). Two types of armed groups are not included in the initial FORGE dataset. Non-state actors included in the UCDP Actor List that were not clearly identifiable as a named rebel organization, such as “Croatian Irregulars” or “Kashmiri Insurgents” were omitted because it was not possible to identify specific foundational organizations for undefined groups of this nature. We also did not include rebel groups that only participated in anti-colonial conflicts, such as the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) which fought against the United Kingdom. However, groups that fought both anti-colonial conflicts as well as subsequent civil wars against their own independent government, like UNITA in Angola, are included in this initial version of FORGE.<sup>3</sup>

We began by using primary and secondary source materials<sup>4</sup> to identify the date on which the rebel group organization was founded; this can be several months if not years prior to the initiation of an armed confrontation with the government that produced the requisite 25 or more battle deaths to be included as an intrastate conflict dyad in the UCDP Armed Conflict Database. While the vast majority of rebel group organizations begin their existence principally engaged in preparing for and perpetrating violence, we find that approximately 15 percent of rebel groups start life as nonviolent

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<sup>3</sup> We plan to add exclusively anti-colonial groups in a future version of the database.

<sup>4</sup> To gather this information we relied on a variety of sources including organizational charters and other founding documents of the group, news stories, scholarly accounts, and online data resources including the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia (Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2019), Non-State Actor database (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013), the Terrorism Resource & Analysis Consortium (TRAC – <https://www.trackingterrorism.org/>), and the Terrorist Organization Profiles data (<http://www.start.umd.edu/tops/>).

political movements or formalized political parties that seek elected office of some sort prior to taking up arms.

Once the “birthdate” of rebel groups was identified, we continued to consult these resources to identify information about the organizational sources of initial membership for the rebel group.<sup>5</sup> In particular, we searched for formalized, named organizations, which we call the rebel group’s “parent organizations.” We identify eight types of these identifiable, formalized, named parent organizations:

- (1) *rebel groups* independently included in UCDP from which a new stand-alone rebel organization splintered (the Moro Islamic Liberation Front breaking away from the Moro National Liberation Front) or arose after the previous rebel group ceased its conflict with the government through defeat, settlement, or stalemate (the Real IRA constituted from members of the Provisional IRA who rejected the Good Friday Agreement, or successors to the Western Somali Liberation Front in Ethiopia which included the Issa and Gurgura Liberation Front as well as the Ogaden National Liberation Front);
- (2) other *non-state armed groups* that did not previously challenge the government directly, like paramilitaries or pro-government militias (Cocoyes in the Republic of the Congo), as well as violent anti-government movements that were not engaged in conflicts with 25+ yearly battle deaths (*Bandera Roja* in Venezuela emerged from the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* when it abandoned violent struggle in favor of party politics in 1970);

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<sup>5</sup> A “case description” document will be made available that provides details about coding decisions of each variable across all rebel groups in the FORGE dataset. This document will also offer a works cited list for each organization to facilitate further group-level research.

- (3) ***political parties*** that explicitly organized as a party whether they were legally able to do so or not, seeking some access to political power either – and most commonly – by competing in existing election processes (the Armed Islamic Group emerged from the Islamic Salvation Front party that contested and won the 1990 elections in Algeria but was subsequently outlawed), by seeking to pressure the regime to engage in reforms that would allow for opposition parties to participate in elections and political institutions in the first place (the Opposition Coalition in Paraguay that was comprised of the Paraguayan Communist Party, the Liberal Party, and the Febrerista Party), or parties that sought to overhaul the system in some considerable way, most commonly in line with the agendas of Communist organizations (the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, for example);
- (4) ***political movements*** that organized primarily around a political agenda but did not seek to organize as a formal party in order to seek formal inclusion in government institutions (the nationalist movement Ovamboland People's Organization gave rise to the South West African People's Organisation, which fought for Namibian independence);
- (5) ***religious groups*** (the origins of the Nigerian rebel group *Jama'atu Ablis Sunna Lidda'amati wal-Jihad*, better known as Boko Haram, lie in a study group at the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri, Borno State);
- (6) ***trade unions*** (the MLN-Tupamaros of Uruguay were a merger of the UTA, which was a cane workers' union, and militias known as *Coordinador*);
- (7) ***student organizations*** (the All-Burma Students Democratic Front rebel group emerged after the government harshly repressed pro-democracy protests led by its preceding organization, the All Burma Federation of Student Unions);

- (8) **foreign organizations** such as mercenary forces (the Presidential Guard group in Comoros was almost entirely comprised of French mercenaries, while the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was partially formed from Serbian mercenaries) and even the armed forces of other governments (French paratroopers constituted much of the military faction seeking to return Leon M'ba to power in Gabon, while Charles Taylor benefited from a loan of personnel from the armed forces of Burkina Faso to help jump-start his National People's Front of Liberia rebel group).

We also account for rebel groups deriving foundational membership from the following types of groups formally or formerly affiliated with the government that eventually comes under attack by the resultant rebel group:

- (9) the **military of a former regime** that had been relieved of service following a regime transition (after Idi Amin was forced from office in 1979, his successors gutted the Ugandan military and several groups of subsequently unemployed veterans formed their own rebel groups or joined with elements of existing armed organizations to create new rebel groups, including *Kikosi Maalum*, the Former Ugandan National Army, and the Holy Spirit Movement);
- (10) the **current military** either as a standalone actor (the 1973 coup in Chile led by Augusto Pinochet and comrades) or in concert with other organizations in society (reformist factions within the armed forces of the Dominican Republic, known as the Constitutionals, worked with civilian members of leftist parties and movements to overthrow the government and restore the 1963 constitution);
- (11) **non-military government factions**, including regional governments that demand more than just the existing status quo autonomy (after it was dismissed by President Bhutto in 1973, members of the Balochistan regional government in Pakistan went

on to form multiple Balochi separatist rebel groups), as well as groups of politicians themselves (the Parliamentary Forces that challenged Russian President Yeltsin in 1993 were in part comprised of several members of the legislature including the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, the highest legislative body in Russia).

