

# Do Birds of a Feather Flock Together? Rebel Constituencies and Civil War Alliances

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Challenging influential perspectives that downplay the role of shared rebel constituencies, we argue that they represent important causes of rebel alliances. Yet, we theorize distinct effects for different types of constituency. While compatible political aspirations push both organizations with a common ideological constituency and those with a common ethnic constituency to ally, for co-ethnic organizations this cooperation-inducing effect is offset by a cooperation-suppressing effect due to their higher risk of inter-rebel war. Leveraging a novel dataset of alliances in multiparty civil wars (1946–2015), we find support for our theoretical expectations. Shared ideological constituencies have a larger and more robust positive effect on the probability of alliances than shared ethnic constituencies. Furthermore, we find that co-ethnic rebel organizations tend to establish informal alliances only, while organizations sharing an ideological constituency are drawn to formal alliances.

Cuestionando perspectivas influyentes que le restan importancia al papel de grupos de interés compartidos argumentamos que estos representan causas importantes de alianzas rebeldes. No obstante, teorizamos efectos divergentes para los distintos tipos de grupos. Si bien las aspiraciones políticas compatibles fomentan alianzas en organizaciones que comparten grupo ideológico y aquellas con que comparten grupo étnico argumentamos que, para las organizaciones co-étnicas, este efecto que propicia la cooperación se ve compensado por un efecto que suprime la cooperación, a causa de un riesgo mayor de guerra entre rebeldes. Analizamos un nuevo conjunto de datos de alianzas en guerras civiles con múltiples actores (1946–2015) y encontramos respaldo a nuestras expectativas teóricas. Compartir grupo ideológico tiene un efecto positivo más amplio y sólido en la probabilidad de generar alianzas que compartir grupo étnico. Además, encontramos que las organizaciones rebeldes co-étnicas tienden a establecer únicamente alianzas informales, mientras que las organizaciones que comparten grupo ideológico tienden a las alianzas formales.

Nous remettons en question les points de vue influents qui minimisent l'importance du rôle des groupes rebelles à intérêts partagés et nous soutenons qu'ils représentent d'importantes causes d'alliances rebelles. Cependant, nous théorisons des effets divergents pour les différents types de groupes d'intérêts. Bien que des aspirations politiques compatibles poussent d'une part les organisations constituées de groupes d'intérêts idéologiques communs à s'allier et d'autre part les organisations constituées de groupes d'intérêts ethniques communs à s'allier, nous soutenons que pour les organisations partageant des intérêts ethniques, cet effet motivant à la coopération est contrebalancé par un effet réfrénant la coopération en raison de leur plus grand risque de guerre entre rebelles. Nous avons tiré parti d'un nouveau jeu de données sur les alliances dans les guerres civiles multi-parties (1946–2015) et nous avons trouvé du soutien à nos hypothèses théoriques. Les groupes d'intérêts idéologiques partagés ont un effet positif plus robuste et plus important sur la probabilité d'alliances que les groupes d'intérêts ethniques partagés. De plus, nous avons constaté que les organisations rebelles à intérêts ethniques partagés tendaient à n'établir que des alliances informelles, alors que les organisations partageant un même groupe d'intérêts idéologiques étaient attirées vers des alliances formelles.

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## Introduction

Rebel organizations pitted against the same government have good reasons to ally: they face a common—and typically more powerful—enemy. Yet, we often see rebel

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**Replication Data:** The data underlying this article are available on the ISQ Database, at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/isq>.

organizations failing to ally and even fighting one another (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012). What drives rebel alliance decisions? What explains the variation in alliance patterns we observe? We tackle these questions by developing a theoretical framework about the effects of shared constituencies on rebel organizations' alliances. Challenging influential perspectives that downplay the role of shared rebel constituencies, we argue that they represent important causes of alliances. Yet, we theorize distinct effects for different types of constituency. While compatible political aspirations push organizations with a common ideological constituency and with a common ethnic constituency to ally, for co-ethnic organizations, this cooperation-inducing effect is offset by a cooperation-suppressing effect due to a higher level of distrust and risk of inter-rebel war (Pischedda 2020). Therefore, we expect common ideological constituencies to have a stronger impact on alliance propensity and to be conducive to deeper forms of cooperation than shared ethnic constituencies.

We test our argument with a novel dataset of rebel alliances, including all dyads of rebel groups simultaneously fighting the same government in the period 1946–2015, using a range of methods, from logistic models to additive and multiplicative effects (AME) model and split-population duration model (SPDM). Our results show that groups sharing a constituency have a greater propensity to form alliances. Yet, the effects are larger and more robust for shared ideological constituencies than for ethnic ones. Furthermore, we find that co-ethnic rebel groups tend to establish informal alliances only, while groups sharing an ideological constituency are drawn to formal alliances.

The next section explains the motivation for our research by situating it within the existing literature and explaining its policy relevance. The following three sections present our argument, data, and empirical analyses, respectively. The concluding section discusses our findings and avenues of further research.

### Motivation and Preview of the Argument

The civil wars scholarship has emphasized rebel groups' ideologies and ethnic identities as key factors for understanding the effective organization of rebellion (Weinstein 2007; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Costalli and Ruggeri 2015; Walter 2017; Hoover Green 2018; Lewis 2020) and rebels' varying success in attracting aid from third-party states and transnational ethnic kin communities (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010; Cederman et al. 2013; Bulutgil 2017). Nonetheless, seminal contributions on the causes of alliances between rebel groups fighting against the same government have downplayed these factors, advancing instead structural or situational explanations.

In her important book, Christia (2012) posits that civil war alliances follow a balance of power logic: warring parties aim to form the smallest possible alliance with sufficient strength to win the civil war. Thus, whenever the "minimum winning coalition" threshold is passed, they are expected to abandon the dominant coalition for an optimally sized one. From this perspective, rebel organizations' ethnic and ideological profiles are largely epiphenomenal and endogenous to alliances, as leaders mine their organizations' identity repertoires to develop narratives justifying alliances that actually follow balance of power considerations. Seymour (2014) zeroes in on local-level and short-term factors driving alignments in a subset of civil wars characterized by weak states and shallow ethnic and ideological cleavages. He argues that the desire to obtain support against local competi-

tors and access to various forms of rewards (e.g., cash, land titles, and control of lucrative resources) motivates rebel groups' alignments. Both Christia (2012) and Seymour (2014) consider shared ideology and ethnicity as alternative explanations for alliance behavior and find little supporting evidence in the cases they examine. By contrast, ideological considerations are part of Bapat and Bond's (2012) theoretical story. These authors posit that third-party state supporters can mitigate commitment problems in alliance formation, thus facilitating the inclusion of weak organizations in *ideologically* compatible alliances. However, due to lack of data on rebel groups' ideologies, Bapat and Bond (2012) do not test that part of the argument, focusing instead on the balance of power and the influence of external supporters.<sup>1</sup>

More recent studies, however, identify a positive association between shared ideology and rebel alliances, in line with the longstanding emphasis on ideology in the related field of terrorist alliances (Karmon 2005; Mendelsohn 2015; Asal et al. 2016; Moghadam 2017; Bacon 2018). In particular, Gade et al. (2019) find ideologically proximate rebel groups in Syria's civil war to be more likely to ally, while Blair et al. (2021) show that militant organizations (including terrorist and rebel groups) sharing an ideology are more likely to sustain cooperation in the face of government repression. Both sets of authors suggest that shared ethnicity should have a similar effect. Yet, common ethnic constituencies are often a source of violent competition among rebel organizations, rather than cooperation, as exemplified by inter-rebel fighting among co-ethnics in civil wars in Ethiopia, Iraq, and Sri Lanka (Lilja and Hultman 2011; Fjelde and Nilsson 2012; Phillips 2019; Pischedda 2020). Hence, it is not obvious that shared ethnic and ideological constituencies would have a similar effect on rebel alliances.

This article advances the study of civil wars by developing an argument about the distinct effects of rebel groups' shared ideological and ethnic constituencies on their alliances and testing it with novel data on multiparty civil wars from 1946 to 2015.<sup>2</sup> The argument challenges the notion that social constituencies are unimportant drivers of alliances while accommodating in a single theoretical framework the seemingly contradictory observations in the literature that rebel groups with a shared ideology tend to ally while organizations sharing an ethnicity often clash.

We conceptualize *rebel constituency* as the broad social group on whose behalf rebels claim to fight, with the objective of addressing the predicament it faces.<sup>3</sup> We distinguish between ethnic constituencies and ideological constituencies and theorize about their different effects on alliance behavior. This distinction maps onto debates about differences between ethnic and ideological civil wars in terms of their causes, dynamics, and termination (e.g., Kaufmann 1996; Sambanis 2001). Rebel organizations with an ethnic constituency advance political claims on behalf of an ethnic group, typically described as subjugated or mistreated. Rebel organizations with an ideological constituency cast political claims on behalf of social groups identified on the basis of non-ascriptive characteristics, which their

<sup>1</sup> See also Popovic (2018) for theory and evidence about the effects of shared state sponsorship on rebel alliances.

