A Call to Arms: How Rebel Groups Choose Their Recruitment Appeals

Abstract:

Why do some rebel groups mobilize around diverse grievances, while others organize around a narrow set of issues? Rebels can widen their recruitment pool by appealing to broader segments of society. However, groups that represent multiple interests are often plagued by in-fighting and low cohesion, as members disagree about which issues to prioritize. We contend that radical Islamist groups are more likely to recruit with more diverse claims than other rebel organizations. This is because radical Islamist organizations attempt to unite diverse interests through a shared religious identity and use disparate grievances to promote the idea that Islam is under threat. Moreover, the frequent adoption of transnational identities by radical Islamist groups often places them in conflict with local, regional, and international actors, widening the scope of organizational grievances. We find support for these arguments by leveraging novel data on the recruitment practices of 232 rebel movements across the world.

Acknowledgements: The authors thank Ilayda B. Onder and participants in the "New Frontiers in Research on Terrorism and Civil Wars" workshop at the University of Houston for their feedback.

Data Availability Statement: Replication materials are available at:

https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/6BZSKR

Introduction

In 1989, the United Somali Congress (USC) formed as an umbrella organization of several rebel factions opposed to the Barre regime in Somalia (2011). The USC recruited exclusively from the Hawiye clan (Bakony 2009; Lewis 2008) and its messaging focused primarily on clan-based discrimination perpetrated by the Barre regime (Hall 2015). In contrast, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) became one of the first Somali militant groups to mobilize members across clan lines and around diverse interests (Ahmad 2009; Mapping Militant Organizations 2019). The ability of the ICU to effectively employ such diverse recruitment appeals is notable given the historic rivalries between some of the clans from which the group recruited.

In conflicts across the world, grievances play a prominent role in rebel organizations' discursive appeals to potential recruits. While some rebel groups mobilize around a small number of issues (e.g., the USC), others highlight numerous grievances in their propaganda (e.g., the ICU) (Soules 2023). However, employing diverse recruitment appeals can serve as a double-edged sword for rebel groups. On the one hand, organizing around a larger number of issues expands the pool of recruits available to rebel organizations, as broader segments of the population can feel represented by the rebels' objectives (Gabbay 2008; Schwab 2023). On the other hand, armed groups that represent a diversity of interests are often plagued by lower levels of cohesion and higher levels of in-fighting, as the preferences of members are less likely to align (Perkoski 2019). Why, then, are some rebel organizations more willing to take the risks associated with employing diverse recruitment appeals?

In comparison to other types of rebel organizations, we argue that radical Islamist groups are more likely to employ diverse grievance-based recruitment appeals for multiple reasons.[1] First, violent Islamist organizations attempt to unite recruits with diverse interests by emphasizing an overarching religious identity that transcends ethnic, familial, and national divisions (Ahmad 2016; Walter 2017). Building on this shared identity, Islamist organizations also frequently seek to spur recruitment by reinforcing the idea that Islam is under threat (Wagemakers 2008). These threats are often tied to a diversity of grievances, with Islamist groups arguing that danger to Islam comes from numerous sources. Third, radical Islamist rebel movements throughout the world have increasingly adopted transnational agendas. Seeking to establish political orders that extend across existing international borders entails that radical Islamist groups may expand their grievances as they seek to delegitimize and attack a broad range of adversaries (Hegghammer 2009).

To test this argument, we use data from the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID). RAID contains original information on the recruitment strategies of rebel organizations that were active across the world from 1989 to 2011. Specifically, RAID includes measures of the particular types of recruitment appeals made by rebel groups, which we use to build measures of diversity in recruitment appeals (Soules 2023). While some of these appeals are connected to well-established ideologies (e.g., Marxist, ethnonationalist, and/or left-wing belief systems), others focus on specific grievances, such as foreign military occupation or violent government repression. We also empirically evaluate the mechanisms, finding that radical Islamist groups employ combinations of appeals that most groups avoid and are more likely to make diverse appeals when they recruit foreign fighters and have ethnically diverse memberships.