- (12) ***non-military factions from a former regime***, such as regional government institutions and officials from the Soviet Union or during colonial rule, that were not part of the current regime in some way. For example, both the Republic of Abkhazia and the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic rebel organizations developed out of regional legislative bodies called a “Supreme Soviet” that were, at least in these cases, not maintained in their previous form after the dissolution of the USSR.

Finally, we also identify when a rebel group derived its membership from (13) ***refugee communities*** and other exiled populations based outside their home country where a civil war eventually occurs or (14) domestic ***ethnic communities***, but not from a formalized organization representing those communities that could lend the rebel group some sort of organizational structure and/or experience in interacting with the government or other actors. Examples include the *Rassemblement des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée*, comprised largely of Guineans in exile, Palipehutu (*Parti pour la libération du peuple Hutu*) which was formed from Burundians in Tanzanian refugee camps, and the Kuki National Front which fought the Indian government for a separate state for the Kuki people after they had been repeatedly ostracized and extorted by Naga groups controlling Nagaland.

It is also possible, though quite rare, that we were not able to identify any sort of foundational parent organization or even a specific community (as described in the previous paragraph) underpinning the initial membership of a rebel group. Examples include the Independent Nasserite Movement in Lebanon and the *Résistance Armée Tunisienne* in Tunisia. Most commonly,

these fully “parentless” rebel groups emerged around a particular individual who became the group’s leader, relying on the recruitment of friends and neighbors, adults lacking alternative employment opportunities and idealistic or impoverished youth. While the leader might be linked to some organization like a political party or the country’s armed forces, if other members did not seem to follow him and take up arms, we do not treat that as a parent organization.

When determining the parent organization’s type, we endeavor to maximize the specificity of its categorization based on the nature of the parent organization’s activities and membership at the time when the rebel group emerged. Certainly, student organizations can have political orientations and make political demands of government institutions, but if the parent organization is readily identifiable as being principally oriented around religious activities or as a formalized group that is populated by students at a university we treat it as being in categories 5 or 7, respectively, rather than a less-specific political movement of category 4. Similarly, if a community had a formal organization that was making political demands on its behalf, and that organization provided initial membership for the rebel group, we would code the rebel group as having a category 4 “political movement” parent organization rather than simply the “refugee” or “ethnic” community category. An example of this would be the Macha and Tulama Self-Help Association (MTSHA), representing two major Borana Oromo clans in Ethiopia. This organization provided social services to Macha and Tulama communities and, importantly, it also lobbied the government on their behalf at a time political parties were not allowed. The MTSHA was integral to the founding of the Oromo Liberation Front rebel group in 1974.

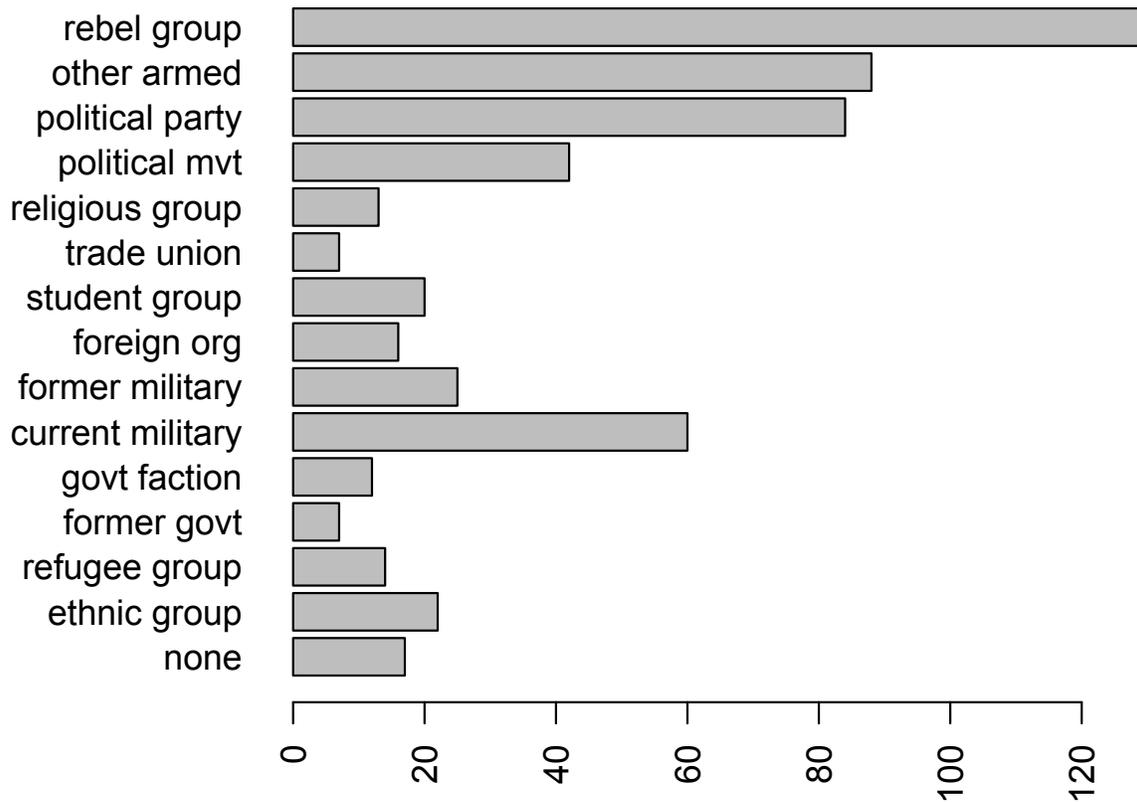
These parent organizations can be thought of as the immediate predecessors to the rebel groups of observation in FORGE. They might no longer be in existence as a formal organization due to military defeat or a significant change in political circumstances, such as decolonization, but we still treat them as parent organizations if sources identify these organizations as important

contributors to the rebel group's initial composition. For example, as its name suggests the Former Ugandan National Army rebel group emerged from the defeated and purged members of Idi Amin's armed forces. The Free Papua Movement (OPM) grew out of personnel from the Papua Volunteer Corps (PVK), local defense forces that were officially sanctioned during Dutch colonial rule in order to deter incursions by the Indonesian Army. The PVK had been disbanded in the years prior to the OPM's emergence, but the motivations for self-determination and protection remained strong among the population. As a result, former PVK personnel were an integral foundation for the OPM.