<sup>2</sup> We focus on alliances between organizations fighting against the same government within the same country, thus excluding cross-border rebel alliances.

<sup>3</sup> In some cases, these claims may reflect rebel leaders' genuine commitment to the well-being of their constituency; in others, leaders may be merely pursuing their narrow interests. Our argument applies regardless of leaders' motives.

ideology typically portrays as exploited or inappropriately treated.<sup>4</sup>

In keeping with a fundamental insight from the study of interstate alliances, we envision rebel alliances as serving primarily a capability-aggregation function (Waltz 1979), that is, rebel organizations ally in order to pull their resources and fight the government more effectively. Yet, alliances also entail potential costs for rebel organizations, namely negotiating costs, loss of autonomy, and opposition by supporters and members, which make rebels discerning about partners. The broad compatibility of political aspirations among organizations sharing an ideological constituency should keep alliance costs low. Negotiations among them should be smoother than for organizations not sharing an ideological constituency. Also, cooperation among organizations with a common ideological constituency should be less likely to draw the ire of supporters and members or to entail major departures from each organization's preferred course of action. Thus, rebel organizations with a common ideological constituency should be more likely to ally than those without.

This cooperation-inducing effect deriving from compatible political aspirations also exists for rebel organizations sharing an ethnic constituency. We argue, though, that it is offset by a cooperation-suppressing effect resulting from the distinctively competitive dynamics that characterize relations among co-ethnic rebels (Pischedda 2020). While "ethnic parochialism" predisposes *individuals* to support, cooperate with, and join rebel organizations making claims on behalf of their ethnic group (Sambanis, Schulhofer-Wohl, and Shayo 2012), it also stokes tensions among co-ethnic *organizations*. Indeed, because individual ethnic parochialism makes it relatively easy for rebel organizations to absorb the "social resource base" of co-ethnic competitors (in particular, the ethnic networks from which they draw support), rebel organizations may be tempted to attack a co-ethnic competitor out of a desire to extend their control of the ethnic community and/or fear of being attacked by the co-ethnic competitor. Even when inter-rebel war is deterred by its excessive costs, co-ethnic rebel organizations are likely to be deeply suspicious of one another. By contrast, given that the absence of a comparably powerful and widespread ideological parochialism makes taking over the resource base of defeated organizations with a shared ideological constituency difficult, relations among co-ideological organizations tend to be characterized by lower levels of distrust and conflict. That is the case despite likely tensions due to overlapping ambitions over the same social group. Therefore, while we expect a tendency to cooperate for organizations sharing an ideological constituency, our expectation for co-ethnic organizations is indeterminate, for the cooperation-inducing and cooperation-suppressing effects might balance each other. Moreover, due to their typical mutual distrust and the risk of infighting, we expect co-ethnic rebel organizations to engage only in relatively superficial forms of cooperation ("informal alliances"); rebel organizations sharing an ideological constituency, instead, are likely to establish deeper ties ("formal alliances").

Our research aims to shed light on the drivers of rebel alliances. This is a subject of growing academic attention with significant policy relevance, as rebel alliances affect various

outcomes. For example, rebel alliances appear to make government victory in civil wars less likely (Akcinaroglu 2012). They also seem to help contain competitive dynamics within fragmented insurgent movements, thus increasing rebels' political-military effectiveness (Krause 2017) and reducing their incentives to victimize civilians (Wood and Kathman 2015). The effects of rebel alliances may be felt long after guns fall silent, as there is evidence that alliances influence the risk of civil war recurrence (Zeigler 2016).

### Shared Constituencies and Rebel Alliances

Rebel groups stand to reap significant military benefits from forming alliances against the incumbent through various mechanisms of capability-aggregation.<sup>5</sup> First, battlefield coordination enables larger joint anti-government operations and diversionary attacks, whereby rebel groups engage government forces to relieve pressure on their beleaguered allies or to induce the government to reduce its presence elsewhere in the country. Second, pooling assets enables alliance members to access more resources than they could individually, thus strengthening the anti-government camp as a whole. In particular, intelligence-sharing and joint training can provide all members with information and skills, respectively, possessed by one, while alliance-wide use of cross-border logistic networks controlled by one organization can offer its allies access to the outside world.<sup>6</sup> Third, alliances make it possible for rebels to exploit tactical-operational comparative advantages and the efficiency gains of specialization (Bapat and Bond 2012). For example, in 2014, Free Syrian Army (FSA) affiliates near Aleppo explained their cooperation with the al-Nusra Front thus: "groups like us provide the numbers, and they [al-Nusra] provide what you might call the elite forces" (International Crisis Group 2014, 24). Al-Nusra contributed to the fight against the Assad regime with its unique military expertise (in particular, in suicide operations) but, given its relatively small numbers of fighters, it benefited from cooperating with larger FSA units.

In a statistical analysis of the effects of rebel alliances on civil war outcomes, Akcinaroglu (2012) presents evidence consistent with these capability-aggregation mechanisms. Alliances reduce the probability of rebel defeat and, under some conditions, increase the probability of rebel victory.<sup>7</sup> However, alliances may entail substantial costs too, which may deter their formation. Some alliances carry political and image costs for member organizations. Association with an actor perceived negatively by a rebel organization's supporters or rank-and-file risks to weaken it and undermine its leadership. For example, in its early days, the Moro National Liberation Front refrained from cooperating with the fighters of the Communist Party of the Philippines to avoid alienating both Moro supporters and patrons in the Muslim world (Yegar 2002, 277). Analogously, it seems that al-Nusra's name change and distancing from al-Qaeda in 2017 was at least in part motivated by a desire to attract support from Gulf States against Assad. Even if on-the-ground cooperation is not publicly announced and institutionalized, keeping it secret, thus avoiding the corresponding costs, will often be hard.

<sup>5</sup>The terrorism literature postulates similar effects of alliances and finds that they increase the longevity and lethality of terrorist groups (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008; Horowitz and Potter 2014; Phillips 2014).

<sup>6</sup>This mechanism implies that some rebel resources are "non-rival," that is, an organization's access to them does not necessarily reduce access for others.

<sup>7</sup>Akcinaroglu (2012) finds a positive effect on rebel victory only for "capable" (i.e., between strong organizations) and "credible" (i.e., formal) alliances.

<sup>4</sup>Sanin and Wood (2014) correctly note that ethnic claims can be conceptualized as ideological too, given that identifying a referent ethnic community facing a challenge to be addressed with military means amounts to an ideology. The basis of our distinction between ethnic and ideological constituencies, however, is the type of identity required for membership, not their ideational nature.

Another type of cost arises from the fact that establishing an alliance may require investing substantial resources in negotiations. Moreover, the resulting agreement may undermine an organization's autonomy to define its preferred course of action against the incumbent, which both leaders and rank-and-file would want to avoid. Put differently, rebel alliances entail a "power-autonomy trade-off" for their members, as aggregating capabilities against the incumbent may come at the cost of reduced autonomy.<sup>8</sup>

Rebel groups with a common ideological constituency are well positioned to enjoy the power-aggregation benefits of alliances while minimizing the costs. This is because these organizations tend to have compatible political aspirations, that is, a minimum common denominator in terms of political goals and values. Like ideologically aligned political parties in the context of government coalition formation (Martin and Stevenson 2001), rebel groups with a shared ideological constituency would be relatively likely to agree on a plan of action satisfying their key aspirations—thus preserving their autonomy—and would incur modest negotiation costs to come to an agreement. Rebel organizations with a common ideological constituency would also typically expect little opposition to an alliance from their supporters and members, as they would likely see such an alliance as furthering the interests and values that brought them to support or join the organizations in the first place. Therefore, we expect organizations with a common ideological constituency to be drawn to one another as alliance partners.

This is not to imply perfectly harmonious relations among organizations with a shared ideological constituency. In fact, as co-constituent organizations appealing to the same social group, they would tend to engage in some form of competition. In particular, rebel organizations may try to develop a reputation for valuable attributes (e.g., resolve, military effectiveness, and incorruptibility) and/or distinct ideological brands (Tokdemir et al. 2021) to preserve and increase their "market share" within the common constituency. Yet, we expect the tensions emerging from these competitive dynamics to be generally mild and thus to be overshadowed by the powerful incentives for cooperation produced by compatible political aspirations, resulting in a tendency for organizations with a shared ideological constituency to ally with one another.

**H1:** *Rebel organizations with a shared ideological constituency are more likely to ally than those without.*

#### *The Complex Effects of Co-Ethnicity on Rebel Alliances*

For co-ethnic rebel organizations, powerful cooperation-inducing and cooperation-suppressing effects coexist. Like their ideological counterparts, co-ethnic rebel organizations tend to have broadly compatible political aspirations, which should make alliances more likely by lowering their costs. However, drawing on recent work on inter-rebel fighting (Pischedda 2020), we posit that competition among co-ethnic organizations is not limited to the "product differentiation" efforts discussed above and instead takes a characteristically intense form, leading to an offsetting cooperation-suppressing effect.

