

When does Civil War Recur after Rebel Victory?

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Abstract

Rebel victors of civil wars face existential threats both internally and externally. The structural factors that influence rebel victory in armed conflict, such as weak institutions, economic and political grievances, and arms availability, condition the rivals' aspirations to change the status quo. How do rebel victors respond to domestic armed challengers? Do such decisions determine civil war recurrence? We argue in this paper that rebel victors can manage domestic risk and consolidate state power by either repressing or coopting challengers. While the repression strategy can be costly both domestically and internationally, a rebel government can coopt new or existing insurgencies through a variety of strategies, ranging from (1) unilateral changes to the constitution, (2) elite pacts for powersharing, (3) peace agreements, or (4) negotiated constitutional reform. Analysis of data on post-rebel victory cases (1989-2015) lends support to the theoretical argument that repressive strategies increase chances of renewed civil war, while consensus-based strategies of cooption reduce the probability of repeat conflict. Of the four cooption strategies, we find that sharing executive power is likely to increase chances of renewed civil war, whereas peace agreements with constitutional reform provisions decrease the probability of conflict recurrence. The paper has concrete implications for international engagement with rebel incumbents, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, for the purpose of preventing countries from falling in the so-called conflict trap.

Keywords: rebel victory; conflict recurrence; peace agreement; constitutional reform; sanctions; Afghanistan