Rebel groups can and often do emerge from multiple parent organizations; typically this is the result of a merger of similar types of organizations (e.g. armed non-state actors pooling their human and material resources to mount a more significant challenge to the government). An example of this comes from Cote d'Ivoire with the *Forces Nouvelles*, which was a merger of three pre-existing rebel groups: *Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI), *Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest* (MPIGO), and *Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix* (MJP). We also occasionally observe new rebel groups resulting from mergers between quite different types of parent organizations such as political parties and the current military. An example of this is the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Force) which fought the government of Pakistan for the liberation of Bangladesh, and was comprised of Bengali members of the Pakistani security forces as well as an East Pakistani political party known as the Awami League.

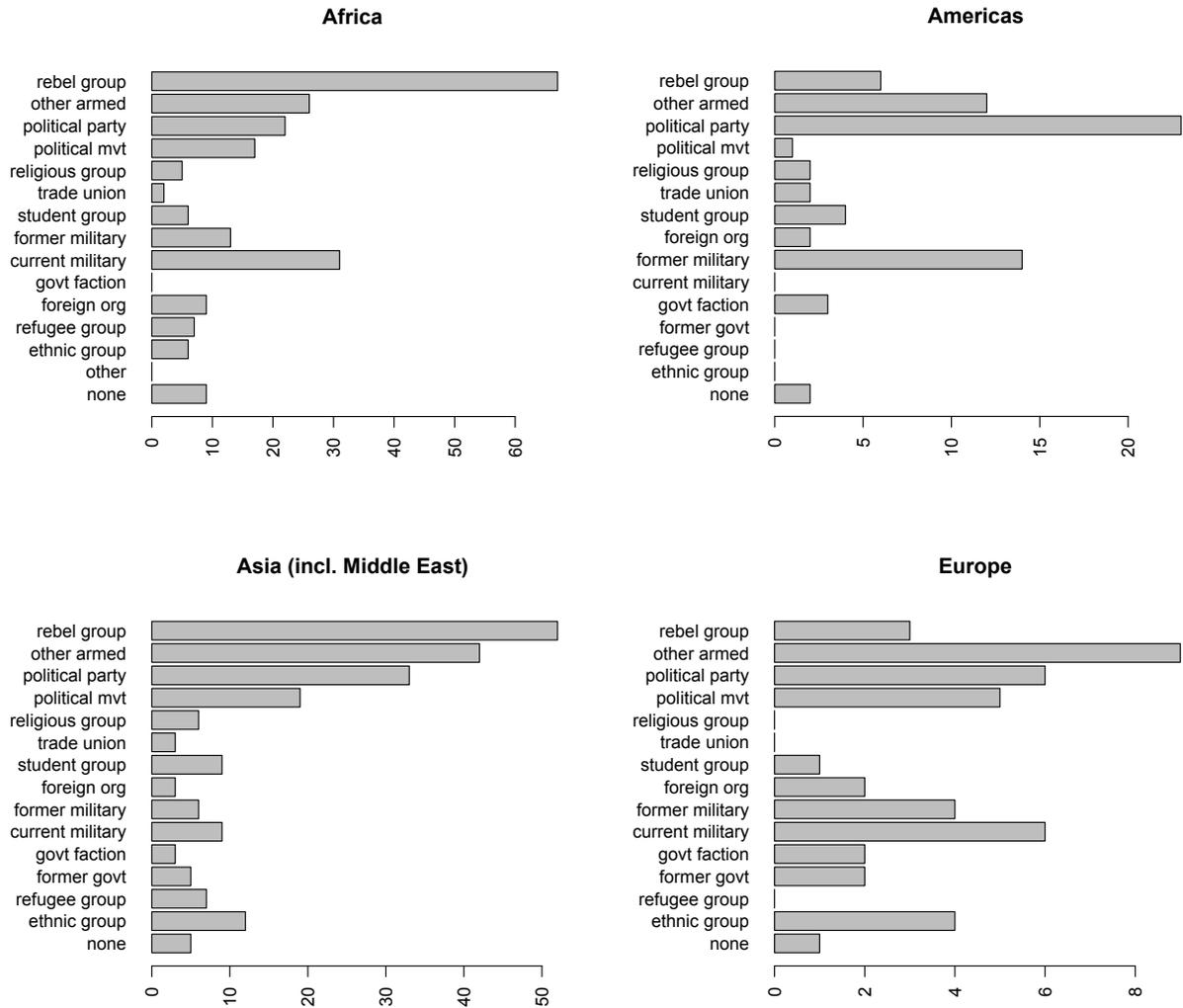
Figure 1 provides the global distribution of the types of parent organizations giving rise to rebel groups active between 1946 and 2011, while Figure 2 breaks this down across various regions of the world. Each bar represents a count of the number of individual rebel groups in FORGE with that particular type of parent organization. Keeping in mind that a single rebel group can have multiple types of parent organizations, these figures total more than the 428 rebel groups included in the FORGE dataset.