Pischedda (2020) argues that competition among co-ethnic rebel organizations has a significant potential for escalation to inter-rebel war. Ethnic organizations typically hold sway over a subset of the ethnic constituency, their social resource base—that is, the social networks from which

they actually obtain intelligence, recruits, and material support, in addition to their current members—and jostle with other co-ethnic organizations for control of the broader ethnic community.<sup>9</sup> The demise of co-ethnic competitors would remove significant obstacles to an organization's domination of its ethnic constituency, as it would find itself in a position to take over with relative ease contested ethnic networks and the social resource base of erstwhile rivals (in particular, their support networks). Therefore, co-ethnicity provides powerful incentives for inter-rebel aggression: a rebel organization may be tempted to use force both out of a desire of growing at a co-ethnic rival's expense and out of fear of being attacked down the road. Even when a balanced distribution of power among rebels or a serious and imminent threat posed by the government deters inter-rebel war by making it too costly, the baseline level of distrust among co-ethnic organizations is likely to be high. Using a combination of case studies and statistical analysis of post-Cold War civil wars, Pischedda (2020) provides evidence of a positive effect of shared ethnicity on inter-rebel war while finding no effect for shared ideology.

The micro-foundation of the relative ease of harnessing the social resource base of co-ethnic organizations and controlling the broader ethnic constituency in the absence of rivals is ethnic parochialism—*individuals'* tendency to cooperate more with and favor members of their ethnic group—which has been documented in sociopolitical settings ranging from voting and patronage distribution to contribution to public goods, the "stacking" of security forces, and wartime informing (Posner 2004; Ferree 2006; Chandra 2007; Roessler 2011; Franck and Rainer 2012; Sambanis, Schulhofer-Wohl, and Shayo 2012; Lyall, Shiraite, and Imai 2015; Corstange 2016; Robinson 2020). In the context of multiparty civil wars, this co-ethnic bias translates in a tendency for individuals to be inclined to support, cooperate with, and join rebel organizations claiming to represent their ethnic group, giving rise to intense interorganizational competition for a "biddable" population often taking a violent form (Pischedda 2020).<sup>10</sup> Explanations of ethnic parochialism differ. Some emphasize individuals' instrumental rationality. In particular, high levels of intra-ethnic cooperation may result from the fact that ethnic networks provide better information about co-ethnics, thus deterring individual opportunism; self-fulfilling expectations of reciprocity among co-ethnics may then set in, facilitated by the relative visibility and stickiness of ethnic attributes (Fearon and Laitin 1996; Hale 2004; Habyarimana et al. 2009; Larson and Lewis 2017). Other explanations posit that individuals have profound emotional attachments to their ethnic group, which in turn may be the result of early socialization through family and school (Birmir 2006; Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006; Balcells 2013) or an evolutionary inheritance from our

<sup>9</sup> Staniland (2014) adopts a similar conceptualization of rebel organizations' social bases. The key difference is that he focuses on preexisting social networks atop which rebel organizations form (e.g., political parties, religious organizations, kinship ties, sport clubs), while we refer to social networks controlled by a rebel organization, regardless of whether they existed before the rebellion and whether they constituted the "foundation" for the emergence of the organization.

<sup>10</sup> Although rebel leaders may be as ethno-parochial as the average individual, they are distinctively likely to be responsive to the potential existential threat and opportunity for expansion represented by co-ethnic organizations. Insurgent leaders are uniquely placed to grasp the incentives provided by their strategic environment, as they are the ones regularly having to make decisions with direct implications for the prospects of organizational survival and growth. Moreover, leaders' personal interests are more closely aligned with those of the organization than is the case for average individuals. Thus, rebel leaders will be particularly motivated to pursue the survival and growth of *their* organization.

<sup>8</sup> This is analogous to Morrow's (1991) security-autonomy trade-off.

ancestral past as members of tightly knit kin-culture groups, that is, tribes (Bowles and Gintis 2013; Gat 2013).<sup>11</sup>

Although adjudicating between these explanations is beyond the scope of this article, they all provide reasons to expect individual-level parochialism along ethnic lines but no comparably strong and widespread ideological parochialism. In fact, the existing studies suggest that ethnic networks (at least in developing countries, the setting of most civil wars) tend to be denser and more pervasive than networks defined on some other basis, such as ideology or class (Corstange 2016), while the low visibility and limited stickiness of ideological identities reduce their usefulness as information shortcuts.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, whereas socialization in the ethnic group starts at birth, ideological socialization tends to occur later, which suggests that emotional attachments to ideologically defined constituencies should generally be less profound and less widespread across a population.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, relations among co-ethnic rebel organizations are subject to two powerful offsetting forces. On the one hand, the compatibility of their political aspirations pulls them together into alliances enabling them to reap the benefits of power aggregation on the cheap. On the other hand, the fact that inter-rebel war could be waged effectively to get rid of co-ethnic competitors and take control of the shared constituency (Pischedda 2020) implies high levels of distrust and tension between co-ethnic organizations, which keep them apart. Relations between the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) are a useful illustration. In the second half of the 1970s, after years of infighting, the Eritrean organizations cooperated with each other, bowing to pressure from the Eritrean population and international supporters as well as to the need to fend off Ethiopian government offensives. Yet, in 1980, the EPLF exploited a lull in government military operations to crush its weaker co-ethnic rival and take control of the Eritrean rebellion. By contrast, there should not be a powerful cooperation-suppressing effect for rebel organizations sharing an ideological constituency. As noted above, these organizations do engage in efforts at "product differentiation" to stand out within their common constituency. However, the absence of a comparable ideological parochialism implies limited prospects of easily capturing the social resource base of a vanquished competitor and the rest of the constituency through inter-rebel war, which should keep distrust and the corresponding risk of violent escalation relatively low: when absorbing a defeated competitor's resource base is likely to be a difficult and costly endeavor, requiring large-scale proselytizing and deployment of coercive assets on an unresponsive (or, worse, recalcitrant) population, rebel organizations would have little reason to plan for inter-rebel aggression. Although the net effect is theoretically indeterminate, the existence of two opposite forces shaping

relations among co-ethnic organizations implies that common ethnic constituencies should have a smaller positive impact on alliances, if they have one at all, than shared ideological constituencies:

**H2:** *Co-ethnicity has a weaker positive effect, if it has an effect at all, on the probability of alliances than shared ideological constituency.*

#### *Formal and Informal Alliances*

Following Akcinaroglu (2012), we distinguish between informal and formal alliances.<sup>14</sup> Informal alliances entail on-the-ground cooperation, taking the form of resource pooling (e.g., arms, training, recruits, logistics, and intelligence) and/or battlefield collaboration (i.e., joint or coordinated operations). Formal alliances are publicly announced commitments by two or more rebel organizations to cooperate in their fight against the government, entailing the creation of a named institution (e.g., the FMLN, bringing together five Salvadorean rebel groups).

The degree of institutionalization in formal alliances varies, but they often entail procedures for information-sharing and even joint planning. Thus, formal alliances should provide more capability-aggregation benefits than informal ones, because arrangements for information-sharing and joint decision-making among rebel groups may help reduce coordination problems bedeviling collective action. Enhanced information flows and the audience costs of violating a public commitment should also constrain opportunistic behavior: once concerns about free-riding and non-reciprocation are assuaged, allies should be more willing to engage in resource-sharing and coordination of their respective forces as well as to take full advantage of opportunities for specialization.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these significant military benefits, we expect co-ethnic rebel groups to be more likely to opt for informal arrangements, when they cooperate. Given the intensity of distrust between co-ethnic organizations and the real possibility of infighting (Pischedda 2020), rebel leaders would be weary of investing time and other resources to create complex, public cooperative arrangements whose viability remains highly uncertain. Moreover, rebel organizations would fear that sensitive information on their plans and tactics acquired by co-ethnic organizations through formal alliance ties may lead to vulnerabilities in case infighting broke out. Of particular concern would be the risk that inter-rebel war may prompt a former co-ethnic ally to defect to the government, buttressing its counterinsurgency capabilities with a treasure trove of intelligence on the inner workings of the insurgency (Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro 2012; Staniland 2012). Conversely, co-ideological rebel organizations should be particularly drawn to formal alliances, as their relations are likely to be less antagonistic.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup>The occurrence of large-scale violence against civilians along ethnic lines should strengthen both instrumental and emotional drivers of individual cooperation with co-ethnic organizations. In the face of a serious risk of being victimized because of their ethnic identity, even people merely interested in individual survival likely turn to co-ethnic armed actors for protection (Mueller 2000).

