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The Search for Enduring Peace: Promoting Rebel Party Formation in Post-Civil Conflict States

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Introduction

Civil wars have been a common occurrence throughout human history and have had an immense impact on political developments worldwide. Infamous examples include those in Rwanda, the Congo, Ukraine, and more recently, Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan—all of which were, or haven't been quite violent and with a range of human rights abuses committed by both state and rebel actors. Civil wars often have a variety of outcomes: a decisive win by government and military forces, a revolutionary victory and overthrow of current powers accomplished by rebels, the creation of a “failed state” lacking legitimate leadership and political institutions, or a stalemate in which government and rebel actors are forced to negotiate some sort of a peace settlement. After the Cold War era however stalemates have increased by 50%, with roughly 70% of civil wars on average ending with this outcome (Fortna 2009, 7).

In the case of a stalemate, or even a less forceful government victory, one option that is occasionally presented to rebels operating in democratic settings is to form political parties. Ultimately rebel party formation is a safe middle ground post-conflict, as ex-combatants have the chance to realize or retain some sort of political status and influence, while not obligating government officials to concede power to rebels in its entirety. In other words, ex-combatants retain the opportunity to share and hopefully persuade the broader public to adopt their ideologies, but under the auspices of democratic norms and institutions. As opposed to rebel groups being abolished outright, when granted the opportunity to form political parties they are given a more reconciliatory way to be reintegrated into their societies and participate in the happenings of the state, which in turn might decrease the likelihood of recidivism. In a democratic setting, government leaders and international observers can also more closely monitor ex-combatant reintegration.

Although rebel party formation appears to be a quite a diplomatic solution, by no means is its implementation ever easy. It is not uncommon for rebel political parties to disband, fail to see electoral victories (Braithewaite & Cunningham 2020, 191), be forcefully driven out by existing political parties or bitter citizens, or to experience high rates of recidivism (Matanock 2016, 1). This potential for failed rebel parties to reignite social and political divides in this way should certainly be concerning for policymakers, who are often wary of allowing ex-combatants to form political parties for this very reason.

Caution should certainly be taken if a rebel party formation provision is included in any peace agreement. The social, political, and economic realities of a country ought to be considered in such a decision, as well as a state's capacity to support this kind of democratic inclusion of rebels. It is of equal importance for government leaders and international observers of peace processes to consider the factors that either encourage or deter successful rebel party formation. Allowing ex-combatants to form political parties without this foreknowledge can be dangerous and has the potential to disrupt not only the democratic structures and institutions of a state, but also the already fragile post-conflict stability and collective security of a country.

If rebel party formation is to occur, it must be done well or simply not at all, otherwise the potential negative consequences are far too perilous. Rebel-to-party transformations are obviously not impossible, as numerous instances of successful party formation by ex-combatants exist. It is by following these models and examples that policymakers can best assess which factors allow for the most sustainable rebel party formation, or whether it should even be pursued at all.

Certainly, the democratic consolidation of rebels in this way is the most ideal post-conflict outcome, but it requires a degree of consciousness and meticulousness that simply

cannot be disregarded. If a solid understanding of how to promote successful rebel party formation exists however, it can have immensely positive implications for post-conflict societies that desire for ex-combatants to embrace democratic norms once again, which can in turn have an echo effect on the political proceedings of the country overall.

As such, the following section of this paper will review extant literature surrounding rebel party formation, which will be continued by the presentation of a novel theory hypothesizing the factors that most contribute to success in this post-conflict process. From there, a research design will be introduced outlining the comparative case studies that will be assessed later in this paper. These analyses will then be followed by an evaluation of the results of this study and concluded with the policy implications of this research.

Existing Work on Rebel Party Formation

There is a myriad of factors which can contribute to or deter successful rebel party formation, beginning with the behavior of actors themselves. Acknowledging this, John Ishiyama (2018) looked particularly at the role of ex-combatants in shaping in their own success as a political party. More specifically, he evaluated the impact of intentional acts of identity change on ex-combatant party formation processes, and analyzed the number of seats won in the legislature and degree of inclusion into the executive to determine the political success of rebel groups.

Using an original dataset (454), Ishiyama assessed whether rebel parties that have undergone identity changes end up more successful than groups that have not done so (455). He defined rebel groups as “military organizations that fight against the central government”, with a “commitment to use violence to enact political change”. Conversely, he described rebel parties

as “a rebel organization that has stood for election and offered candidates under a distinct label” (456).

Ishiyama’s research primarily focused on two distinct independent variables concerning rebel to party transformation: reimagining or a change in rebel organization name and the formal denunciation of political violence (455). The variable then dependent upon these two factors was a rebel party’s political success, measured by either the share of legislative seats won or degree of participation in the executive branch. Ultimately Ishiyama found that the rejection of violence had the greatest impact on the likelihood of rebel political success. In other words, rebel parties that formally renounced violence oftentimes fared better politically than groups that did not (454). Ishiyama’s research demonstrates that ex-combatants themselves have some degree of agency over the success of their party formation, which is important to consider in post-conflict settings.

Jessica Maves Braithwaite and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham reach similar conclusions concerning the primacy of rebel actors in post-conflict processes using their Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence or FORGE dataset. Braithwaite and Cunningham’s quantitative work demonstrates that rebel experiences and conflict processes are central to understanding how a civil war is resolved (4). The FORGE dataset correlates rebel group origins with the results of post-conflict outcomes such as the characteristics of peace negotiations, presence of external mediators, and concessions offered to rebels, all of which typically impact the ability of ex-combatants to form political parties (5).

In addition, FORGE attests that a rebel group’s background influences its political capabilities and even willingness to participate in politics later (28). While the research of Braithwaite and Cunningham does not focus specifically on rebel party formation, the

information they gather is critical to understanding how the characteristics of rebel organizations affect the peace process. In this sense, their work—like that of Ishiyama—demonstrates the important role of rebel actors in party formation.

