



ARMED GROUPS' MODES OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT AND
POST-CONFLICT (IN)STABILITY:
INSIGHTS FROM THE ETHIOPIAN AND SOMALI CIVIL WARS

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MOTIVATION & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Deepen the study of the **determinants of civil war recurrence** and of the stability of post-war governments
- Existing arguments:
 - Military balance of power : stability stems from a sovereign authority achieving military hegemony which deters further challenges
 - Incentives: failure of settlements linked to unaddressed grievances, leading party to renege on agreements and pursue their interests through violent means. Even if the incentives are rights, lack of mechanisms for credible commitments fosters insecurity
- Some patterns of variation with important policy implications remain unexplained
 - Post-war governments emerging one side's clear victory are not always stable
 - Not all settlements fail

PROCESSES & PRECURSORS OF CIVIL WAR RECURRENCE

How does the post-conflict order typically unravel?

Fragmentation

- Of the ruling coalition and or its constitutive entities
- Of the insurgent movements

Inadequate demobilization

- Formal DDR/demobilization programs are often unable to re-establish the authority of the state and security, particularly in areas that were under insurgent control during the war

Dependence on local power brokers/lack of state autonomy – In post-war environments with deficient state institutions, governments often have to rule through local power structures (traditional elites, other community leaders, local strongmen etc...). These alliances are costly to maintain.

- Fewer resources for recovery
- Hinders genuine political participation

ARGUMENT (I)

- Armed groups' approach towards local power structures is an important contributor to the (in)stability of the post-conflict order.
- It shapes the risks of postwar fragmentation, incomplete demobilization and dependence on local power brokers

Local power structures: Community-level organizations, mostly outside of state structures, that shape people's behaviors and interactions. Depending on the context, these power structures can take various forms, from kinship networks to religious or criminal organizations.

Some armed groups establish themselves by **coopting** these structures, other by replacing or **transforming** them.

Cooptation

Examples: SPLM in South Sudan, Shan State Army in Myanmar, Tuareg rebellions in Niger and Mali

Transformation

Examples: Viet Minh, Talibans, FARC in Colombia

ARGUMENT (II)

It is harder for post-war governments to achieve stability after conflicts in which dominant actors adopted strategies of cooptation rather than transformation.

Implications of strategies of cooptation

- High level of internal differentiation
- Local elites and field commanders retain an independent capacity for social control
- They are difficult to replace and have an exit option
- Local elites are likely to resist effective demobilization which would weaken their bargaining power
- Unfavorable conditions for centralizing power and laying the foundations of direct administration



Greater risk of fragmentation
(During and after the conflict)



Demobilization tends to remain
provisional



Lack of state autonomy

DOCUMENTING WARTIME MODES OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

Documented for a subset of armed groups in the NSA dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salahan 2013). Criteria for inclusion: controlled territory, active for at least two years and/or mobilization capacity matched the state's → 126 armed groups

Practices of cooptation documented

Promotion of norms and identities
tied to traditional structures

Mechanisms of indirect governance

Practices of transformation documented

Attacks against old elites

Creation of local councils

Reform of the judiciary system

Redistribution of land

Social empowerment of groups
treated as subalterns

Systematic propaganda

DIVERGENT POST-WAR TRAJECTORIES IN SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia – Derg regime is overthrown in May 1991



Transition government until 1995, controlled by EPRDF in power until 2018
“Bastion of stability”

Somalia – Regime of Siad Barre is overthrown in Oct. 1991



Persistent fighting, prompt the first UN mission
Failure of TNG (2000), followed by TFG (2004)
“Failed state”

A LEGACY OF WARTIME MODES OF ENGAGEMENT OF THE ETHIOPIAN AND SOMALI REBELS?

Are post-war differences connected to rebel wartime modes of local engagement?

Ethiopia



TPLF dismantled the old village-level power structure (the “feudal system”), replacing it with new local councils

- Used these new structures to enact a thorough land reform
- Provided an effective basis for recruitment
- Post-war, the TPLF and its “satellites” in other region expanded on this approach to consolidate control

Somalia



Initial efforts to establish both the SNM and the USC as multi-clan organizations – These efforts failed due to:

- Efforts of the government to arm factions against each other
- Expediency concerns
- Kinship networks/clan based are not fixed, but continued to be the main levels of mobilization, used by both political and

THEORETICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Theory

Are wars state-making or state-breaking?

It depends – But examining distinctions in rebel wartimes modes of local engagement can help make sense of the legacy of a civil war

Policy

Armed groups' mode of local engagement is not typically under the control of policy makers – but these mechanisms still have implications for policy debates

- Debate on harm caused by foreign intervention, “autonomous recovery”/ “Give war a chance”
- Better senses of the challenges that post-war governments state lacks autonomy after the war



THANK YOU |

ANNEX 1: WHOSE MODE OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT MATTERS FOR POST-CONFLICT STABILITY?

For conflict that end with the victory of one side, is the wartime local strategy of the victors the only one influencing the trajectory of the post-conflict state?

No, the local strategy of other actors can be and often is another driver as long as it has affected the relative influence of the state and its rivals

Are only insurgents' local strategies relevant?

No, state actors can also engage with local power structures in different ways, and thereby change local political orders.

The dataset is limited to insurgent actors though

ANNEX 2: FREQUENCY OF CONFLICT RECURRENCE BY TYPE OF ENDING

Military victory of the government	17%
Military victory of the rebels	6%
Negotiated settlement	22%
Stalemate/ceasefires	31%
Overall	16%

ANNEX 3: VARIATION IN ARMED GROUPS' MODE OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

Distribution of rebel groups by type of practices adopted

Profile	Frequency
Did not implement any of the practices coded	23%
Implemented practices of political cooptation exclusively	30%
Implemented practices of political transformation exclusively	37%
Implemented both types of practices	10%