<sup>12</sup>Our claim is a probabilistic and relative one. There certainly are instances in which ideological identities are observable and hard to escape. For example, Kalyvas (2008, 1047) reports that during the Russian civil war, "the Whites sometimes determined who was a Bolshevik by looking for callused hands," and Balcells (2017) documents sticky ideological identities in the Spanish civil war. The point is that ethnic traits are generally more difficult to hide and more frequently perceived by both in-groups and out-groups as ascriptive, that is inherited and thus unchangeable. See Chandra (2007) and Wimmer (2013).

<sup>13</sup>Various evolutionary perspectives also converge in suggesting that ethnic constituencies should generally elicit stronger emotional responses than other constituency types (Bowles and Gintis 2013; Gat 2013).

<sup>14</sup>Similarly, Moghadam (2017) studies "high-end" and "low-end" cooperation between terrorist actors.

<sup>15</sup>On internal and external audience costs generated by publicly announced international alliance commitments, see Fearon (1997) and Morrow (2000).

<sup>16</sup>Some argue that a rationale for international alliances is managing tensions among their members through information-sharing mechanisms that increase transparency. This argument, however, does not suggest that co-ethnic rebel organizations would tend to establish formal alliances to prevent their conflicts from escalating. In fact, Weitsman (2004, 17–24), a prominent proponent of this perspective, posits that when levels of mutual threat perception are high, alliances would be ineffective tools of conflict management, which implies that we should not expect co-ethnic rebel organizations to seek formal alliances to prevent their disputes from escalating. By contrast, formal alliances could help manage the milder tensions that characterize relations among organizations sharing an

These considerations suggest our third hypothesis:

**H3:** *Rebel organizations sharing an ideological constituency are more likely to establish formal alliances, while rebel organizations with a shared ethnic constituency are more likely to establish informal alliances, if they ally at all.*

## Data and Variables

### Dependent Variables

Our Rebel Organization Alliance Dataset (ROAD) includes all pairs of rebel organizations engaged in civil war against the same government in a given year over the period 1946–2015 (320 unique rebel organizations and 665 rebel dyads, for a total of 2,496 dyad-years), based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Dyadic Dataset 17.1 (Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen 2008). The unit of analysis is the undirected *rebel dyad-year*. We coded rebel alliances by conducting extensive research on each pair of rebel groups in our dataset. We decided to create our own alliance variables because the existing dataset coding formal and informal inter-rebel cooperation (Akcinaroglu 2012), is monadic rather than dyadic, as it indicates whether a rebel organization had an alliance in a given year but not with which organization(s). The other main cross-national dataset on alliances available at the time of our research, compiled by Bapat and Bond (2012), does not distinguish between formal and informal alliances and covers only the period up to 2001, a substantially shorter time span than the one we aimed to study.<sup>17</sup>

We code three alliance variables on an yearly basis: (1) INFORMAL ALLIANCE, a binary variable marking dyads whose members engage *only* in cooperation on the ground, taking the form of battlefield collaboration (i.e., joint or coordinated battles and attacks) and/or sharing of resources (in particular, training, weapons, intelligence, and logistic networks); (2) FORMAL ALLIANCE, a binary variable capturing dyads whose members have publicly announced an alliance with a specific name (e.g., Afghanistan’s Northern Alliance);<sup>18</sup> and (3) ALLIANCE, a binary variable indicating the existence of either type of alliance.

### Independent Variables

Our key independent variables are CO-ETHNIC and CO-IDEOLOGICAL, marking pairs of rebel groups sharing ethnic and ideological constituencies, respectively. These binary variables are not mutually exclusive, as rebel organizations can advance both ethnic and ideological claims at the same time. The dyadic common-constituency variables are based on two organization-level dummies, indicating whether a rebel organization has an ethnic constituency and an ideological constituency, both of which are coded on the basis of organizations’ *claims*.

The data on ethnic claims come from the ACD2EPR Dataset 2018.1 (Vogt et al. 2015). Following ACD2EPR, we adopt a broad definition of ethnicity as a subjective sense

ideological constituency, providing an additional rationale for these organizations to ally formally.

<sup>17</sup> The Big Allied and Dangerous 2.0 dataset does not differentiate between formal and informal alliances either and has even narrower time coverage (1998–2012) (Asal, Rethemeyer, and Schoon 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Evidence of on-the-ground cooperation is not necessary for coding formal alliances. However, we exclude cases in which there is direct evidence that formal alliances did not entail any cooperation whatsoever on the ground (what we call “dead letter alliances”).

of commonality based on a belief in common ancestry and culture. Various markers of shared ancestry and culture may be relevant, including common language, race, and/or religion. We code a rebel organization as affiliated with an ethnic group if the organization casts claims on behalf of that ethnic community; organizations can make claims on behalf of multiple ethnic groups and thus have multiple ethnic affiliations (Wucherpfennig et al. 2012).

We focus on two broad constituency-defining ideologies—Marxism and Islamism—whose constituencies are exploited social classes and a community of Muslim believers, respectively. Although certainly not the only ones, these are the most prevalent and most studied ideologies in post-WWII civil wars.<sup>19</sup> For Marxist groups, we use Balcells and Kalyvas’s (2015) dataset, which codes rebel organizations professing a Marxist or Revolutionary Socialist ideology.<sup>20</sup>

Using a range of secondary sources (conflict encyclopedias, newspapers, and think-tank reports as well as scholarly works), we code as Islamist rebel organizations claiming to fight to advance political goals inspired by their interpretation of Islam, including (but not limited to) the establishment of a state or autonomous region ruled by Sharia law.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that in some cases, Islam may constitute both the cultural cleavage separating ethnic groups and the basis for a political ideology, Islamism, so that two rebel organizations can be both co-ethnic and co-Islamist. In other cases, the ethnic and ideological dimensions may not coexist.<sup>22</sup>

Our broad ideological categories are internally heterogeneous. For example, the Marxist category includes both Marxist–Leninist and Maoist rebel organizations, while the Islamist category encompasses both transnational jihadists (e.g., the Islamic State) and Islamic nationalists (e.g., Hamas). We opted for broad categories because ideological differences within the same ideological family typically do not imply different constituencies. For example, both Marxist–Leninist and Maoist rebel organizations claim to be fighting on behalf of “exploited classes” (including both urban workers and peasants), which would thus be their common constituency in a civil war against the same government.<sup>23</sup> The point applies to Islamist rebel groups, too:

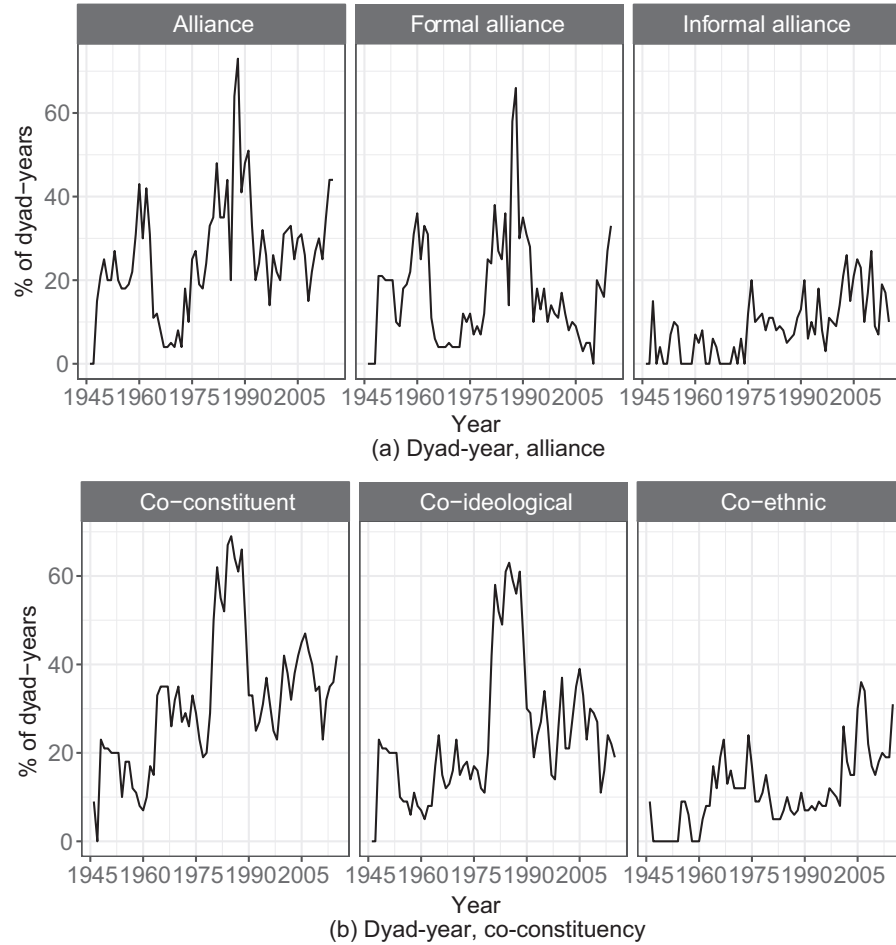
<sup>19</sup> During the Cold War, Marxism constituted the ideological basis for rebel mobilization and recruitment *par excellence*; more recently, political Islam has become increasingly prevalent (Balcells and Kalyvas 2015; Melander, Pettersson, and Themnér 2016). Cross-checking our list of rebel organizations with the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (FORGE) dataset’s (Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020) variables coding right-wing and religiously inspired ideologies reveals zero pairs of right-wing rebel organizations and only two pairs whose members embrace an ideology inspired by a religion other than Islam in our data.