Aila Matanock (2016) takes a step back from the role of rebel actors in party formation in her work, focusing more on the broader contextual factors that breed new political parties, and how the electoral participation of ex-combatants impacts trends of democratization. Like Braithwaite and Cunningham, she developed a dataset that provides information on ex-combatant engagement in elections (1). This Militant Group Electoral Participation or MGEP dataset provides additional insights on the impact of rebel political participation on peacebuilding and democratization processes.

The MGEP dataset contains three distinct categories of rebel electoral participation that are caused by a variety of factors with differing effects: “violent” participation—when a rebel group still in engaged in combat competes against the government, “peaceful” participation—when ex-combatants compete against the government, typically under the terms of a peace settlement, and “won” participation—when rebels successfully defeat the pre-existing government and hold elections afterward. The MGEP dataset finds that over 100 rebel groups have taken part in elections, most commonly through “peaceful” participation (2). The MGEP certainly provides compelling data but is not entirely beneficial for understanding the specific factors that contribute to successful rebel party formation, as it tends to focus more on rebel political participation and its effect on democratization, rather than what allows for such activity to begin with.

Additional research produced by Matanock (2017) did a far better job at assessing the impact of political engagement by both rebels and external actors on the larger peace process.

She specifically assessed the impact of electoral participation provisions in peace settlements, which allow for rebel parties compete in post-conflict elections. These provisions are often incorporated into more difficult peace agreements, such as those with higher death rates or decreased state capacity (118).

According to Matanock, commitment problems are often the greatest barrier in fostering lasting peace (99). She argued that electoral participation provisions encourage third-party oversight to promote compliance with peace agreement terms, thereby assisting in overcoming ex-combatant commitment issues (95). Matanock also maintained that third party actors can have an immensely positive impact on this component of the peace process. Unlike domestic agents, impartial external agents can have significant leverage in enforcing compliance with peace settlement terms, one example of this being sanctions against non-complying parties. Matanock observed that some third-party actors may choose to offer incentives such as foreign aid or loans, but regardless of what is offered or threatened must be greater than what can be gained through non-compliance. To be considered credible however external actors must possess the means to enforce settlements without significant cost to themselves (100).

In addition, Matanock predicted that countries located in areas with pre-existing, third-party electoral monitors should anticipate increased external engagement to ensure compliance with peace settlement terms (112). In assessing the impact specifically of international organizations such as the United Nations in promoting adherence to peace agreements, Matanock admitted that these actors lack significant correlation with the peacebuilding process. Regardless, when rebels expect a degree of third-party oversight, a positive relationship between electoral participation provisions and peace typically holds (108).

While electoral participation provisions do not ensure that all parties will possess equal political influence, Matanock's study found that 75% of settlements with electoral participation provisions remain at peace five years after agreements have been finalized, compared to only 50% without (113). Similarly, in only 21% of settlements with electoral participation provisions does conflict reoccur after 5 years, which is significantly less than 56% in those without (114). Overall she discovered that electoral participation provisions do not guarantee a smooth resolution to civil conflicts, but nevertheless it is 80% more likely that peace will endure with the incorporation of such provisions (95). Ultimately, Matanock's research suggests that electoral participation provisions effectively promote peace enforcement while helping to overcome commitment problems (130). Additionally, her findings are critical in understanding of how peace settlements can be constructed to encourage credibility and accountability from the international community.

In collaboration with Natalia Garbiras-Diaz, Matanock (2018) added to her existing research surrounding the actors that encourage rebel party formation, this time focusing on the role of common citizens. Garbiras-Diaz and Matanock noted that while engaging ex-combatants in electoral politics certainly is important, in democratic contexts it cannot be done well without first obtaining some form of approval from the masses. They went on to argue that even if a peace agreement is popular, citizens still may be prone to object to the political inclusion of rebels participation, especially if such provisions are framed or worded as concessions (para. 14).

If ex-combatants have a criminal or otherwise unpopular history, it may also reinforce mass disapproval of their political inclusion. Citizens' degree of willingness to allow the electoral participation of ex-combatants may also be dependent on the amount of blame given to rebel groups for initiating fighting, as well as the extent of rebel's willingness to take part in peace

agreements (para. 15). Beyond all of this, overarching characteristics of the political environment such as citizen's political awareness and the degree of societal polarization influence the ability of rebel groups to participate politically (para. 17).

Garbiras-Diaz and Matanock acknowledged that combatants specifically have certain expectations when entering the peace process. In many cases rebels often require protection, legitimacy, and power to even engage in peace talks to begin with. Furthermore, rebels typically only agree to peace negotiations if they expect an agreement to offer the same benefits they could secure from fighting. Voters or the wider citizen base however often desire the exact opposite for rebels who opt for peace talks, which further complicates the political inclusion process (para. 14).

The research of Garbiras-Diaz and Matanock primarily centered on the impact that citizens have in shaping not only the peace process, but also the degree of political inclusion given to rebels. This then also contributes to whether rebel groups can make successful transitions into political parties. In conducting this assessment, Garbiras-Diaz and Matanock acknowledged that often the circumstances surrounding a civil conflict and the role that rebels historically play in promoting violence has a substantial impact on their public perception during the peace process. A rebel group's behavior during a civil war will undoubtedly impact public opinion of them, which in turn impacts the degree of political inclusion offered to them during peace negotiations (para. 15). In this way, the research of Garbiras-Diaz and Matanock does an excellent job at demonstrating how the actions and attitudes of multiple actors simultaneously interact and work to determine the outcomes of rebel party formation. Because of this, in the development of peace agreements and electoral participation provisions, policymakers would do well to consider the perspectives of ex-combatants and civilians alike.