[1] For simplicity, we refer to grievance-based appeals as "recruitment appeals" throughout the paper.

This paper makes multiple contributions to existing research. First, rebel groups devote significant resources to their recruitment efforts. Various studies highlight the diversity of themes in armed group propaganda (Wignell et al. 2017; Winkler et al. 2020). Related work has examined the consequences of recruiting with diverse appeals for militant organizations (Gabbay 2008; Khan and Whiteside 2024). However, existing research often examines the causes and consequences of employing diverse recruitment appeals among a relatively small number of militant groups. To our knowledge, this is one of the first cross-group, quantitative analyses exploring why rebel groups operating in disparate conflicts across the world choose to diversify their recruitment appeals.[2]

Second, a burgeoning strand of research explores the importance of ideology in civil wars (Gutiérrez Sanín and Wood 2014). Scholars have analyzed how ideology affects outcomes such as cooperation between militant groups (Gade et al. 2019), rebel fratricide (Hafez 2020), conflict duration (Basedau et al. 2022), and armed groups' tactical choices (Revkin and Wood 2020). We build on this scholarship by highlighting key distinctions between different types of ideological rebel groups and their recruitment appeals. Finally, ideological diversification is expected to affect the longevity and success of rebel movements (Khan and Whiteside 2024; Perkoski 2019). However, to make empirical claims about the consequences of rebel recruitment strategies, existing research requires further understanding of the factors that drive recruitment practices. This paper provides empirical evidence of such factors.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. First, we review the literature on the diversification of rebel group recruitment strategies. We then develop our theory to explain why radical Islamist groups are more likely than rebel organizations with other ideologies to diversify their recruitment

[2] Tokdemir et al. (2021) investigate how inter-rebel competition drives groups to alter their ideological platforms, but their quantitative analysis does not specifically address the role of recruitment.

appeals. Next, we detail our research design and present our results. Following this, we conduct additional analyses to test some of the mechanisms underpinning our core theoretical arguments. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our results.

Diversity in Recruitment Strategies

Militant organizations can draw on a variety of ideological and grievance-based recruitment appeals, which involve promoting one or more issues to directly persuade individuals to join the group (Soules 2023, 1818). Some appeals build on common ideologies that characterize rebel groups, including left-wing, ethnonationalist, and religious ideologies. Such appeals may center on fighting for the creation of an Islamic state, ending ethnic discrimination, seeking an independent country for particular national communities, or forming a government based on Marxist ideals. Other recruitment appeals might tap into more specific grievances. These appeals highlight the need to mobilize against issues such as government repression, the exploitation of local resources, gender inequality, and foreign intervention. These different appeals, including those connected to broader ideologies and those linked to more specific grievances, fall under our conceptualization of diverse recruitment appeals.

Numerous examples showcase the diversity of appeals adopted by rebel groups. For instance, the Action Directe and Red Army Faction (1985) signed a joint statement, "For the Unity of Revolutionaries in Western Europe," criticizing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), economic exploitation, and the actions of the "imperialist machine" against oppressed peoples. Elsewhere, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (1984) declared that the Ogaden people had suffered from Ethiopian colonization, the denial of universal human rights, attacks against Ogaden culture, and the "indiscriminate murder of our families and the looting of our collective and

individual wealth." Additionally, the Arab separatist groups in Iran have delineated the "crimes against humanity" committed by the Iranian regime, including the torture, persecution, and forced displacement of the Ahwazi people (Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Al Ahwaz 2020). In another case, Hamas delineated multifaceted grievances, such as Israeli occupation, the unlawful imprisonment of Palestinian women and young children, and human rights violations, while constructing its English-language narrative on Twitter (Margolin 2022).