<sup>20</sup> We code rebel groups that are in our dataset but not in Balcells and Kalyvas’ (2015) with secondary sources, following their coding protocol. See the online appendix for details.

<sup>21</sup> Note that we code pairs of Islamist organizations as co-Islamist (for both the main variable and the alternatives based on sub-types) if their members are on the same side of the main Islamic sectarian divide (i.e., both organizations adhere to Sunni Islam or both adhere to Shia Islam).

<sup>22</sup> For example, Algeria’s rebel groups in the 1990s were co-Islamist but not co-ethnic, because they professed to be fighting for the appropriate role of Islam in public life, without claiming to represent specific ethnic groups. Conversely, Fatah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) are co-ethnic but not co-Islamist: although they both cast claims on behalf of a Muslim-majority ethnic group, only PIJ has an Islamist outlook.

<sup>23</sup> Rebel organizations will often differ in the extent to which they rely on specific segments of their constituency (e.g., urban workers versus peasants or, say, members of ethnic group X living in the west of a country versus members of X living in the east), but this would not amount to having different constituencies based on our definition; rather, it would mean that organizations have “appropriated” different social networks (Staniland 2014). Furthermore, it should be noted that even when focusing on appropriated social networks, instead of constituencies as we conceive them, the above-mentioned Marxist–Leninist/Maoist divide



**Figure 1.** Temporal patterns for alliances and co-constituencies (1946–2015).

*Note.* Panel a shows rebel alliance patterns over time. Panel b displays percentages of rebel dyads by shared constituency over time.

for instance, despite ideological differences about the legitimacy of democracy and civilian targeting, the Islamic Salvation Army and the Armed Islamic Group shared an ideologically defined constituency in Algeria—the community of Sunni Islam believers.

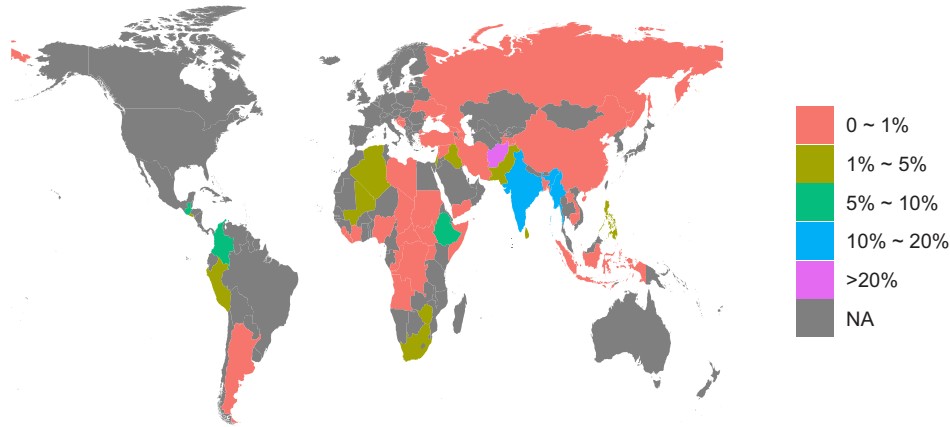
There is also an important methodological rationale for focusing on broad shared ideological constituencies: they are less likely to be endogenous to alliance decisions than more nuanced measures of shared ideology. As Bacon's (2018) work on terrorist alliances suggests, although rebel organizations with compatible ideologies are drawn to one another, they may engage in further ideological convergence to facilitate the forging of alliance ties. For example, in the period leading up to its admission in the Islamic State's transnational alliance network, the hitherto Nigeria-focused Islamist organization Boko Haram "increasingly tailored its propaganda toward global jihadis, professionalizing its media products and emphasizing Arabic over Hausa, bidding to enter the Islamic State's orbit" (Thurson 2016, 24). The advantage of focusing on broad ideological constituencies is that they tend to be slow-moving, which

does not map onto the urban workers/peasants distinction, as both sets of rebel organizations generally rely on peasants to wage guerrilla warfare; for example, the avowedly Marxist-Leninist TPLF and FARC, and the Maoist Sendero Luminoso all prioritized the mobilization of peasants.

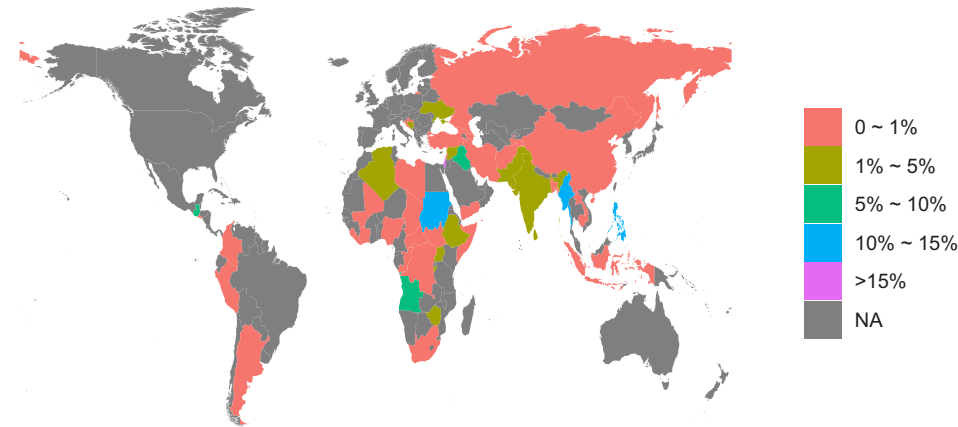
makes them unlikely to reflect leaders' strategic calculations about alliances. Even rebel leaders bent on instrumentally manipulating their organizations' ideological image will be constrained in the short run by the need to ensure some degree of credibility of ideological proclamations in the eyes of members, supporters, and potential allies or, as Christia (2012) would say, by sticky identity repertoires. Thus, in the example given above, while Boko Haram's recent embrace of transnational jihadism reflected its desire to cooperate with the Islamic State, the Nigerian organization's longstanding Islamist orientation preceded, and was exogenous to, this alliance decision. Boko Haram's leadership had some leeway in strategically fine-tuning its Islamist profile, but it would have found it far more difficult to embrace an entirely different ideology, such as a secular one.

Figure 1 depicts patterns of rebel alliances and the prevalence of co-constituent dyads in multiparty civil wars over time. Alliances in general and formal alliances peaked in the late 1980s, a moment in which co-ideological dyads were also at the height of their prevalence. Figure 2 shows the geographic distribution of types of co-constituency across our sample of fifty-one countries experiencing multiparty civil wars in the 1946–2015 period. The different colors indicate the global share of a country for each type of

### Co-ideological Rebel Dyads (1946–2015)



### Co-ethnic Rebel Dyads (1946–2015)



**Figure 2.** Geographical patterns of co-constituencies (1946–2015).

*Note.* Gray areas denote countries that did not experience multiparty civil wars and thus are not in our sample.

co-constituency. The top part shows that Afghanistan, India, and Myanmar have the highest share of co-ideological rebel dyads, while the bottom part indicates that Israel, Myanmar, Sudan, and the Philippines hold the record for co-ethnic rebel dyads.<sup>24</sup>

#### Control Variables

We control for various factors that could affect the probability of rebel alliances. *SPLINTER* is a binary variable indicating whether two rebel groups splintered off from one another or from the same parent organization, based on the UCDP Actor Dataset 2.2-2014.<sup>25</sup> Including *SPLINTER* is important because organizations emerging from connected fragmentation processes are likely to share a constituency and display distinct tendencies to ally, depending on whether separation was amicable. *POST-COLD WAR* is a binary indicator for the period after the Cold War

(i.e., post-1990), which may affect both the prevalence of different types of rebel constituencies and the tendency for rebel groups to ally (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). *NUMBER OF REBEL GROUPS* is a count of rebel organizations across all dyads pitted against the same government in a given year. On the one hand, as the number of rebel organizations goes up, each one may have fewer incentives to form alliances following a logic of strength (or at least safety) in numbers vis-à-vis the government; on the other hand, a highly fragmented rebel movement may imply that each organization is relatively weak (i.e., it has access to a small share of total rebel resources) and thus needs allies. *MILITARY PERSONNEL* and *GDP PER CAPITA* indicate, respectively, the size of the government armed forces (in millions) and the country's per capita income (in million 2011 USD, logged), as proxies for government power.<sup>26</sup>