Oliver Kaplan and Enzo Nussio (2016) returned to a more specific focus on the post-conflict needs of ex-combatants in their research. They analyzed a wide array of factors that either compel or dissuade rebels from returning to conflict. In their study, Kaplan and Nussio recognized that post-conflict decisions are driven by “driving” and “restraining” influences. These factors in turn impact the likelihood of ex-combatants to be successfully reintegrated politically (Kaplan & Nussio 2016, 66). Kaplan and Nussio recognized that a variety of forces impact the likelihood of rebel recidivism, such as personal history and ties to a rebel group, the amount of time spent in a rebel organization, family ties, and education levels (Kaplan & Nussio 2016, 64). They found however that poverty and a lack of political inclusion have the greatest impact on the likelihood of recidivism (Kaplan & Nussio 2016, 68).

Ex-combatants are often the targets of violence (Kaplan & Nussio 2015, para. 19), low levels of education and vocational training, and are largely unmonitored. By providing resources such as job training, policing, education, financial subsidies, and counseling, governments can significantly decrease the rate of recidivism among ex-combatants (Kaplan & Nussio 2015, para. 2). In addition, Kaplan and Nussio found specifically that increased access to political participation decreased the likelihood of renewed war, even more so than aid donations to rebel groups (Kaplan & Nussio 2015, para. 4). Like the argument made by Garbiras-Diaz and Matanock however, Kaplan and Nussio recognized that granting electoral participation to rebel groups first requires their social acceptance. When former combatants are welcomed into post-conflict communities, this reduces the need for them to retain their social ties with rebel groups (Kaplan & Nussio 2015, para. 1).

The insights presented by Kaplan and Nussio (2017) demonstrate that ultimately rebel party formation must coincide with social and economic reintegration measures that truly

reconcile ex-combatants to their post-war communities (para. 15). When ex-combatants feel socially accepted and are given access to services such as vocational training and financial stipends, they are more likely to avoid recidivism (Kaplan & Nussio 2017, para. 10). While not explicitly stated in the research of Kaplan and Nussio, these provisions in turn create pathways for ex-combatants to enter the political arena and return to democratic norms. Moreover, their assertion that social reintegration affects political participation furthers additional points made by Garbiras-Diaz and Matanock concerning the significance of multiple actors—in this case, both civilians and ex-combatants—in promoting the success and likelihood of rebel party formation.

This concept is furthered through the work of Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs and Sophia Hatz (2016), who assessed the post-conflict roles of all parties involved in the rebel party formation process: ex-combatants, civilians, government officials, and international actors. Their research found that the likelihood of successful rebel party formation increases when rebel leaders mutually agree to disarm and participate peacefully in electoral politics, rebels have a strong support from civilians, the government offers political inclusion to ex-combatants, and the new political party formed has international legitimacy (992).

Kovacs and Hatz noted that each of these factors alone are not sufficient to promote a successful rebel-to-political party transformation, a claim that will be further-explored later in the case study analyses of this paper. For instance, peace agreements made with the government alone cannot ensure a smooth transition, but rather necessitate the incorporation of political inclusion and integration provisions (1002). Similarly, rebel groups simply choosing to disarm and refer to themselves as a political party does not equate to a successful transition. Instead, they must register under an official party name, select candidates, and participate in elections to legitimize their shift (996). Overall, the research of Kovacs and Hatz once again demonstrates

that rebel-to-party transformation is not a straightforward process, but rather is impacted by several moving parts and actors both domestically and abroad, which is perhaps one of the most important considerations in pursuing rebel party formation.

Carrie Manning and Ian Smith (2016) cautioned however that rebel party formation does not necessarily ensure peace or democratization in a post-conflict state. Ultimately, this is just a small step that should be taken as part of a much larger pursuit of increased stability and security. Beyond this though, and differing from previously mentioned studies, Manning and Smith analyzed the impact of civil wars characteristics and post-conflict contexts in determining the success of party formation (974). They cited the pre-conflict experiences of combatants, duration of conflict, intensity of fighting, how a civil war ends, and the post-conflict cultural environment as the strongest correlations between rebel party formation. Their findings demonstrated that rebel groups with political experience prior to a civil war are more likely to transform into post-conflict political parties (973).

Manning and Smith reported that wartime characteristics play an equally significant role in rebel party formation, as those conflicts that are more violent or longer in duration result in increased likelihood of successful party formation due to the experience of “war weariness” (976). Post-conflict electoral systems and agreements have an equally notable impact on rebel groups (982). In states with multiple warring factions, occasionally certain rebel organizations may be offered separate peace, meaning a peace agreement in which other armed opposition groups remain engaged in combat. Rebels may be attracted to this over a traditional peace agreement, as it presents them with an opportunity to distinguish themselves from other combatant groups, particularly if the agreement also includes political participation provisions (977). In addition, ex-combatants are often less attracted to electoral systems with proportional

representation, as there is a greater likelihood that they would feel outnumbered by the presence of multiple pre-existing parties (982).

If policymakers genuinely wish to seek the political inclusion of ex-combatants, then they must also be willing to consider the broader structural obstacles and trends that exist in a post-conflict setting, as was demonstrated in the work of Manning and Smith. It is in this way that they may be able to devise the necessary strategies and reforms to ensure the successful party formation and political inclusion of ex-combatants.

Theory

The topic of rebel party formation clearly has no shortage of information. Political scientists approach the subject with a variety of different lenses and perspectives, all of which lead to a myriad of findings. What each researcher presents however is just a small portion of a much larger image of what contributes to successful political party formation for ex-combatants. For example, John Ishiyama (2018) cited the importance of official rebel renunciation of violence as a key component in the transition process, but his research demonstrated that rebranding alone can have only a limited impact and that institutional factors have much further-reaching implications on an ex-combatant's decision to reject violence as a political means (478-479).