Importantly, recruitment appeals can transcend ideological divides between Islamist, separatist, and left-wing rebel groups. For instance, rebel groups across the ideological spectrum have criticized foreign intervention. The left-wing, ethnonationalist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) argued for the urgency of combating foreign intervention in its founding document. In doing so, the PFLP (1967) stated that "we must confront the Zionist invaders; the fate of our people and our cause and every human being in Palestine relies upon our Palestinian determination to fight the invaders in order to preserve our dignity, and our lands and our rights." In another case, the Taliban declared in 2016 that it "condemns the barbarian invasion and continuation of occupation by America and her allies in the strongest terms…leave our country, bring the occupation to an end…Otherwise the believing Afghan nation will continue their legitimate struggle under the leadership of the Islamic Emirate, until the invaders are expelled from the country" (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan 2016). In its Green Brook, the Irish Republican Army argued that the organization had the right to engage in violence to combat foreign aggression, tyranny, and economic exploitation (Coogan 1993).

The diversity of recruitment appeals made by rebel movements is an important strategic decision (Gabbay 2008; Schwab 2023). After all, there are multiple drawbacks associated with adopting a diverse range of appeals. First, diversification may affect the ability of militant groups

to effectively recruit and achieve long-term goals. Mobilizing around a diversity of appeals can create the perception that rebels are too fractured to be effective (Khan and Whiteside 2024). Indeed, rebels often need to signal their commitment to specific ideological causes to gain and maintain legitimacy (Cronin-Furman and Arulthas 2024). Organizational recruitment strategies may be hampered if a group says it is fighting for a certain issue but then fails to follow through on its promises (Benford and Snow 2000). Consequently, rebel groups that mobilize around a diversity of issues might have difficulty convincing potential recruits that they can credibly satisfy all the diverse interests that could be represented in the group. Moreover, adopting a diverse range of grievances may place rebel groups at odds with a wider number of enemy forces.

However, rebels may also possess various incentives to adopt diverse recruitment appeals. For one, drawing on a broad range of appeals may bridge gaps between disparate types of identities. In doing so, rebel groups engage in frame bridging, which involves "the linking two or more ideologically congruent but structurally disconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. Bridging can occur between a movement and individuals, through the linkage of a movement organization with an unmobilized sentiment pool or public opinion cluster, or across social movements" (Benford and Snow 2000, 624). Developing a common frame that aligns with others' grievances can bind together seemingly disparate actors into a unified cause (Gerhards and Rucht 1992).

Additionally, rebel groups may draw on different types of appeals as they seek to appeal to multiple audiences. While some militant groups primarily draw on local populations for recruits and support, other organizations attempt to gain the backing of transnational audiences. Mobilizing around diverse appeals may aid organizations in widening their pool of potential recruits, appealing to supporters (at home and abroad) who are on the fence about particular militant

organizations (Walter 2017). This is because we expect that, on average, the more recruitment appeals groups make, the more interests will be represented in their ranks.

Overall, there are various drawbacks and benefits associated with adopting diverse appeals. Weighing these costs, rebel organizations vary in the range of appeals they adopt. Below, we explore these dynamics in greater depth, highlighting why radical Islamist groups have greater incentives to draw on wide-ranging recruitment appeals in comparison to other rebel organizations.

Militant Islamist Groups and the Diversity of Recruitment Appeals

Relative to other rebel organizations, we argue that radical Islamist groups are more likely to make diverse recruitment appeals for several reasons.[3] These include radical Islamist groups': (1) attempts to create an encompassing identity among diverse populations; (2) efforts to support the idea that Islam is under threat; and (3) increasing adoption of transnational goals that place organizations in conflict with local, regional, and international actors.