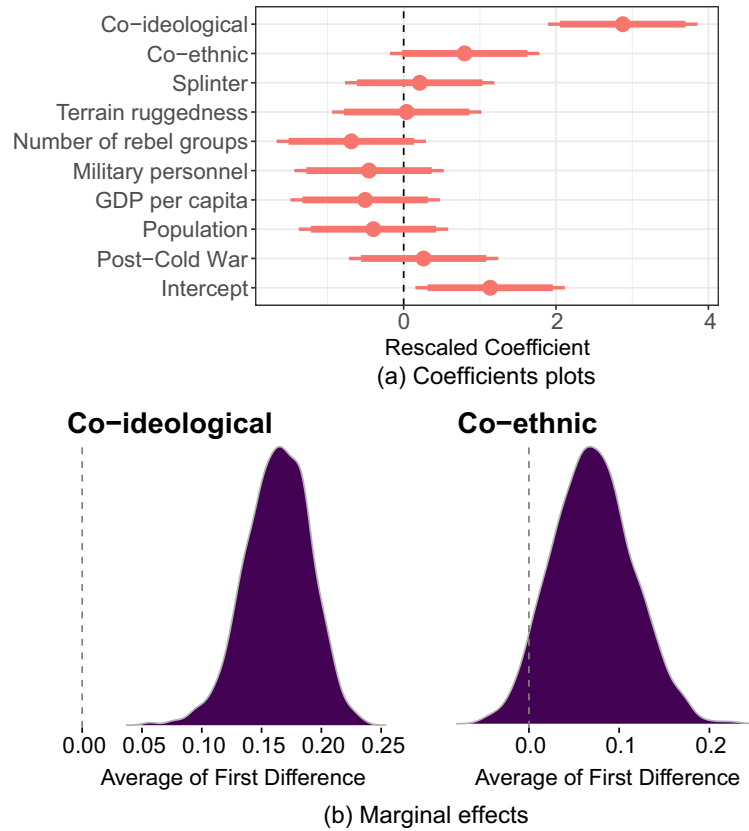
Furthermore, we control for *POPULATION* size (logged), a proxy for the degree to which the government security apparatus is spread thin policing the country. *POPULATION* and *GDP PER CAPITA* are from Penn World Table 9.1, which covers the period 1950–2017 (Feenstra, Inklaar, and Timmer 2015). We supplement this source

<sup>24</sup> Figure A21 in the online appendix plots the number of co-constituent dyad-years in each country as a percentage of the total number of dyad-years in that country, thus illustrating the within-country prevalence of shared constituency types.

<sup>25</sup> We code splintering for the years 2014–2015, which are not covered in the Actor Dataset, using conflict encyclopedias and case-specific sources.

<sup>26</sup> Rebels facing strong incumbents may be more inclined to cooperate with one another, but strong governments could also deter alliances (Asal et al. 2016).





**Figure 3.** Logistic regression results for alliance (1946–2015).

*Note.* Panel a displays estimated coefficients with 90% and 95% confidence intervals (standard errors clustered at the country level). Panel b presents the distributions of estimated first differences based on the posterior distribution of panel a’s parameters.

for other years with the World Bank’s World Development Indicators (WDI) and the Correlates of War (COW)’s National Material Capabilities 5.0 (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972; World Bank Group 2018). The size of armed forces personnel is mainly from COW, supplemented with WDI for 2013–2015.<sup>27</sup> We also control for terrain ruggedness, the proportion of a country’s rugged terrain (Shaver, Carter, and Shawa 2019), as difficult terrain may reduce the government’s power projection, thus mitigating rebels’ incentives to cooperate. Finally, we include a cubic polynomial approximation to model the temporal dependence among observations in our time-series cross-sectional data (Carter and Signorino 2010).<sup>28</sup>

### Empirical Results

We use various modeling strategies, adjusting accordingly our data and variable structures. We first estimate a logistic regression model with ALLIANCE (i.e., formal and informal alliances combined) as the dependent variable. Panel a of figure 3 plots estimated coefficients (rescaled for ease of visualization). Consistent with our first hypothesis, CO-IDEOLOGICAL has a significant positive effect, indicating that rebel groups with a shared ideological constituency are more likely to ally with one another than groups without. By contrast, CO-ETHNIC is not significant. The fact that

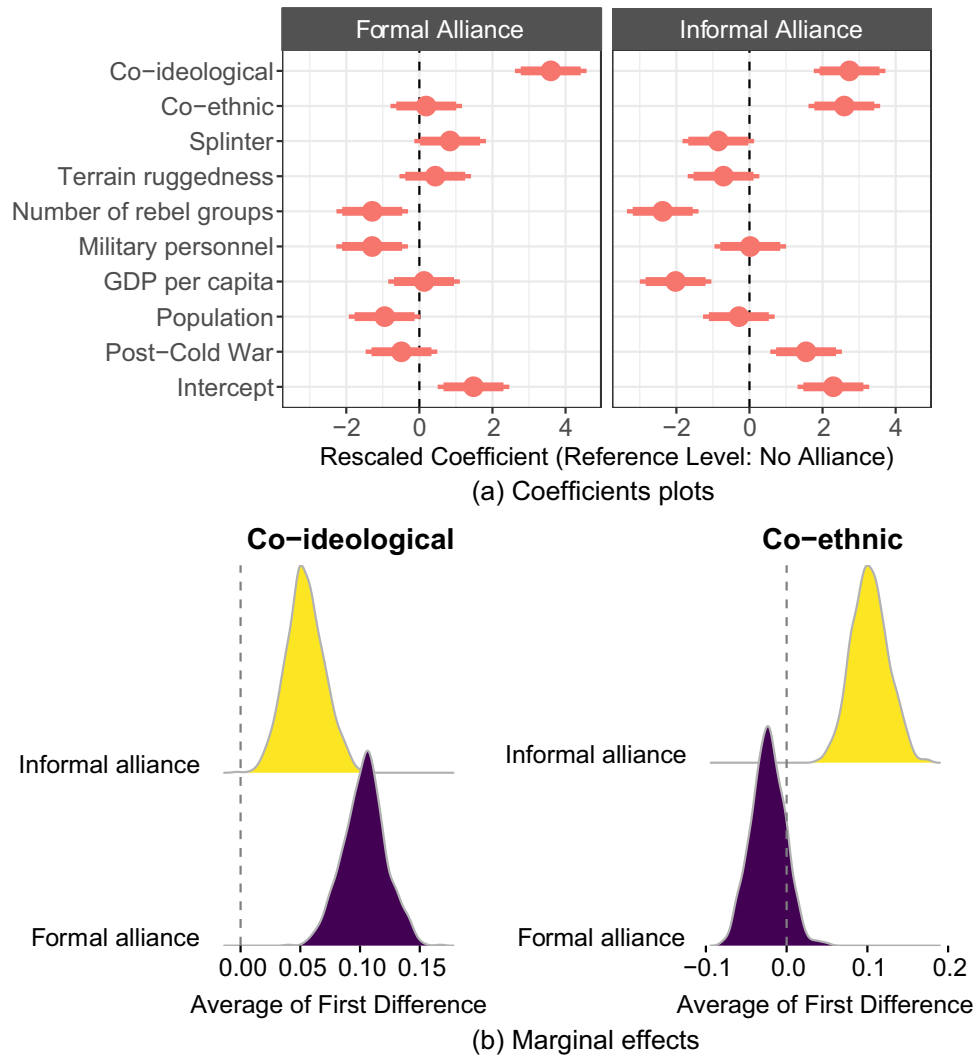
of the co-constituency dummies, only CO-IDEOLOGICAL reaches statistical significance is consistent with our expectations about the existence of offsetting effects of shared ethnicity on rebel alliances.

To assess the substantive importance of the estimated effects, we plot the *first differences in predicted probabilities* (i.e., marginal effects) of alliances for the key independent variables. We rely on simulations via an observed-value approach to obtain the first differences. For each simulation, we calculate the changes in the predicted probability of alliances by varying the value of one key independent variable (from zero to one) at a time, while allowing other independent variables to take their observed values in the population. By running one thousand simulations and averaging over them, we obtain “an estimate of the average effect in the population” for that independent variable (Hanmer and Ozan Kalkan 2013, 263).

Panel b of figure 3 presents the distributions of first differences across simulations based on the model results reported in panel a. The left graph shows an average increase in predicted probability of 0.16 for a shift of CO-IDEOLOGICAL from zero to one (the *average* predicted probabilities of alliance for dyads with and without a shared ideological constituency are 0.4 and 0.24, respectively). The entire density distribution is to the right of the  $x = 0$  vertical line, indicating a highly significant positive effect. We thus find strong evidence of a substantively large effect of shared ideological constituency. A comparison with the distribution of first differences for CO-ETHNIC (right graph of panel b) reveals a significantly smaller effect for co-ethnicity

<sup>27</sup> We impute missing values with the Bayesian semiparametric copula method (Hoff 2007).