On the other hand, academics like Aila Matanock and Natalia Garbiras-Diaz (2018), and Oliver Kaplan and Enzo Nussio (2015, 2016, & 2017), focused heavily on the need for post-conflict political and social inclusion, seeing these as the primary way to ensure a successful rebel group transition to political party. These measures to better include rebels socially and politically require at times external oversight however, something that these academics only briefly recognize in their research. Kaplan and Nussio (2015) went beyond human actors and

agencies in their study and saw institutional and historical characteristics that exist outside the current control of rebel and state actors alike—such a length and violence of war (para. 19), economic conditions post-conflict (para. 38), and rebel political experience (para. 4)—as influencing not only the success but also likelihood of an ex-combatant group’s willingness and ability to transition into a political party.

The research of Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs and Sophia Hatz (2016) goes further, as they recognized ultimately that a broad array of factors influence peace processes. Along with previously mentioned factors such as political inclusion, social acceptance, and comprehensive reintegration, they find that international legitimacy is also essential for successful party formation (994). Without international or other third-party oversight, rebel recidivism or an overall lack of compliance with peace agreement provisions may occur (993). What’s more, international recognition of a rebel group’s transition to a political party may provide ex-combatants with not only financial assistance and diplomatic support needed to present themselves as a legitimate organization competing in democratic elections (992).

Certainly, all of the above-mentioned researchers and academics had a general understanding of what factors contribute to a successful rebel-to-party transformation. However, three overarching factors seemed to have the most research-based and historical evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness in supporting ex-combatant group’s transitions to electoral politics. The first and most critical of these is the need for political inclusion and societal acceptance of ex-combatants. While it certainly is an admirable idea for rebel groups to disarm and peacefully enter democratic politics, it is impossible if the ruling government prohibits or otherwise impedes the electoral participation of ex-combatants. In other words, to participate in elections, rebels must first be given the “permission”—for lack of a better term—by governing

officials. Typically, the most effective way to ensure this is through explicit electoral participation provisions, which are normally included in codified peace negotiations between rebel and government leaders. To be most effective however, these provisions ought to provide more than mere permission to participate in electoral politics, but also protections for ex-combatants, who are far too often the victims of political discrimination and violence.

Beyond political inclusion from governing authorities, rebels must also receive approval and acceptance from their communities as well as the broader society. This does not necessarily mean that they must secure electoral victory, but rather just the mere recognition by other citizens that they are, in fact, a legitimate political organization. Oftentimes, this kind of social acceptance is mostly dependent on a rebel group's history during a conflict. In other words, groups that more frequently perpetuated acts of violence, or who were engaged in corrupt practices, are more likely to be viewed unfavorably by the wider public, thereby limiting or otherwise decreasing the amount of political support they are likely to receive. If rebel groups see themselves as less likely to have even minimal political support, than the decision to transition to a participating political party may be abandoned altogether.

For those rebel group's occupying more of a moral "gray" zone in the public's eyes, comprehensive social reintegration programs play a significant role in the transition to political party. To be most effective, these initiatives ought to be implemented by the government or incorporated into formal peace negotiations. Social reintegration efforts can take the form of programs such as psychotherapy for ex-combatants, educational programs, police monitoring, or promoting reconciliatory dialogue between former rebels and their family members and friends. Moreover, social reintegration should be coupled with economic assistance for ex-combatants to reduce the likelihood of recidivism. This most frequently takes the form of job training or other

basic living stipends that allow for ex-combatants to gain financial stability. If ex-combatants feel reintegrated back into their pre-conflict communities, this will allow for greater ease and willingness to participate in electoral politics. Without some degree of social acceptance, participating in electoral politics will simply be a less attractive option to rebel groups.

Another significant contributing factor in the outcome of rebel-to-party transformation is the presence, or lack thereof, of international or third-party oversight. Whether it be an organization such as the UN, a neutral neighboring country, or another state or party more removed from the conflict, international oversight can have a positive impact in the transition process for ex-combatant groups. These states or organizations can provide mediation for peace agreements, oversight of elections or other clauses included in peace treaties, as well as even funding to support post-conflict democratization efforts. In some instances, third party actors may even offer financial or political support to rebel groups as they transition to parties, to give them not only credibility but also the resources they need to experience a successful transition. Furthermore, international third parties give legitimacy not only to peace agreements made between rebels and the government, but also to rebel groups seeking to redefine and restructure themselves as political parties adhering to democratic norms.

Admittedly, the above-mentioned factors do not always constitute a perfect formula for rebel party formation. As stated earlier, the mere renunciation of violence as a political means is often not sufficient to ensure the full political reintegration of rebels into a democratic society. Oftentimes, it must be coupled with disarmament efforts, which to be most effective ought to be overseen by government officials or third-party monitors. However, not all third-party actors are effective in providing oversight to post-conflict peace negotiations, and with this rebel-to-party transitions. International organizations such as the UN have been known to occasionally fail in

their intervention efforts, and it is not uncommon for individual states offering third-party oversight to have hidden agendas, as is often seen with United States involvement in Latin American states.

The overarching goal of rebel party formation should be democratic consolidation. Indeed, it is what truly defines a “success”. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan explain the process of democratic consolidation as “a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become, in phrase, ‘the only game in town.’” (Linz & Stepan 14, 1996). In other words, democratic consolidation is realized when all citizens accept democratic norms. One way to encourage such acceptance among ex-combatants is through party formation, which Linz and Stepan would argue is necessary to achieve democratic transition, one of the three minimal conditions for democratic consolidation (Linz and Stepan 14, 1996). Because of this, regardless of ex-combatants’ electoral success, their adoption of democratic norms through party formation is truly the most significant accomplishment in the post-conflict peacebuilding process.

In addition, the three previously-stated variables which most contribute to successful political party formation cannot always be enforced easily, as it can often be difficult to persuade rebels to disarm, encourage citizens to look past ex-combatant’s wartime offenses, or even to ensure the presence of an un-biased third-party monitor in the post-conflict peace process. Moreover, these are just three of several factors which have the potential to promote more successful rebel party formation. It is not uncommon for war characteristics to have a major influence on a rebel group’s ability to transition to political party status. It is also important to acknowledge that not all three of these factors may be necessary for ex-combatants to form a political party. Occasionally, the political inclusion of rebels alone may be sufficient to ensure

successful party formation, where in others mere rebel renunciation of violence may be most effective.