**Figure 1: Types of Parent Organizations (Global)**



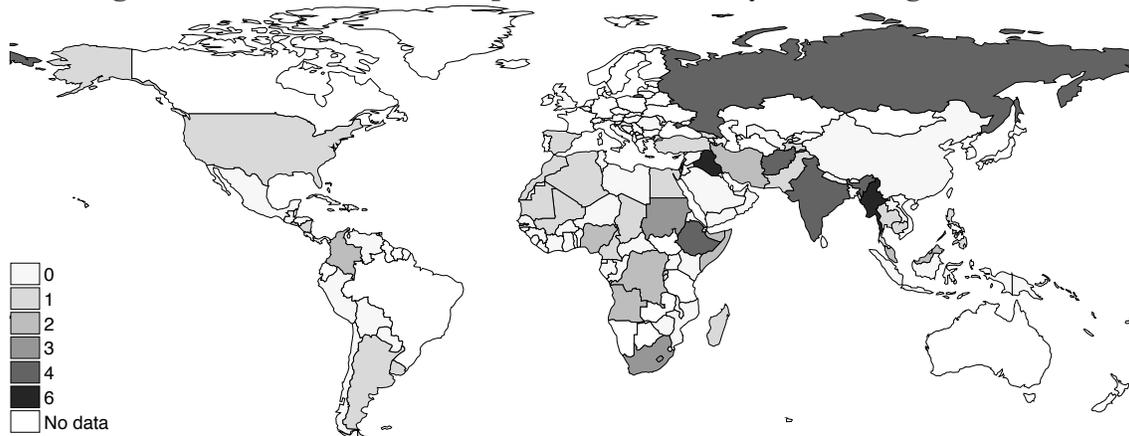
As can be seen in Figure 2, there is considerable variation across regions as to which types of organizations within societies go on to form rebel groups. Overall, about one third of rebel groups in the Non-State Actor database were constituted from a portion of the membership of another such organization – either a rebel group that was still active in conflict against the government or a rebel organization that had previously ceased to be active through stalemate, settlement, or defeat but whose members were not ready to give up the fight. Pre-existing rebel groups included in UCDP and other armed non-state organizations constitute the largest source of rebel group origins in Africa, Asia, and Europe, but in the Americas the most common rebel group parent type was political parties. Many of these were Communist parties that had been disenfranchised formally or informally (often by military dictatorships), leaving party members and supporters feeling as though they had little other choice to pursue their goals than to take up arms against their government.

Figure 2: Types of Parent Organizations by Region



In order to further disaggregate the regional variation presented in Figure 2, Figures 3 and 4 provide the distributions of a few types of parent organizations at the country level. These maps depict the total number of rebel groups active in a given country between 1946 and 2011 that arose from a particular type of societal organization. Figure 3 focuses on the count of rebels with initial membership from civil society organizations (student, political, labor, and religious groups); Figure 4 presents the count of rebel groups in a given country with organizational foundations in political parties.

**Figure 3: Count of Rebel Groups with Civil Society Parent Organizations**



**Figure 4: Count of Rebel Groups with Political Party Parent Organizations**

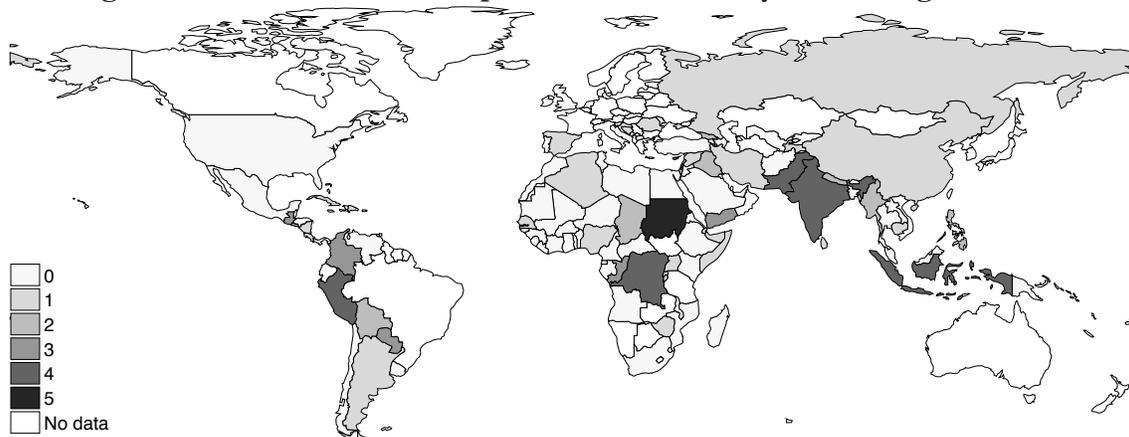
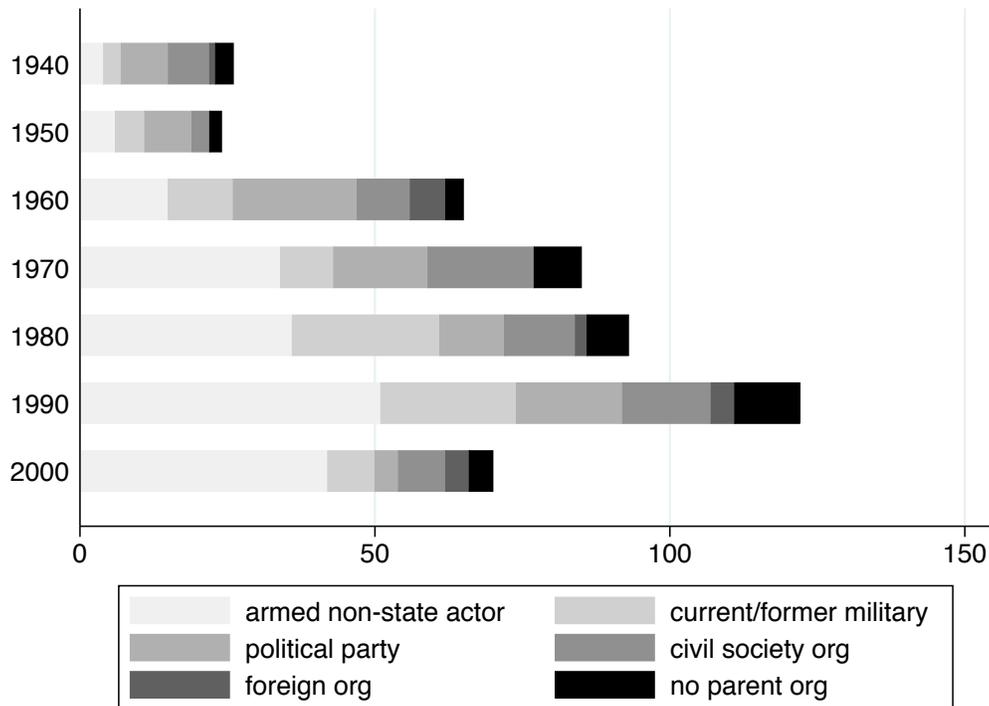