Shared Identity

Radical Islamist organizations place a strong emphasis on an overarching religious identity. This identity transcends clan, ethnic, and tribal differences as well as national borders, with Islamist groups calling on Muslims from different backgrounds to mobilize for their cause. Following the proclamation of the Islamic State's (IS) "caliphate," Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (2014),

[3] We define radical Islamist organizations as armed groups that espouse Islamist goals, such as fighting for an Islamic state, purification of society, and the protection of Islam (Soules 2023).

the former leader of IS, proclaimed the need for Muslims around the world to travel to Iraq and Syria to join the organization's multi-ethnic state:

> It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers. It is a Khilfah [caliphate] that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribi, American, French, German, and Australian…Their blood mixed and became one, under a single flag and goal, in one pavilion, enjoying this blessing, the blessing of faithful brotherhood.

In another case, al-Shabaab combined national and global appeals when calling for mobilization against Ethiopian forces in Somalia, emphasizing "Somalia's special position in the *ummah* and…Islam as part of Somali identity" (Hansen 2019, 44). Moreover, Petrich (2022, 486) writes that al-Shabaab has sought "cohesion through the framework of Islam" to "transcend Somalia's historically fractious clan relationships."

Recent research underscores how Islamist organizations' emphasis on unity through shared religious identity can aid in appealing to diverse audiences (Hegghammer 2010; Ahmad 2016; Walter 2017). For instance, multiple Islamist rebel groups in Syria welcomed thousands of foreign fighters from different ethnic, national, and linguistic backgrounds into their ranks following the onset of the Syrian civil war (Edgerton 2024; Drevon and Haenni 2025). Jaish al-Fatah, a coalition of Syrian rebels, stated that "in order to repel the aggression of the kuffar [infidels] upon the Muslims, it is required for the Muslim Ummah [nation] as a whole to rise up and confront this great evil…This means Muslims from East and the West, righteous and sinful, rich and poor, young and old, educated and uneducated…and so on" (Abu Jihad Al Muhajir 2015, 7). Moreover, Toft and Zhukov (2015) note that while some nationalist insurgents in Chechnya reject the recruitment of non-Chechens, religiously motivated insurgents are much more likely to accept Muslim recruits from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds.

Religious motivations may serve as a critical mobilizing force for recruits to Islamist organizations. Discussing findings from interviews with foreign fighters from disparate backgrounds who joined the ranks of armed Islamist groups in Syria, Dawson and Amarasingam (2017, 192) state: "Religion provides the dominant frame these foreign fighters use to interpret almost every aspect of their lives, and this reality should be given due interpretive weight." Tapping into this identity, Islamist organizations have attempted to create a shared, encompassing identity that transcends numerous cleavages. While bridging divides between different communities, radical Islamist groups can incorporate various types of grievances within their conceptualizations of shared religious identity (Svensson and Nilsson 2025). In addition to adopting an overarching identity that links populations with different ethnic and national identities, radical Islamist groups argue that there are multifaceted threats facing Islam.

Threats to Group Identity

Rebel groups delineate pressing threats that require violent action to change. Radical Islamist organizations frequently draw on the idea that Islam is under threat and in urgent need of defense. For decades, pan-Islamist activists have emphasized the idea that "the Muslim nation (*umma*) faces an existential external threat" (Hegghammer 2010, 73). Such threats include external forces' occupation of territory, desecration of mosques, and violence against women and children. While frames surrounding the specific threat may vary depending on the situation, time, and context, Wagemakers (2008, 4) notes that this "belief that Islam is under threat is shared by different Islamic movements and scholars across various Muslim countries." Radical Islamist groups have linked multifaceted grievances to the idea that Islam is under threat. These grievances, ranging

from the exploitation of resources to external intervention and authoritarian rule, are attributed to various actors.