Ultimately, if all three of the previously-mentioned major factors are present—political inclusion of ex-combatants, an official renunciation of violence by rebels, and the presence of third-party oversight—then successful rebel party formation will occur. Without first a willingness from the government to include rebels in democratic political processes, rebels are not only disincentivized but also unable to form political parties. Beyond this, rebels must also feel accepted socially in their communities and countries, otherwise they will also be less likely to embrace political participation. Inclusion efforts aside, rebel groups seeking to become legitimate political parties must also renounce violence as a political means to truly participate in democratic elections and receive support. Lastly, the presence of third-party actors helps ensure that political inclusion and social reintegration efforts are carried out, while also providing rebels with the legitimacy, oversight, and protection needed as they transition into political parties. When these three elements are present, it is far more likely that rebels will be successful in their post-conflict political transformation.

Research Design

The following study is conducted in a comparative case-study format, following the Most Similar System Design (MSSD) model. To provide variation in both explanation and outcome and to prevent selection bias, four cases from three different Latin American countries were selected with varying degrees of success in democratic consolidation. In this study, democratic consolidation is defined as an enduring renunciation of violence by ex-combatants and a continuation of rebel political engagement. The selected countries and cases include Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (or FARC—split into two different historical

eras to be analyzed separately), El Salvador and the National Liberation Front (or FMLN), and Venezuela and the Revolutionary Left Movement (or MIR).

Ultimately this study seeks to understand how rebel party formation processes occurred in each of these four distinct contexts, depending on the absence or presence of the following independent variables: political inclusion of rebels by both government and civilians, renunciation of violence by ex-combatants, and the presence of third-party actors. An MSSD model was selected for this research as it allows for the isolation of causes along with agreement across factors and variation in outcome, as is demonstrated by the graphic below:

Democratization = Political Inclusion + Rebel Renunciation of Violence + Third-party Oversight

	<i>Independent Variables</i>	Political Inclusion	Rebel Renunciation of Violence	Third-Party Oversight
<i>Cases</i>				
Colombia¹		No – Government allowed for electoral participation of UP, but citizens violently resisted by assassinating or driving out party members/candidates	No – FARC guerillas still engaged in paramilitary campaigns	No – No documented third-party mediation or mention of international oversight
Colombia²		Yes – Colombian government willing to include FARC rebels politically	Yes – FARC leaders formally agreed to disarm under peace agreement terms	Yes – Several third-party actors oversaw peace process & negotiations.
El Salvador		Yes – Through negotiations Salvadoran government allowed for FMLN	Yes – FMLN agreed to disarm and disband their guerilla and	Yes – UN oversaw 1994 national elections to ensure

		participation in electoral politics	paramilitary units	fairness and political inclusion
Venezuela		Yes – President allowed for their conditional reincorporation into national political life	No – No documented evidence of MIR formally renouncing violence or disarming	No – Third-party oversight absent from the party formation process

The decision to analyze these four cases was based on a variety of key factors, the primary one being the similarity of context and time frame, as all selected cases were post-civil conflict Latin American states in the latter half of the 20th century. Additionally, differences in outcome played a critical role in case selection, as all chosen states had varying degrees of success with their rebel party formation processes. In the case of the FARC in Colombia in particular, by separately analyzing two distinct eras of the rebel group’s history there is an added dimension of change over time. Furthermore, the study is conducted qualitatively in order to offer a more detailed explanation of factors and case phenomena beyond what an individual measure could give. This in turn also allows for more in-depth exploration and discussion of the accounts for these specific case studies.

As mentioned earlier, the following research assesses each of the four cases individually, looking at the specific factors present in each rebel party formation process. Referring to the previously mentioned criteria for successful rebel party formation, each individual case study will assess how a particular country and its specific rebel party fared regarding these three criteria. Ultimately, a “successful” transition is one in which the presence of these specific three factors results in democratic consolidation and the full political reintegration of rebels. Important

to note is that not all three factors necessarily need to be present for a successful democratic consolidation to have occurred.

Analysis

Venezuela and the MIR

Following the visit of Cuban President Fidel Castro in 1959, many young Venezuelans felt inspired to use his ideals to promote reform in their own country. Wary leaders of the ruling Democratic Action party despised the onslaught of criticism from these radicals, which resulted in the expulsion all members who favored Cuban policies. These young people quickly turned to create their own party, called the Revolutionary Left Movement or MIR. Following the example of Che Guevara, the group attempted to repeat the Cuban Revolution in Venezuela and led a violent campaign that targeted both government officials and civilians alike (Barrios Nieves 2020, para. 3).

Eventually however the MIR was overpowered by the government of President Rómulo Betancourt. After the defeat the following administration of President Rafael Caldera opened negotiations with the guerillas, allowing for their reincorporation into national political life in exchange for the MIR's rejection of its extreme leftism (Barrios Nieves 2020, para. 4). While the party saw some parliamentary electoral success in the early 1970s (Barrios Nieves 2020, para. 6), with time internal divisions arose between various MIR factions and militants. After a long period of quarreling, the party dissolved altogether, and those that remained interested in electoral politics simply merged with the Movement for Socialism party or MAS (Barrios Nieves 2020, para. 7).

The case of the MIR lacks key variables necessary to ensure successful rebel party formation. While the government of President Caldera was willing to offer political inclusion to the guerillas following their defeat, there is no documented evidence of the MIR formally renouncing violence or disarming, and third-party oversight appeared to be completely absent from the party formation process. In addition, party infighting took place between militant and other MIR factions, which would perhaps suggest that a formal renunciation of violence would have allowed the party to be more cohesive and endure longer. Furthermore, third party oversight could have provided the mediation or at the very least resources needed to allow the MIR to continue its operations as a political party, rather than being forced to merely disband. The absence of these two key variables, rebel renunciation of violence and third-party oversight, likely contributed to the failure of the MIR in its transition to the status of political party.