Figure 5 breaks down the types of parent organizations that contributed to the formation of rebel groups by decade of rebel group emergence. For the sake of easier visual interpretation and as another example of how parent organization categories can be combined, we employ aggregated categories of parent types: UCDP rebel groups plus other armed non-state actors, factions of the former and current armed forces, civil society organizations (student, political, religious, and labor groups), and rebels lacking any sort of parent organization combined with rebel groups emerging from broader refugee and ethnic communities but not a defined organization within those communities.<sup>6</sup> We see that pre-existing rebel groups and other armed non-state actors constitute a meaningful and increasing proportion of rebel group parent organizations over time. Military factions, particularly coming from the current armed forces, were most common in the 1980s and 1990s, but have been less involved in rebel group formation in the twenty-first century. Political parties were another important source of initial rebel membership in the second half of the twentieth century, but also precipitously dropped off as integral to rebel group formation in the 2000-2011 period. Figures A2 and A3 in the appendix provide the counts and percentages by decade for all 14 parent organization categories, not aggregated in the manner presented here.

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<sup>6</sup>The FORGE dataset disaggregates parent organization types to a high degree, and as a result it often makes sense to merge some of these categories together. For example, FORGE distinguishes several types of civil society groups that do not seek access to direct power in the way that political parties do. Depending on project goals, we suggest that users consider combining several types of parent organizations into a single “civil society” category: political movements, religious groups, trade unions, and student groups. These are organizations that exist to coordinate activities among members and, on occasion, mobilize to promote and protect the interests of their constituents. Importantly, these civil society groups are different from other types of parent organizations in FORGE because they do not explicitly seek access to political office (and thus do not pose the same sort of threat to ruling elites as a political party or rebel group that explicitly seek to alter existing distributions and allocations of power), nor did they typically engage in violent strategies in pursuit of their goals prior to the formation of the rebel group.

Figure 5: Types of Parent Organization Categories, Counts by Decade



Beyond information on the birthdates and parent organizations of rebel groups, the FORGE dataset also offers a variety of information about rebel group traits prior to the conflict start date listed by UCDP.<sup>7</sup> We use the aforementioned resources to identify the initial stated goals of rebel groups prior to the outset of conflict (independence, autonomy, regime change, democratization, increased representation or other improvement of rights); initial group ideology (Communist, right/left-leaning, nationalist, anti-system, religious); and whether the rebel group was explicitly founded around a particular religion or ethnic group. The FORGE dataset also lists the founding locations of rebel groups whenever it was possible to find this information.

<sup>7</sup> All additional variables mentioned here are discussed further in the codebook, included as part of the appendix accompanying this manuscript and also as a separate document available for download with the dataset. See AUTHOR'S PERSONAL WEBSITE for these resources.

## **An empirical application: rebel group origins and conflict duration**

There are a number of ways in which rebel group origins could be expected to impact dynamics of civil wars, including the duration of these conflicts. For example, one might anticipate that groups lacking an underlying organizational hierarchy or structure – features that could be “inherited” from a parent organization – at the outset of conflict will have a more difficult time challenging the state violently for a sustained period of time and thus we should see shorter campaigns for rebel groups that lack a parent organization. We might also anticipate that group-specific characteristics identified in existing literature as important determinants of conflict duration might be conditioned by the group’s origins. For example, groups with nonviolent parent organizations might have more effective legal political wings and broader mobilization capacities that increase relative strength, helping them to fight shorter wars. In this section, we replicate and extend models from Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2009; henceforth CGS), presenting two sets of results examining how organizational foundations affect our understanding of the relationship between rebel group traits and the duration of the wars they wage.

Previous work has identified a number of structural, situational, and organizational dynamics as important determinants of civil war duration. Violence drags on when negotiated settlements are difficult to reach given conflicting preferences in multi-actor conflicts, when the government is constrained in its willingness and ability to bargain with rebels, or because combatants have few incentives to trust the credibility of promises made during peace talks (Bapat 2005; Cunningham 2006; Prorok 2018; Toft 2003; Walter 1997, 2006; Wiegand and Keels 2019). Although it may help facilitate a lasting peace after termination, third party involvement can prolong civil wars, particularly when both the government and rebels receive external support (Balch-Lindsay, Enterline, and Joyce 2008; Cunningham 2010; Regan 2002). Structural conditions such as poverty and moderate ethnic divisions also prolong conflicts (Collier, Hoeffler, and Soderbom 2004; DeRouen and Sobek 2004).

In their foundational 2009 study, CGS introduce original data at the rebel group level, enabling an analysis of how dyad and organizational features shape conflict duration. They argue that a number of group-level characteristics influence rebels' ability to target government forces during conflict as well as their ability to resist the regime's counterinsurgency efforts. CGS find that a number of these traits are important determinants of how long civil wars last. Namely, wars are shown to be shorter when rebels' fighting strength relative to the government increases; when the rebels have a legal political wing that can substitute nonviolent, conventional political activities for violence in pursuit of group demands; and when rebels control territory.

We explore here the idea that these rebel group traits do not necessarily function equally across all groups—in particular, the organizational origins of rebel groups captured in the FORGE data may condition the efficacy of a group's political wing, the benefits it derives from controlling territory, and its ability to develop and maintain its fighting capacity particularly through pre-existing recruitment channels. Furthermore, these organizational foundations themselves may prove important determinants of civil war duration in their own right.