In March 2024, for instance, al-Shabaab issued a statement rebuking the United States and its plundering of "Muslim wealth," declaring that "the U.S. government often takes predatory measures in order to harass and persecute Muslim communities around the world and appropriate their wealth, all under the most flimsy and ludicrous pretexts" (Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujahideen 2024). In 2018, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) rebuked the "crusader plunderer" (al-Naheeb al-Salibi), and especially French companies, for looting "around 85 percent" of the global Muslim community's riches. Additionally, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (2021) argued that "the massacres perpetrated by the French in Mali and other African countries are too many to count…the real reason for the French invasion of Mali is hatred for that which Allah revealed, and malice for the religion of Allah and His Shari'ah." Local regimes have failed to rule by Islamic law and repeatedly demonstrated their subservience to foreign powers. Following attacks on protestors in Pakistan, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (2024) claimed that the Pakistani military was merely "agents" (umala') of Zionism and "Zionist America" (Amrika al-Sayuniyya). In another case, Shia actors framed IS as a pressing threat to Shia mosques and shrines in Iraq and Syria, legitimizing the use of violence to protect holy sites from IS destruction (Isakhan 2020).

Militant Islamist organizations have articulated the threat faced by Islam in publications produced in different languages. Yahya Ibrahim (2015, 3), the former editor of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) English-language *Inspire* magazine, stated that "Muslims continue to face the results and consequence of the fierce crusade aggression against Islam." Appealing to English-language audiences, AQAP has also made links between racism in the United States and oppression against Muslims across the world: "Racism and discrimination still exist in the minds

of the white…The solution to this fanaticism [white supremacy] should not only be confined to America. This is because the same American oppression towards the Blacks today, is practiced towards other communities around the world. The same level of oppression is exercised against the Muslims today."[4]

These framing strategies are not divorced from broader public perceptions. Following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, global surveys found that an increasing percentage of Muslims in different countries viewed the existence of serious threats to Islam (Pew Research Center 2003). Moreover, Chassman (2016) finds that while members of IS have a diversity of grievances, they are still united by some common ideas, such as the belief that Islam is under threat across the world. Edgerton (2024) also finds that IS fighters from outside Syria and Iraq also frequently came from areas in which Sunni Muslims faced exclusionary policies and were denied access to political power. In their survey of former Al-Shabaab combatants, Botha and Abdile (2014) found that 98% of respondents reported believing that Islam was under threat. Appealing to such sentiments, the pressing nature of threats to Islam underscores the need for recruits from different backgrounds to take up arms in defense of a shared religious identity.

Transnational Identities

Finally, a defining feature of civil wars over recent years is the transnational nature of rebel objectives. This trend among rebel groups is driven by the increasing adoption of transnational goals by radical Islamist organizations (Walter 2017). Through the 1990s, there was often a divide between radical Islamist organizations that a) sought to overthrow local Muslim regimes to create

[4] These quotes were gathered from different articles in *Inspire* edition #14. For a secure link to all *Inspire* issues, see Aaron Zelin's jihadology.net.

Islamic states in particular countries and groups that b) focused on attacking Western states and achieving goals that transcend recognized state borders (Hegghammer 2009). Regarding the former, these "revolutionary" Islamist groups fought for power in a particular state against a Muslim regime that organizations viewed as illegitimate (Svensson and Nilsson 2018). For years, these organizations were often the dominant type of violent Islamist group in various conflicts.

However, recent decades have witnessed salient changes within the jihadist movement as more organizations have espoused transnational aspirations. As Svensson and Nilsson (2018, 1134) write, transnational Islamist claims occur "where the rebel group's Islamist aspirations go beyond the national boundaries and the group seeks to establish a transnational caliphate." The growing number of militant Islamist groups espousing transnational goals has blurred the distinction among organizations that emphasized combating local "apostate" regimes and those that targeted Western states. Here, Hegghammer (2009) notes that, following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, "a process of ideological hybridization has occurred, with the result that the enemy hierarchies of many jihadist groups are becoming more unclear or heterogeneous than they used to be."