El Salvador and the FMLN

After El Salvador gained its independence from Spain in 1821, ownership and control of the country's most important resource—land—was given only to Salvadorans of European descent. The other 95% of the population, who identified as either indigenous or mestizo, were essentially reduced to serfdom. For decades, the country was ruled by various military dictatorships controlled by the landed elite. Clashes between those of European and indigenous descent was quite common, sowing seeds of increased social divisions over time (The Center for Justice and Accountability 2022, para. 2). In January 1932, a Marxist leader named Agustín Farabundo Martí led a working class uprising against the established dictatorship and other members of the landed class. Although the rebellion was crushed in a matter of weeks, sporadic violence between leftist guerillas and right-wing paramilitaries

continued, escalating rapidly in the following decades (The Center for Justice and Accountability 2022, para. 3).

In 1980 Roberto D'Aubuisson, a right-wing Salvadoran military official, oversaw the assassination of human rights defender Archbishop Oscar Romero and led the following massacre that took place at his funeral (The Center for Justice and Accountability 2022, para. 5). Responding to these attacks, El Salvador's five major leftist groups banded together to form a guerilla army known as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front or FMLN (The Center for Justice and Accountability 2022, para. 7). What resulted was a full-scale civil war between the Salvadoran government, guerillas, and paramilitaries. The conflict ultimately produced countless human rights abuses and violent atrocities committed on all sides (The Center for Justice and Accountability 2022, para. 10).

It was not until a group of notable Jesuit priests were massacred in November 1989 that the world truly began to show concern for the conflict in El Salvador (The Center for Justice and Accountability 2022, para. 12). With the global community appalled by the most recent atrocity and the Cold War beginning to wind down, military, financial, and political support for both the FMLN and counterinsurgency groups started to slowly decline. With time it was clear that the war had reached a stalemate of sorts, and formal peace negotiations initiated (The Center for Justice and Accountability 2022, para. 14).

After several rounds of UN-mediated peace talks, a finalized treaty was signed in January 1992. These Chapultepec Accords, as they came to be known, allowed for the FMLN to later be recognized as an official political party in Salvadoran politics, along with obtaining UN observers for the upcoming March 1994 elections. The peace treaty also arranged for the disarmament and disbanding of both the FMLN and certain government

military units, all of which would also be overseen by the UN (University of Notre Dame 2019).

Ultimately, FMLN leaders agreed to the Accords because of “the revolutionary extent of the agreed upon reforms” (Holiday & Stanley 1993, 1). By offering military demobilization, electoral participation, and additional institutional and economic reforms (Holiday & Stanley 1993, 1), the Salvadoran government and UN officials managed to successfully persuade rebels to agree to peace. This detail is significant as it reinforces arguments made by Matanock and Diaz (2018) and others, who maintained that rebels will only agree to peace agreements and party formation if the concessions made outweigh the potential gains of returning to combat. For the FMLN in El Salvador, this conjecture held true, demonstrating the importance of strategic compromises in peace settlements to discourage recidivism and promote democratic consolidation.

Overall, the FMLN fared well in the 1994 elections, securing 24.9% of the vote in the first round of the presidential race and 31.65% in the second. Similarly, the party managed to win 21 of the 84 seats in the legislature (Edouard Lehoucq 1995, 1-2). Over time, the FMLN continued to build their electoral base and popularity, and in 2009 the party officially won the presidency. Today the FMLN retains its status as the majority party in Salvadoran electoral politics (The Center for Justice and Accountability 2022, para. 18-19).

Looking at the Chapultepec Accords, one can see that all three of the hypothesized independent variables necessary for successful rebel party formation were present. Through negotiations the Salvadoran government allowed FMLN participation in electoral politics and both rebel and government forces agreed to disarm and disband their guerilla and paramilitary units. Moreover, the UN offered third-party oversight for not only the

disarmament process but also the 1994 national elections to ensure fairness and political inclusion. In this sense, all three of the major and necessary criteria for successful rebel party formation were met. More significantly, the presence of these three variables allowed for the FMLN's later electoral successes and the party's eventual majority control in Salvadoran democratic politics. The case of the FMLN is certainly the leading example of a successful rebel party formation.

Colombia and the FARC

Colombia¹ (1948-1988)

Colombia presents a complex history of numerous peace attempts, two of which are studied in this paper. The first case—Colombia¹—spans from 1948-1988 and represents a failure in rebel party formation. The second case—Colombia²—assesses the period of 2002 to the present, and currently appears to be more of a success. To summarize Colombia¹, in the 1980s the government tried to permit the electoral participation of FARC rebels, but a lack of social acceptance coupled with a failure of rebels to renounce violence and no visible third-party oversight led to unsuccessful party formation. While there was a blatant lack of two of the three hypothesized variables necessary for rebel party formation, what is more striking is how political inclusion as a factor for success was also negatively affected by the proceedings of this case. Ultimately, Colombia¹ demonstrates that political inclusion is partially determined by both government and civilian actors, as citizen's unwillingness for FARC rebels to participate in electoral politics led to their failure as a political party.

In the mid-20th century, Colombian politics entered an era of severe partisanship. By 1948, divisions between the country's Liberal and Conservative parties were so severe that they

incited widespread outbreaks of political violence. The following decade was termed *La Violencia*—or “The Violence”—a period in which roughly 200,000 Colombians lost their lives (World Peace Foundation 2016, para. 1). This surge of bloodshed and disorder eventually led to the near collapse of the state and its various institutions. Several groups saw this societal breakdown as an opportunity for not only political but also economic gains.