We begin by considering whether civil conflicts are shorter when they involve groups without formal parent organizations, as these rebels are more likely to lack well-developed organizational structures that can help to minimize principal-agent problems and other challenges faced by armed groups. Using information from the FORGE dataset, we can conceptualize these “parentless” rebel groups in two ways: those rebel groups that have neither a formal organization nor an identifiable broader community underlying their initial membership (*No Parent – Narrow*), as well as a more generously defined set of parentless rebels that includes those groups that were initially constituted from a specific refugee population or domestic ethnic group but not from a formal organization within those communities (*No Parent – Broad*). To empirically examine the relationship between these conceptualizations of parentless rebel groups and the duration of

intrastate conflicts, we include these variables *No Parent – Narrow* and *No Parent – Broad* in the model specified by CGS.

Table 1 reports the results from a semi-parametric Cox proportional hazards model as specified in the original article. Positive coefficients signify increased hazard rates, meaning that a conflict is more likely to come to an end sooner given that particular condition.

**Table 1: “Parentless” Rebels and Civil Conflict Duration**

	Model 1	Model 2
No Parent – Narrow	0.621* (0.296)	
No Parent – Broad		0.451* (0.217)
Territorial control	-0.509** (0.190)	-0.535** (0.190)
Rebels stronger	1.211** (0.396)	1.084** (0.402)
Rebels at parity	0.485* (0.216)	0.522* (0.216)
Legal political wing	0.535* (0.242)	0.554* (0.243)
War on core territory	-0.278 (0.399)	-0.287 (0.394)
Coup d’état	3.349** (0.290)	3.378** (0.289)
ELF index	0.614 (0.409)	0.641 (0.403)
Ethnic conflict	0.184 (0.169)	0.172 (0.169)
ln(GDP per capita)	0.215* (0.106)	0.228* (0.105)
Democracy	-1.270** (0.253)	-1.282** (0.252)
Two or more dyads	-0.389** (0.151)	-0.392** (0.149)
ln(Population)	-0.094 (0.068)	-0.101 (0.066)

NOTE: N = 2,000. Robust standard errors clustered by conflict in parentheses. \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

As expected, we indeed observe positive coefficients for both conceptualizations of parentless rebel groups (those with [Model 1] and without [Model 2] broader refugee or domestic ethnic communities constituting their initial membership), suggesting that rebel groups without parent organizations fight shorter conflicts as compared to those groups that emerge from pre-existing organizations. The core findings from CGS remain robust, suggesting that the parentless nature of some rebel groups is a contributing factor to shorter wars; controlling for group origins does not negate the original CGS findings. Legal political wings, greater relative strength, a lack of territorial control, *and* the lack of a formal parent organization are all conditions that decrease conflict duration.

We might also anticipate that certain rebel group traits at the heart of the original CGS study – such as their strength relative to the government or their maintenance of a legal political wing – could affect conflict duration differently based on the group’s organizational origins. For example, in terms of the “ability to substitute nonviolent actions for violent activities” as a way to hasten conflict termination (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009, p. 12), a rebel political wing that is rooted in a pre-existing organization with experience in peaceful mobilization and even lobbying activities (such as a civil society group or formal party) is likely to be more efficacious in this substitution as compared to a newly-created political wing of a rebel group that did not originate from a nonviolent organization.

To explore these expectations empirically, we again revisit the Cox proportional hazards models presented by CGS. Model 3 in Table 2 re-estimates the original findings using the sample of rebel groups included in the FORGE dataset. Models 4 and 5 split this full sample between rebel groups that do and do not have at least one political party or civil society parent organization, respectively. We split the sample by rebel groups with and without nonviolent organizational origins

in order to examine whether the group's foundations condition the effect of various traits deemed by CGS to be important determinants of conflict duration. This demonstrates another way in which the FORGE data could be used, in addition to simply including parent types as an independent variable as we did in Table 1.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of both substantive and statistical significance, the conflict-shortening effects of rebel strength and legal political wings found by CGS appear to be driven by those rebel groups that have their organizational roots in civil society organizations and political parties. Rebel groups that lack foundations in these types of nonviolent parent organizations are no more likely to experience shorter wars when they are stronger or at least at parity with the government, nor are their conflicts abbreviated when they feature a legal political wing.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, the conflict-prolonging effect of rebels controlling territory does not seem to help those groups with nonviolent origins to fight longer conflicts; this original finding from CGS holds only for rebels without nonviolent parent organizations, just beyond conventional levels of statistical significance.

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<sup>8</sup> In the appendix Table A6, we also present results from a model where “nonviolent parent” is a stand-alone independent variable. The coefficient for this variable is negative but does not achieve conventional levels of statistical significance on its own. Thus, the importance of nonviolent origins for the duration of rebel campaigns seems to operate through additional features of the group, including political wings and strength relative to the government.

<sup>9</sup> Legal political wings are not disproportionately common among rebel groups that emerged from parties and civil society organizations as compared to those groups without these origins. Of the 272 dyad-year observations with legal political wings, 169 involved rebel groups with nonviolent origins whereas 103 dyad-years featured rebel groups that lacked nonviolent origins. Of the 55 observations in which rebels were stronger or much stronger than the government, 19 dyad-years involved groups with nonviolent origins and 36 did not involve such origins. Of 143 dyad-year observations coded in the CGS data as being at parity, 35 featured groups with party or civil society parent organizations, while 108 dyad-years involved groups lacking these nonviolent origins.