In addition to new organizations that advocated for transnational goals at their formation, the decision to pledge allegiance to the leaders of al-Qaeda or IS has been key in the transnationalization processes of several organizations in the jihadist movement (Svensson and Nilsson 2025). For example, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which later changed its name to AQIM in January 2007 after it pledged fealty to al-Qaeda the previous year, focused solely on achieving goals within Algeria in its founding charter (*al-Mithaq*) (Berlin 2024). Yet, the organization would increasingly adopt more regional goals, with Abdelmalek Droukdel, the leader of the GSPC/AQIM from 2004 to 2020, claiming that "our objectives concerning the Islamic Maghreb, they are plenty. Most importantly is to secure our countries from the tentacles

of these criminal regimes that betrayed their religion, and their people. Because they are all secretions of colonialism that invaded our country in the last two centuries, and enabled those regimes to govern" (New York Times 2008).

Rather than only emphasizing local objectives, a growing number of radical Islamist organizations have advocated for transnational goals over recent decades. The increasing heterogeneity in the enemy hierarchies of radical Islamist groups means that organizations may simultaneously admonish the actions of local, regional, and global powers. Combating numerous enemies entails that transnational Islamist groups may draw on diverse appeals as they rebuke the actions of numerous actors in the international system.

Central Hypothesis

This discussion is not to say that all separatist or leftist groups fail to criticize international actors, avoid the creation of overarching, shared identities, or evade discussing the pressing threats that their in-groups face. However, these organizations have less incentives and capacity to combine all three components in their appeals in comparison to radical Islamist groups. First, radical Islamist and ethnonationalist secessionist groups have concrete, identity-based audiences, while left-wing organizations do not (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008). Thus, the first two types of organizations could more easily unite recruits with diverse interests through shared religious and/or ethnic identity, while left-wing groups may struggle to do so. However, radical Islamist groups often appeal to recruits across many different nationalities and ethnolinguistic groups. In contrast, any individual ethnic group that a rebel organization claims to represent would likely be much smaller and less diverse.

Second, not all groups are likely to have the same ability to diversify their appeals as part of their efforts to internationalize their struggle. Leftist groups, for instance, have sought to appeal to a transnational proletariat and emphasize the need to combat imperialist and capitalist forces. Indeed, international politics have historically shaped the behavior of many leftist rebel groups (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). Yet, ethnonationalist separatist groups often do not have the same incentives to do so. Indeed, secessionist groups often seek to curry favor with the international community, by building perceptions of their legitimacy, so that they can gain recognition of their claims to territorial sovereignty (e.g., Mampilly 2011; Stewart 2018). Thus, unlike left-wing and radical Islamist groups, separatist groups might avoid making enemies with regional and international actors, which limits their grievances against these actors. Overall, numerous radical Islamist groups have adopted transnational goals, attempted to create an overarching religious identity, and highlighted the multifaceted threats facing Islam, leading to our central hypothesis:

> *H1: Radical Islamist groups will employ a larger number of recruitment appeals than other rebel organizations*.

Additional Testable Implications

There are several other testable mechanisms that can be derived from the theory. First, the propagation of an overarching religious identity allows radical Islamist organizations to appeal to disparate audiences. While emphasizing a shared religious identity, radical Islamist groups frequently tie various local and global political developments with their argument that Islam is under threat. As AQAP's Ibrahim (2015, 3) states, Islam's enemies had revealed "themselves in different forms of aggression: plundering Muslim wealth, occupying their lands, imprisoning their men and women, killing their scholars and the worst of all is the aggression towards the very core principles of Islam." In doing so, radical Islamist groups have weaved together various types of

appeals, many of which other rebel groups have used in isolation, in their discourse surrounding the dangers facing Islam. Consequently, another implication of our theory is that radical Islamist groups might be more likely to tie together seemingly contradictory appeals in their discourse as they attempt to unite diverse interests under the banner of jihad.

> *H2a: Radical Islamist groups are more likely than other rebel organizations to tie together incompatible recruitment appeals*.