<sup>28</sup> We omit the corresponding coefficients from our report due to space constraints.



**Figure 4.** Multinomial regressions results for formal and informal alliances (1946–2015).

*Note.* Panel a displays estimated coefficients with 90% and 95% confidence intervals (standard errors clustered at the country level). Panel b presents the distributions of estimated first differences based on the posterior distribution of panel a's parameters.

(the *average* first difference is 0.07), in line with our second hypothesis.<sup>29</sup>

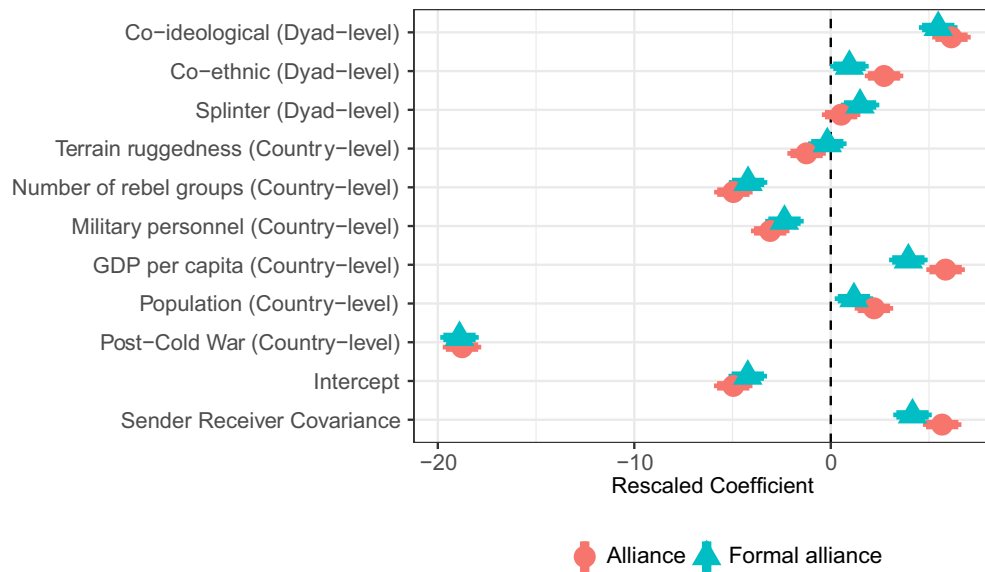
To investigate whether the different types of shared constituencies lead to distinct types of alliances—namely whether co-ideological dyads tend to establish in-depth cooperation, while co-ethnic dyads' cooperation tends to be informal—we run a multinomial logit model. The dependent variable here is nominal, taking the value of zero for no alliance, one for informal alliance, and two for formal alliance (categories are mutually exclusive).

Panel a of [figure 4](#) reports the estimated coefficients for formal alliance (left) and informal alliance (right) relative to no alliance, the reference category. Results are consistent with our third hypothesis: CO-ETHNIC has a statistically significant and positive effect on informal alliances only, while CO-IDEOLOGY has a significant, positive effect on both formal and informal alliances.

Since coefficients in multinomial logit models are sometimes “unreliable for assessing statistical significance” ([Paolino 2021](#), 417), we again use the simulation via the observed-value approach to obtain the first differences in predicted probability for our co-constituency variables ([Hanmer and Ozan Kalkan 2013](#)), which we plot in panel b of [figure 4](#). CO-IDEOLOGICAL has a significant, positive marginal effect on both types of alliances (the impact on informal alliances, an average increase in probability of 0.05, is substantially smaller than on formal alliances, 0.1). CO-ETHNIC has a significant, positive marginal effect only on informal alliances. Thus, the multinomial logit analysis confirms our theoretical expectation that co-ethnicity tends to promote only relatively superficial cooperation, while shared ideological constituencies prompt deeper cooperation.

A possible alternative explanation for the distinct alliance patterns of co-ethnic organizations relates to incumbents' “wedge strategies” ([Crawford 2011](#)). In particular, the government may use threats of intensified military pressure and/or promises of rewards to suppress co-ethnic rebel

<sup>29</sup> Based on a two-sample *t*-test of the differences in marginal effects over one thousand simulations.



**Figure 5.** AME model results for formal and informal alliance (1947–2015).

*Note:* Estimated posterior means with 90% and 95% credible intervals.

cooperation. However, this is unconvincing on two theoretical grounds. First, it is not clear why governments would feel more threatened by a united ethnic front than an ideological one, thus devoting more resources to prevent or break ethnic alliances. Second, the idea that rebel alliances are systematically driven by government’s actions evokes an implausible image of rebel groups as pawns, rather than strategic actors capable of seeing through the incumbent’s machinations. In any case, we probe this alternative explanation with interactions between our co-constituency variables and the measures of government power (GDP and troop numbers). If government initiatives shaped alliances between co-ethnic rebel groups, we should observe a negative interaction effect for CO-ETHNIC, but not for CO-IDEOLOGICAL, assuming that more resources at the government’s disposal would make its manipulation efforts more effective. The results (online figure A1) indicate that, if anything, co-ethnic alliances are more likely in the face of stronger incumbents, casting doubts on the idea that lower levels of cooperation among co-ethnic rebel organizations reflect government manipulation.

Another possible alternative explanation is that low levels of internal formal organization/institutionalization of ethnic rebel groups predispose them to eschew formal alliances. Although, to our knowledge, the existing cross-national datasets do not include measures of the degree of rebel groups’ internal formal organization/institutionalization, we use as a proxy Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan’s (2013) variable STRENGTH-CENT, indicating the extent of control exercised by the rebel central command (ranging from “low” to “medium” and “high”). Using this rebel group-level variable, we created STRENGTH CENTRAL COMMAND, a dyad-level ordinal variable ranging from one (both organizations score “low”) to five (both organizations score “high”). Our main results are robust to controlling for the strength of central command (see online figures A2 and A3). Moreover, the ordinal logit analysis at the organization-year level reported in online figure A4 indicates that ethnic rebel organizations actually score higher on STRENGTH CENTRAL COMMAND

than other organizations. Thus, these results increase confidence in our argument by assuaging concerns that the distinctive alliance patterns of co-ethnic organizations we observe may result from their internal organization (or lack thereof).

#### *Robustness Checks*

Our models so far have assumed independent dyad-year observations (i.e., A’s and B’s decisions to ally with each other would be independent from their respective alliances with C). Yet, this assumption is often methodologically and theoretically unwarranted, especially in the study of alliances (Maoz et al. 2007; Cranmer, Desmarais, and Kirkland 2012; Gade et al. 2019). For example, rebel groups’ alliances may display homophily (the tendency to interact more with groups sharing latent traits), resulting in transitivity (“the friend of my friend is my friend”) and balance (“the enemy of my friend is my enemy”) (Hoff 2008). Given that traditional statistical models cannot capture higher order dependencies and latent attributes, we use a latent space network model—the AME model—which treats rebel groups as network nodes and alliances between them as ties (Minhas, Hoff, and Ward 2019). The AME model can account for underlying dependencies between dyads (additive effects) and higher order dependencies (multiplicative effects, such as homophily) driving alliances (Gade et al. 2019; Gade, Hafez, and Gabbay 2019; Gallop, Minhas, and Dorff 2020).<sup>30</sup>

Like the logistic and multinomial analyses, the AME analysis includes dyad-level covariates corresponding to factors common to both rebel organizations.<sup>31</sup> The results, presented in figure 5, are broadly consistent with our

<sup>30</sup>A limitation of applying the AME and other network models to our data structure is that rebel organizations can only ally within the same civil war-country, while AME assumes all organizations have the possibility of allying with one another. Moreover, we dropped the year of 1946 as AME cannot be run if the start year of a longitudinal network includes zero ties (i.e., no alliances).

<sup>31</sup>We use the tailored version of the R *amen* package due to changes in compositions of civil war networks over time (Gallop, Minhas, and Dorff 2020). Each model is estimated via MCMC sampling, with a burn-in period of one thousand followed by ten thousand iterations.

hypotheses: dyads with a shared ideological constituency are generally more likely to have alliances than those without, and CO-IDEOLOGICAL has a larger effect than CO-ETHNIC; moreover, CO-IDEOLOGICAL has a strong, highly significant effect on formal alliances, while the effect of CO-ETHNIC is much weaker and does not reach statistical significance at the 95% level.<sup>32</sup> In sum, the AME models provide further support to our theoretical expectations while relieving methodological concerns about interdependence among observations.

Moreover, our key findings are robust to the inclusion of additional control variables and the use of alternative operationalizations of independent variables and modeling strategies.<sup>33</sup>

First, we employ the SPDM (Beger et al. 2017) to account for the fact that some rebel dyads may not be at “risk” of forming alliances (as reflected in the fact that some rebel dyads in our sample never experienced alliances). Online figure A7 presents SPDM results with the same variables as in our main models.<sup>34</sup> CO-IDEOLOGICAL significantly shortens time to ALLIANCE, while CO-ETHNIC does not, confirming that the effects of types of common constituency differ, as expected. Moreover, while CO-IDEOLOGICAL shortens the time to FORMAL ALLIANCE, CO-ETHNIC does not have a significant effect (online figure A8), confirming the distinct propensity for rebel groups sharing an ideological constituency to engage in deeper cooperation.