What resulted were waves of highly regionalized mob violence which not only heightened internal chaos, but more importantly exposed the severity of cultural, ethnic, and racial divisions within Colombia (World Peace Foundation 2016, para. 2). In the early 1960s, a power-sharing agreement was finally struck between Liberals and Conservatives. This new “National Front” as it was known, managed to temporarily reduce violence, but at the cost of institutionally excluding leftist groups. This decision however created a fundamental shift in Colombian politics away from partisan identification and more towards class divisions (World Peace Foundation 2016, para. 11-12).

This political exclusion quickly paved the way for *Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, a Marxist-Leninist guerilla group composed of militant communists and other members of the peasant class. The FARC, as the group came to be known, claimed that its central goal was to oppose the privatization of natural resources and fight against Colombia’s wealthy on behalf of impoverished rural communities. For all its lofty ambitions however, the FARC still embraced horrendous acts of political violence.

The FARC was guilty of numerous violent crimes, so much so that the U.S. State Department eventually classified the group as “foreign terrorist organization” (Felter & Renwick 2017, para. 2). The guerillas committed numerous assaults and ambushes on both government

institutions and civilian populations, oftentimes in the form of bombings, the destruction of property, political assassinations (Hernández Mora 2014), kidnappings, and extortion. The group was also notorious for its narcotics trafficking, at one point supplying 90% of the world's cocaine (Felter & Renwick 2017, para. 6).

While the FARC continued its campaign of political violence for several decades, the Colombian government continued to have regular democratic elections. In 1982, war-weary President Belisario Betancur initiated peace talks with FARC guerillas and several other rebel groups (Steele & Schubiger 2018, para. 8). The FARC quickly became one of the primary negotiators in the peace agreement, demanding democratic reforms to allow for increased political inclusion (Steele & Schubiger 2018, para. 9). Three years later, the FARC's demands were met through the passing of two democratic reforms, one of which allowed for a formation of a political party that would offer a left-wing alternative to Colombia's Liberal and Conservative parties.

The new party was called the *Unión Patriótica* or "UP", and was founded by the FARC in an effort to gain political power through both violent and non-violent means (Steele & Schubiger 2018, para. 10). The second democratic reform passed by the government allowed for the direct election of municipal mayors, who were previously only appointed by the president (Steele & Schubiger 2018, para. 9). This reform was critical for the FARC and UP, who already had large territorial bases of support due to their involvement in the narco-trafficking industry in certain regions of the country. In 1986, the UP contested its first elections and saw a fair amount of success, winning significant numbers of seats on both the national and local levels. The party even managed to pull 4.5% of the vote in the presidential race, an unprecedented number for a leftist group (Steele & Schubiger 2018, para. 12).

Other groups however quickly began to disapprove of the UP's newfound electoral success. Local politicians were particularly riled, as they had traditionally secured power through appointment alone. As a result, these leaders began allying themselves with local paramilitary groups to target UP candidates and supporters. This "Dirty War" as it was termed endured from about 1986-1988 and resulted in the assassinations of 550 UP members. Those who were spared were often forced into exile or otherwise fled to hide in cities (Steele & Schubiger 2018, para. 13). When probed as to why they failed to protect UP candidates and sympathizers, the Colombian government often cited the group's affiliation with the FARC, who continued paramilitary operations during this time (Steele & Schubiger 2018, para. 16). Ultimately, while the Dirty War's political cleansing efforts successfully stripped the UP of its power and bases of support, it only helped to strengthen other paramilitary groups in Colombia and further the country's civil war. Not to mention, the FARC only continued to arm and grow its narco-trafficking despite the UP's failure (Steele & Schubiger 2018, para. 29).

Returning to the three independent variables that comprise successful rebel party formation, the case of FARC and the UP in this era fail in almost all three areas. While the UP was granted formal political inclusion by the Colombian government, the broader population seemed to withhold support for the new party due to their connection to the FARC. The Dirty War in particular severely limited UP political participation and resulted in a near total political cleansing of party members. This case also demonstrates a failure of rebels to disarm or otherwise renounce violence as a political means, which was another major contributing factor to the group's lack of success, as the government was unwilling to protect UP members due to the FARC's ongoing paramilitary operations.

Furthermore, the peace negotiations referenced in this case contain no documented evidence of third-party mediation or other international oversight. This likely enabled the political cleansing of UP members, who otherwise might have been more protected had an external actor been able to oversee their fair and safe participation in elections. Assessing this lack of nearly all three of the hypothesized independent variables necessary for successful rebel party formation, the case of Colombia¹ can most certainly be classified as a failure.

Colombia² (2002-Present)

After the failed incorporation of FARC candidates into electoral politics in the 1980s, the Colombian Civil War continued for yet another two decades. In 2002 the country's new President Álvaro Uribe pledged to crack down on left-wing guerilla activity, and as a result homicides fell by 40% and kidnappings by 80%. Although some accused Uribe of human rights abuses and collaboration with right-wing paramilitary groups, his campaign against the FARC and other leftist groups nevertheless laid the foundation for later peace talks (Felter & Renwick 2017, para. 12-13).

By 2012, the FARC had significantly declined in numbers, and had lost its founder and leader—Manuel Marulanda—to a heart attack. Assessing the reality of their situation, what remained of FARC leadership once again agreed to peace negotiations with the Colombian government (Felter & Renwick 2017, para. 13). The following president, Juan Manuel Santos, formally initiated dialogue with the FARC, which was mediated and hosted by the governments of Chile, Cuba, Norway, and Venezuela.

By mid-2016, both sides of the conflict had reached an official cease-fire, and a finalized peace agreement was signed in September 2016. The treaty had five central

provisions, one of which would allow for the eventual political participation of FARC members in Colombian electoral politics (Felter & Renwick 2017, para. 15). The agreement also called for complete FARC rebel disarmament, which would be overseen by a UN commission. In addition, the United States government—who has long had interests in Colombia—appropriated roughly \$490 million in aid to support the implementation of the peace deal (Felter & Renwick 2017, para. 15). As with past peace agreements, the Colombian public was somewhat hesitant about the new treaty, arguing that FARC rebels were being treated too leniently considering their past crimes. International justices and groups such as Human Rights Watch, along with Colombian government officials, assured the public however that those guilty of serious offenses would be tried and punished accordingly (Felter & Renwick 2017, para. 18-19).