As noted above, shared Islamic identity may aid Islamist groups in bridging ethnic and national differences (Svensson and Nilsson 2025). Radical Islamist groups have produced magazines, newspapers, and videos in multiple languages while seeking the support of different ethnolinguistic groups and foreign audiences (Zelin 2015). Through these recruitment materials, radical Islamist groups have attracted recruits from different countries as they emphasize shared religious identity in their propaganda (Hegghammer 2010; Walter 2017). However, the membership of some Islamist groups may be relatively homogenous and dominated by one particular ethnic group. This, in turn, may affect organizations' incentives to diversify their recruitment appeals. Among different types of radical Islamist groups, we contend that organizations with diverse ethnic memberships may be even more inclined to employ wide-ranging appeals to appeal to organizational members and recruits from different backgrounds.

> *H2b: Radical Islamist groups with multi-ethnic memberships will employ a larger number of recruitment appeals.*

Finally, one key feature of Islamist groups' transnationalization process is the recruitment of foreign fighters. As Drevon and Haenni (2025, 285) state: "Global jihad is associated with the resort to foreign fighters that contribute to new conflict framing, repertoires of violence such as suicide bombing, stronger organizational cohesion, and longer conflict duration and recurrence."

AQAP, for example, has welcomed fighters into its ranks from areas ranging from Algeria, Tunisia, Chechnya, and Dagestan to Nigeria, Somalia, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan (Schwartz 2024). Mobilizing foreign fighters often involves tapping into both local political grievances and international grievances. In a similar fashion to the ethnic makeup of its members, an organization's reliance on foreign fighters may create incentives to espouse disparate grievances in its recruitment efforts. Consequently, radical Islamist groups that attract foreign recruits may be the most likely type of organization to utilize a diverse range of recruitment appeals.

> *H2c: Radical Islamist groups that recruit foreign fighters will employ a larger number of recruitment appeals.*

Research Design

We employ data from the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID) (Soules 2023) to test the hypotheses. RAID contains data on the recruitment practices of 232 rebel movements that were active across the world at some point from 1989 to 2011. The list of actors is derived from the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (Cunningham et al. 2013). While the main version of RAID is time-invariant, it is an ideal source to use because it contains measures of the specific types of appeals employed by rebel groups. To construct the variables in RAID, detailed qualitative narratives were written using a variety of primary and secondary sources to determine the specific types of recruitment appeals that groups employed (Soules 2023).

Outcome Variables

Evaluating the hypotheses requires a measure of the diversity of recruitment appeals made by rebels. RAID contains measures of the specific types of recruitment appeals used by groups. It has 10 dichotomous measures of whether groups make specific types of appeals, including appeals to

(1) left-wing ideologies; (2) radical Islamist ideologies; (3) other religious ideologies; (4) ethnonationalism and regional-based grievances; (5) women's rights; (6) opposition to exploitation of local resources by external actors; (7) anti-Imperialism and opposition to Western dominance; (8) opposition to foreign military intervention; (9) general anti-government grievances, and (10) a miscellaneous category of "other" appeals (Soules 2023). To be coded in RAID, there had to be evidence that the appeals were used at least sometimes for *recruitment* purposes (Soules 2023).

These categorizations are based on the most dominant types of appeals present in the qualitative narratives of the recruitment appeals of these groups. A few of these appeals are captured in other datasets that use common typologies of rebel ideology, including whether groups are left-wing, religious, and/or ethnonationalist (e.g., Basedau et al. 2022; Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020; Polo and Gleditsch 2016; Wood and Thomas 2017). However, RAID also captures many other grievances rebels mobilize around that are not present in other datasets. We use information in RAID to construct three measures of the diversification of recruitment appeals. The first two variables capture the overall quantity of recruitment appeals employed by rebel groups and are used to test Hypotheses 1, 2b, and 2c. The third variable captures the incompatibility of recruitment appeals and is used to test Hypothesis 2a.