Second, we rerun our logistic and multinomial models controlling for the existence of a common third-party state sponsor for rebel organizations. Using information from the UCDP External Support Dataset (Högbladh, Pettersson, and Themnér 2011), we code the binary variable STATE CO-SPONSOR, which equals one if the two rebel groups in a dyad-year received support from the same state and zero otherwise. We did not include this variable in our main analysis due to a large number of missing values (data available for 1975–2009 only), but controlling for common sponsorship is important as it allows us to address a potential endogeneity concern: external support could be driving both rebel groups’ alliances and their constituency claims. Our results are robust to the inclusion of STATE CO-SPONSOR (online figures A9–A11). State co-sponsor is positively signed and significant, indicating that rebel groups receiving external support from the same source are more likely to ally. This result is consistent with that of Popovic (2018) but contrasts with Gade et al.’s (2019) finding that in Syria, rebel groups with shared state sponsors were not more likely to cooperate.

Third, we check the robustness of our main results to controlling for relative rebel strength, using data on the number of rebel fighters compiled by Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2013), which we did not include in the main analysis due to missing value concerns. Following Fjelde and Nilsson (2012), we code the dummy variable REBEL IMBALANCE OF POWER, which equals one if a member of the dyad has at least two-thirds of the total number of

rebel fighters across all groups pitted against the government in a given year and zero otherwise. This variable does not approach statistical significance, while the effects of the co-constituency variables are consistent with our hypotheses (online figures A12 and A13).<sup>35</sup>

Fourth, we rerun our main models breaking down co-ideological dyads into dyads with a shared Marxist constituency and a shared Islamist constituency. Online figure A16 shows that the effects of CO-MARXIST and CO-ISLAMIST are comparable, and they both differ from CO-ETHNIC, as expected. These findings about the different types of shared ideological constituency, however, should be taken with a grain of salt, as our data do not include the vast majority of the scores of Islamist rebel organizations active in Syria (due to the fact that UCDP currently lumps them together in the “Syrian insurgents” category), and most of our co-Islamist dyad-years are located in a single country—Afghanistan.

Fifth, the theoretical and empirical reasons for focusing on broad ideological constituencies discussed above notwithstanding, we check the robustness of our findings to an alternative measure of shared ideological constituency based on more nuanced classifications of Marxist and Islamist rebels. Specifically, we code four subtypes of Marxists and five subtypes of Islamists and consider a shared ideological constituency only when both members of a dyad belong to the same subtype.<sup>36</sup> The results are summarized in online figures A17 and A18. In the logistic model, shared ideology has a positive, significant effect on alliances, while shared ethnicity has a smaller effect falling short of statistical significance. In the multinomial logistic model, shared ideology has a positive effect on formal and informal alliances, while shared ethnicity only increases the probability of informal alliances. Overall, these robustness checks corroborate our theoretical expectations about the distinctive effects of different types of shared constituency.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, we test a competing argument about the effects of ideology on rebel relations, Hafez’s (2020) proximity-distance paradox. This argument posits that rebel organizations belonging to the same ideological family tree but with some ideological disagreements are particularly likely to engage in inter-rebel war, suggesting that they should also be unlikely to ally with one another. To conduct the test, we break down CO-IDEOLOGY into two binary variables: (1) PROXI-DISTANT, flagging rebel dyads whose members share a broad ideological constituency but do not belong to the same ideological subtype discussed above (e.g., one member is Maoist while the other one is Marxist–Leninist), and (2) PROXIMATE, marking dyads whose members belong to the same ideological subtype (e.g., they are both transnational jihadists). Hafez’s (2020) argument suggests that when we include both variables in the analysis (with dyads of organizations without a common ideological constituency as baseline), PROXI-DISTANT should have a

<sup>32</sup>Note that currently, there is no multinomial logit-equivalent for AME models and that running a model using INFORMAL ALLIANCE as the dependent variable would be misleading because this variable equals zero for both formal alliance and no alliance.

<sup>33</sup>Figures for the rest of the section are presented in the online appendix. Logit and multinomial logit results are also robust to dropping all observations of ongoing alliances, thus restricting the analysis to alliance onset (Figures A5 and A6).

<sup>34</sup>In the *duration* equation, the dependent variable can be viewed as *time* to alliance, with a negative coefficient indicating *shorter* time. A negative coefficient in the *risk* equation indicates a lower risk of alliance (Ward and Ahlquist 2018, 242–43).

<sup>35</sup>We also run tests controlling for whether both members of a rebel dyad emerged from mergers of preexisting organizations (based on FORGE data), as groups with such origins may contain multiple factions and thus veto players for decisions about forming alliances. Results are robust (online figures A14 and A15).

<sup>36</sup>The four Marxist subtypes are: (1) Marxist–Leninist, (2) Maoist, (3) Trotskyist, and (4) a residual category corresponding to organizations embracing an unspecified leftist social revolutionary ideology or borrowing from multiple ideologies. The five Islamist subtypes are: (1) one-country revolutionary jihadist, (2) transnational jihadist, (3) Islamic nationalist, (4) sectarian jihadist, and (5) democratic/reformist Islamist.

<sup>37</sup>We also rerun our analysis replacing CO-IDEOLOGICAL with indicators of rebel groups sharing left-wing or religiously inspired ideologies, based on FORGE data. Results are substantially robust (online figure A19).

suppressing effect on alliances. However, as online figure A20 reports, both PROXI-DISTANT and PROXIMATE display significant, positive effects. This finding is consistent with our argument linking rebel-shared ideological constituencies and alliances. Although intra-ideology disagreements are real and may be bitter, generally speaking, differences in political aspirations should be narrower between organizations that share an ideological constituency than between organizations that do not, making alliances across constituencies a tall order.

### Conclusion

Our analysis indicates that rebel groups' shared constituencies influence their alliance decisions. Rather than simply being facades for short-term opportunism or balance of power calculations, rebel organizations' claims about the social groups they are fighting for influence with whom they ally. Yet, these effects are heterogeneous. Rebel organizations with a common ideological constituency display a more consistent tendency to ally than co-ethnic organizations. Moreover, while organizations sharing an ideological constituency are drawn to in-depth cooperation, alliances among co-ethnic organizations often are more superficial. These findings are consistent with our theoretical expectations that for co-ethnic rebel organizations, the cooperation-inducing effect of common political aspirations is offset by a distinctive cooperation-suppressing effect associated with a higher risk of inter-rebel war.

Examples from Myanmar and Colombia illustrate the dynamics of deep cooperation among rebel groups sharing a Marxist ideology. The year 1959 marked "the beginning of a long and often highly effective alliance"—the National Democratic United Front—between the Marxist rebel organizations Communist Party of Burma and Karen National United Party (Smith 1999, 185). In 1987 the ELN, the EPL, the M-19, and the FARC formally joined forces against the Colombian government by creating the Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinating Board (CGSB). Some of these groups continued to cooperate informally after the CGSB broke down in 1991. By contrast, the relationship between Burundi's Hutu rebel organizations Palipehutu-FNL and CNDD is a good example of the complex mix of hostility and cooperation that characterize relations among co-ethnic organizations. While the two groups informally cooperated against government forces in the years 1998–2002, tensions were never far from the surface, preventing the emergence of a formal alliance; in fact, before cooperating on the battlefield, these groups had fought each other in 1997, and they would do so again in 2003.

Our argument and findings do not imply that other factors emphasized in the literature on civil war alliances, such as the balance of power and external support for insurgents, are unimportant. In fact, we argue that considerations related to rebels' ideologies and identities structure the calculus about the balance of power, rather than being an alternative to it: rebel groups strive to aggregate power against the government, but their decisions about who to ally with are influenced by shared constituencies. Similarly, our findings suggest that rebel constituencies and foreign support are complementary, rather than alternative, explanations. The key research implication of this article, therefore, is that the study of civil war alliances should not neglect rebel constituencies; integrating them with other explanatory factors into rich theoretical frameworks promises to be a productive direction for future research.

We conclude by suggesting three additional avenues for research on rebel alliances. First, researchers may collect data to assess the degree to which our argument holds for alliances between armed groups operating in different countries. Further research may help make sense of the global conflict between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, which defies arguments positing a tendency for transnational militant organizations with similar ideologies to cooperate. Second, future studies may make strides in bolstering the case for the causal nexus between rebel constituencies and alliances by conducting in-depth case analysis tracing rebel leaders' alliance calculus. Finally, relying on the new data on multi-party civil wars presented in this article, scholars could investigate the impact of different types of alliances on civil war termination and outcomes as well as conflict processes.

### Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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