**Table 2: Rebel Group Traits and Conflict Duration, Split by Nonviolent Origins**

	Model 3 (Full Sample)	Model 4 (NV Parent)	Model 5 (No NV Parent)
Territorial control	-0.517** (0.193)	-0.381 (0.280)	-0.520+ (0.280)
Rebels stronger	1.176** (0.395)	1.923** (0.509)	0.682 (0.519)
Rebels at parity	0.503* (0.229)	0.826* (0.402)	0.276 (0.279)
Legal political wing	0.536* (0.248)	0.769** (0.279)	0.364 (0.474)
War on core territory	-0.262 (0.393)	-0.238 (0.398)	-1.166* (0.557)
Coup d'état	3.337** (0.290)	36.621** (0.480)	3.388** (0.320)
ELF index	0.647 (0.408)	1.169+ (0.658)	0.011 (0.480)
Ethnic conflict	0.178 (0.170)	0.083 (0.255)	0.111 (0.225)
ln(GDP per capita)	0.215* (0.106)	0.301* (0.148)	0.091 (0.183)
Democracy	-1.278** (0.252)	-1.082** (0.308)	-1.561** (0.433)
Two or more dyads	-0.395** (0.151)	-0.523* (0.237)	-0.251 (0.188)
ln(Population)	-0.107 (0.067)	0.067 (0.093)	-0.140 (0.102)
Observations	2,000	995	1,005

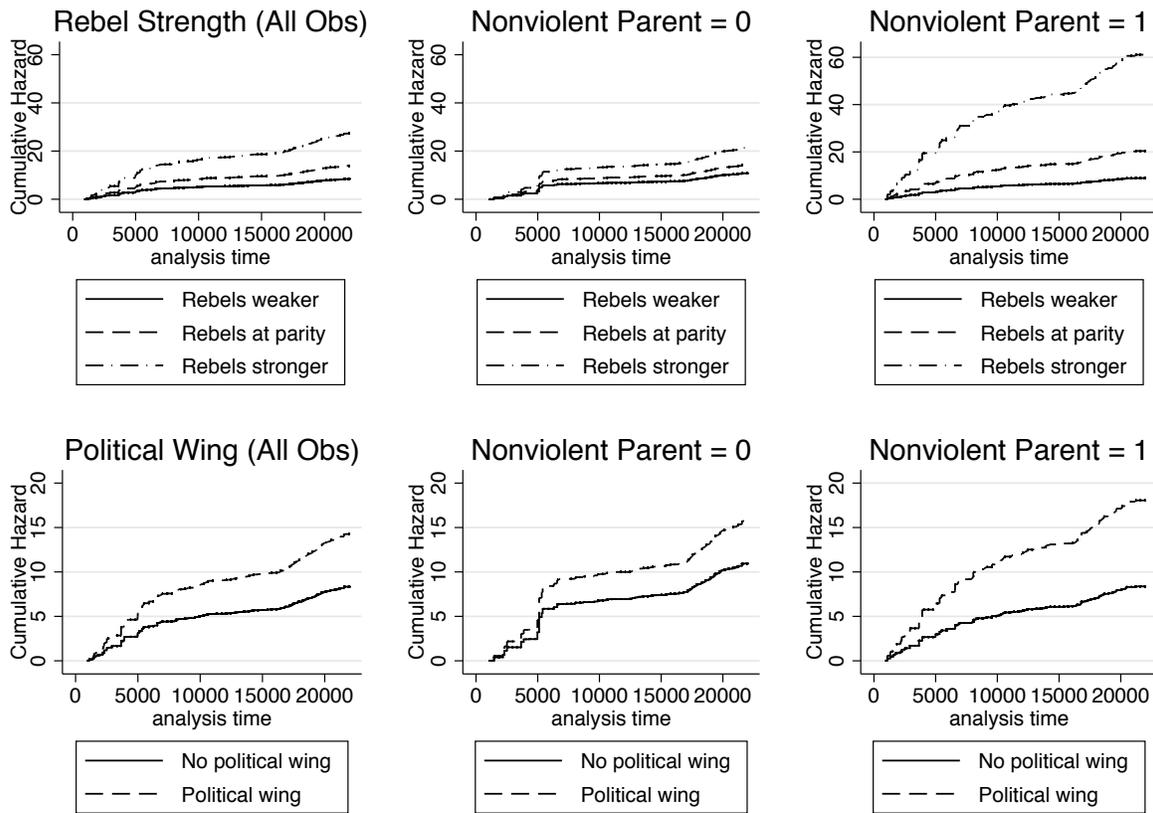
NOTE: Robust standard errors clustered by conflict in parentheses.

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.1

Figure 6 compares cumulative hazard functions for some key independent variables across the models presented in Table 2. The top row of graphs examines the accumulated “risk” of conflict termination over time when rebels are stronger, weaker, or at parity with the government; the bottom row compares rebels with and without legal political wings. The middle column of graphs, involving the sample of rebels without at least one civil society or party parent organization, looks fairly similar to the first column of graphs, depicting the cumulative hazard functions for the entire population of rebel groups in the sample. Importantly, though, we see considerably higher accumulated risk of conflict termination for rebels with nonviolent origins that are stronger or at parity with government forces, as well as when they have a legal political wing. In other words, we would expect conflicts to be shortest for relatively strong rebels with nonviolent parent organizations, as well as those rebels with legal political wings and organizational roots in political parties and civil society groups. Thus, many of the findings from CGS seem to be driven by a particular subset of rebel groups: those with nonviolent origins.

This raises some additional questions about the role of the state in the transformative process of rebel groups. For example, what is the role of criminalizing specific organizations (as the Spanish government did multiple times with Basque organizations)? Do governments actively manage violent challenges by allowing political wings, perhaps selectively? How does that process affect movement fragmentation? The results presented here suggest that a critical examination of the CGS finding on legal political wings can advance our understanding of the dynamic process taking place between governments and rebels.