In 2017 the FARC officially rebranded as a political party, naming themselves the *Fuerza Alternativa del Común*, or Common Alternative Revolutionary Force. Although they retained their controversial FARC acronym, the new party nevertheless chose to participate in Colombia's 2018 general elections (Al Jazeera 2017). As was expected, the FARC fared poorly in their first election, winning less than 1% of the total vote (BBC 2018). Nevertheless, per peace agreement terms the party was still guaranteed five seats in both chambers of the legislation (Al Jazeera 2017). In attempt to reshape public perception of their organization as they continue to transition to democratic politics, the FARC has since officially changed its name to Comunes (Reuters Staff 2021). Whether it proves to be effective or not remains to be seen.

The case of Colombia² largely makes up for most of the shortcomings of the failed negotiations in Colombia¹. Overall, Colombia² met all three of the hypothesized independent

variables necessary for successful rebel party formation. The Colombian government was clearly willing to offer political inclusion to FARC leaders, as was explicitly seen through treaty provisions allowing for five guaranteed seats in the legislature and the ability to run candidates in elections. Additionally, FARC leaders formally agreed to disarm under peace agreement terms and several third-party actors—those being Chile, Cuba, Norway, Venezuela, the US, and the UN—oversaw the peace process and its implementation. Ultimately, all three independent variables were met for Colombia²: political inclusion of rebels, rebel renunciation of violence, and third-party oversight.

Following the hypothesized criteria, the current case of Colombia² is a success. Violent conflicts between guerillas, paramilitaries, and the government are no longer seen on the scale they once were, and post-conflict elections were able to be held without any serious disruptions. Although a small minority, Comunes politicians still hold seats in the legislature, and the international community has largely applauded Colombia for its ability to formally end a decades-long conflict. It is important to note however that, due to the relatively recent nature of the peace agreement and political participation of the FARC in democratic politics, in some ways it may be premature to determine whether the party formation process was true long-term success.

While Comunes will continue to hold seats in the legislature until 2026, their electoral fate after that is uncertain, as decades of violent history as the FARC cannot be erased by a mere peace treaty and party formation. What's more, some rural regions that continue to be neglected by peace agreement provisions are still dominated by FARC dissidents, who—though significantly fewer in numbers and lacking official ties to Comunes—still partake in illicit actions in the drug trafficking industry (Turkewitz & Rios

2021). The current Colombia case is only a success as of now, and time alone will tell whether the FARC sees a lasting progress and achievement in its transition to a political party.

The previously mentioned cases represent a wide range of rebel party formation outcomes. The FMLN is by far the most successful example, with all three of the hypothesized necessary independent variables for rebel party formation being present: political inclusion of ex-combatants, official renunciation of violence by rebels, and the presence of third-party oversight. Similarly, the case of Colombia²—spanning from 2002 to the present—also represents a success in terms of the independent variables, but in some ways more time may be needed to determine the long-term sustainability of this transition. Conversely, the cases of the MIR in Venezuela and Colombia¹ demonstrate instances of failed rebel party formation. In both circumstances, at least two of the three necessary conditions for successful rebel party formation were absent. Had all three variables been present—as in Colombia² and with the case of the FMLN—perhaps the two rebel groups would have seen more electoral success.

Conclusion

Overall, the four cases assessed reinforce the hypothesized suggestion that rebel groups who are formally offered political inclusion, renounce violence, and are monitored by international or third-party actors are more likely to realize a successful party formation. These findings are significant to any political or state actor seeking to reintegrate ex-combatants. If leaders truly wish to promote democratic consolidation in their post-conflict states, then their attention to the above-mentioned factors is critical.

These insights can certainly inform future policy and peace settlements and contribute to the ongoing pursuit of enduring peace. In addition, while this paper solely focused on three cases in Latin America, further research could explore the application of the presented hypothesis in this study by analyzing instances of rebel party formation in other regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East to assess whether its claims and implications still hold true in these contexts.

Government officials must be willing to formally include electoral participation provisions in peace treaties, and—as is demonstrated by the first case of the FARC in Colombia—collaborate with citizens and ex-combatants to create reconciliatory efforts that work to promote the societal acceptance of rebels in their post-conflict communities. For their part, rebels must also officially renounce violence and disarm to demonstrate their genuine acceptance of and entrance into peaceful democratic electoral politics. Furthermore, some sort of third-party oversight ought to be present, not merely for peace negotiations, but also to facilitate rebel disarmament and ensure fair and free elections that meet treaty provisions.

As current and future post-conflict states seek democratic consolidation and lasting peace, the policy applications of this rebel party formation research can certainly serve as useful guidelines. Assessing the current state of Colombia more specifically, continued efforts not only in political but also social reintegration will be key for incentivizing FARC members to remain in electoral politics and avoid recidivism. Similarly, international oversight of the FARC and Colombia's democratic elections should remain in the coming years, particularly after the 2026 elections in which the provision for automatic seats in the legislature expire for Comunes politicians. Simply put, investment in democratic

consolidation requires long-term intentionality in-line with the hypothesized variables for successful rebel party formation.

As alluded to earlier, pursuing rebel party formation is no simple task. Nevertheless, if pursued with wisdom and diligence, it can be immensely reconciliatory. Post-conflict states pursuing rebel party formation must seek compromise from both government leaders and ex-combatants, support from the international community, as well as a societal willingness to look beyond a troubled past towards a more democratic future. If this feat can be accomplished, not only will it speak volumes of the peace process that produced it, but also serve as an encouraging model for other post-conflict societies seeking to heal and restore faith in their political institutions.

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