Figure 6: Cumulative Hazard Functions for Models 3-5



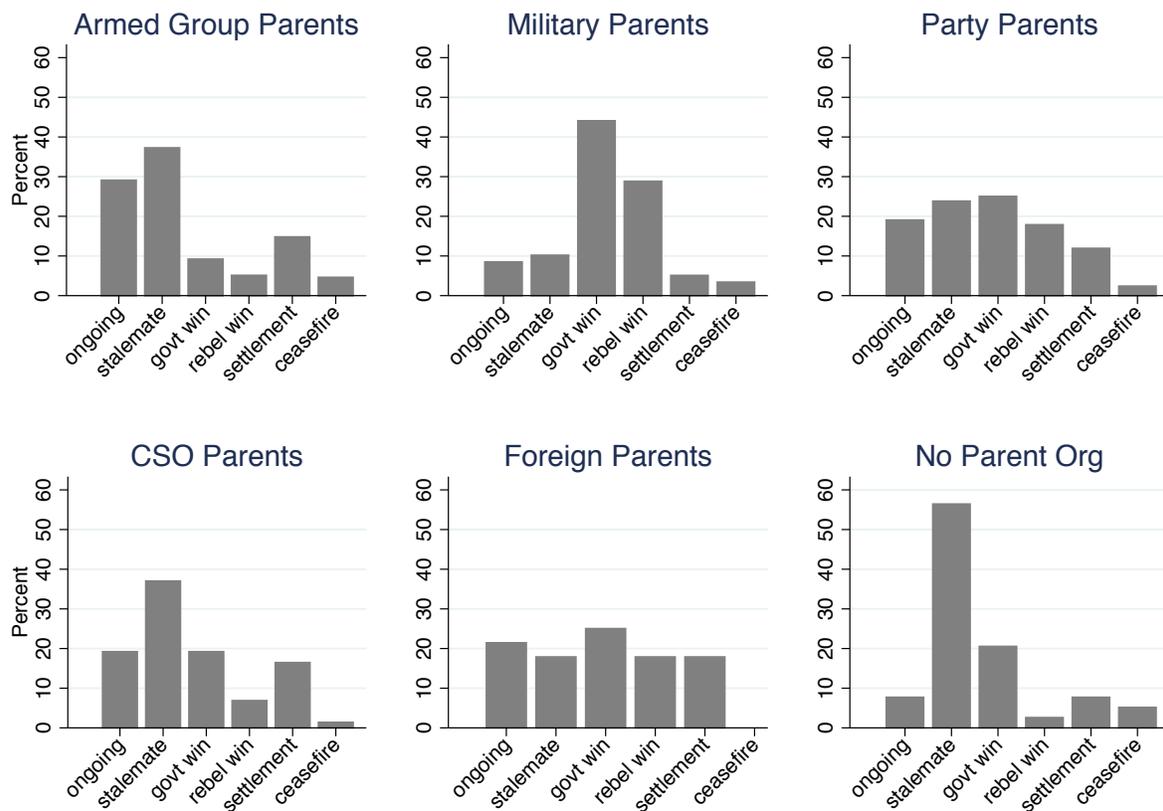
### Additional potential applications

The FORGE dataset elucidates the wide variety of predecessor organizations for rebel groups around the world. This begs an important question for future work: what do these transformation processes look like? Do all parties that turn to armed rebellion do so in a similar way? How different is this process from the evolution of a student group into a rebel organization, or the splintering of existing armed non-state actors? By engaging with the FORGE data, scholars can begin to explore these transition processes systematically.

A logical extension to the initial replication exercise presented in the previous section would be to explore how organizational foundations influence the fate of rebels in terms of how conflicts

end. Are conflicts involving parentless rebel groups shorter because they are ending in government victory, low activity, or some other outcome? Are relatively stronger rebels with nonviolent origins defeating the government militarily or are they agreeing to terms of a negotiated settlement? These questions could be examined by merging the FORGE dataset with the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset (Kreutz 2010) to examine the overall likelihood as well as the time it takes rebel groups with various organizational backgrounds to achieve military victory or defeat as compared to settlements, ceasefires, or low activity stalemates. The histograms comprising Figure 7 exhibit considerable variation in the proportions of conflict outcomes experienced by rebel groups with different organizational backgrounds.

**Figure 7: Conflict Outcomes, by Parent Organization Type**



Rebel group origins may also impact particular dimensions included in peace agreements, especially related to power sharing arrangements – the dynamics of which can significantly affect the duration of post-conflict peace (e.g. Gates et al. 2016; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Mattes and Savun 2009). It is possible that rebel groups constituted from political parties would push for political power sharing provisions to ensure their ability to participate in government moving forward. Similarly, we could expect that a rebel group with membership from a preceding regime’s armed forces would seek military power sharing arrangements to allow its members to regain access to their previous positions. Integrating the FORGE dataset with the IMPACT dataset (Jarstad and Nilsson 2008), which covers the implementation of power sharing arrangements following UCDP conflicts that terminated in peace agreements, would be just one way for users to explore these and similar questions.

There has been considerable interest in dynamics of multi-actor conflicts, especially in the context of rebel cohesion and fragmentation (e.g. Fjelde and Nilsson 2012; Nygård and Weintraub 2015; Olson Lounsbery 2016). The FORGE dataset includes a variable indicating whether those UCDP rebel group parent organizations were concurrently active alongside the rebel group of observation. This, in addition to the broader indicators of rebel group origins in a pre-existing UCDP rebel group or some other armed non-state actor, would allow scholars to (re-)examine questions related to when and how rebel group splintering occurs, as well as how this fragmentation affects conflict duration, outcomes, civilian victimization, forced recruitment, and rebel infighting.

A growing area of interest in the study of civil wars relates to rebel governance. For example, Stewart (2018) examines the conditions under which rebel groups engage in service provision, Loyle and Binningsbø (2018) consider the introduction of justice mechanisms during civil wars, while Cunningham and Sawyer (2019) explore the use of elections in rebel groups. Observations of rebel governance dynamics in each these studies come from the UCDP Armed Conflict Database, and as

such the FORGE dataset could be merged in order to investigate how the organizational origins of rebel groups influence their willingness and ability to engage in governance practices.

## **Conclusion**

With the FORGE dataset, scholars can explore how the foundations and organizational origins of rebel groups affect a wide variety of conflict processes. Research on civilian targeting and rebel behavior beyond the use of violence has increasingly suggested that rebels have complex relationships with civilians. Understanding the pre-war foundations of rebel organizations can shed light on the connections between combatants, local supporters, other political actors, and victims of rebel violence during wartime. Knowing more about the origins of rebel groups should also help us to better understand the interactions between these organizations and the governments they fight against, and possibly also with third party actors who provide external support or participate in conflict management endeavors. The FORGE dataset provides an opportunity to build on existing quantitative analyses of civil war dynamics, and to probe the generalizability of important findings from qualitative studies of individual rebel group behavior and performance.

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