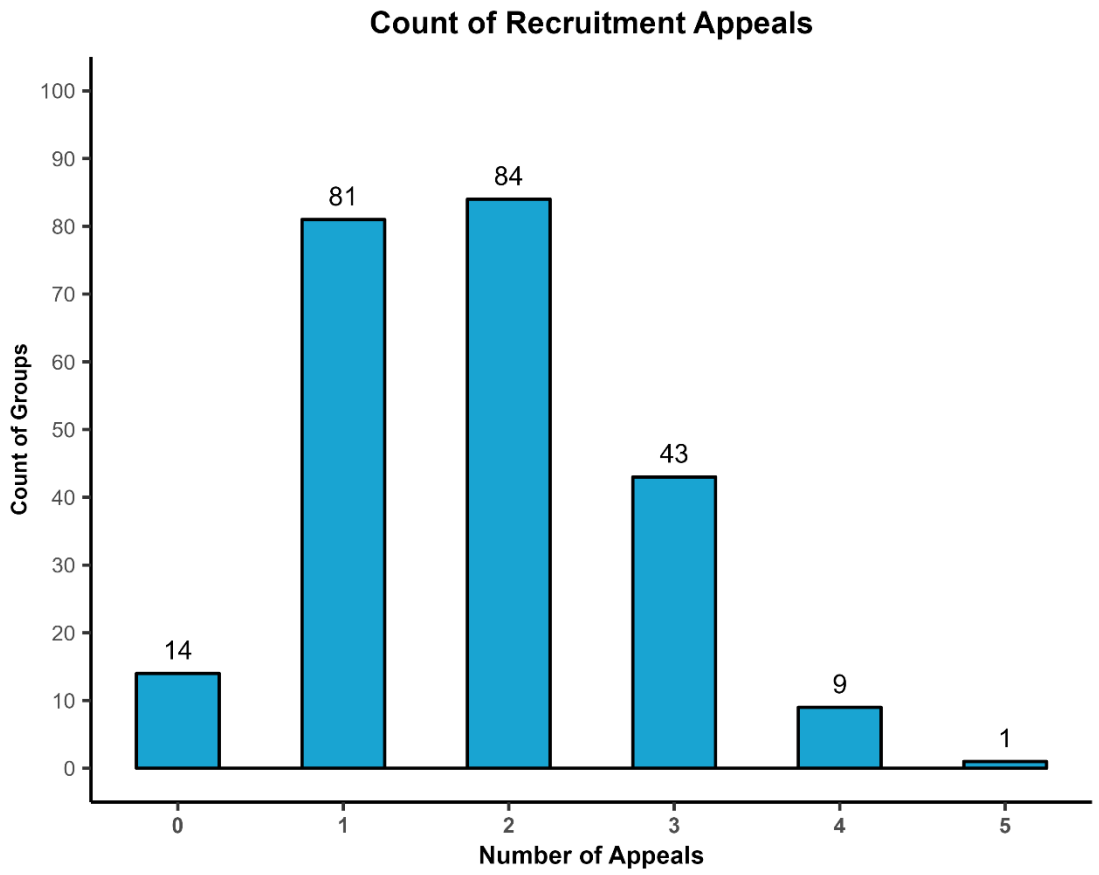

Figure 1: Count of Recruitment Appeals

Starting with the quantity of appeals, we first build a count variable of the number of individual appeals made by groups. This variable ranges from 0 (as there are 14 groups in RAID that rely exclusively on material incentives and make no grievance-based appeals) to 5 (made by the Communist Party of the Philippines). The median number of recruitment appeals made is 2, and the mean is 1.8. **Figure 1** displays the distribution of this count variable. As shown, the distribution of this variable is highly skewed. To ensure that this does not bias the results, we built a binary measure of whether a group makes two or more recruitment appeals. Approximately 59% of the groups in the sample make multiple recruitment appeals, while the rest either make one or none.

For the count measure of recruitment appeals, we employ Poisson regression.[5] We use logistic regression analysis for the binary indicator of recruitment diversity. We are not claiming that when groups make multiple appeals that each appeal is equally important for their recruitment strategy. However, we expect that, on average, the more recruitment appeals groups make, the greater diversity of interests will be represented in their ranks.

Hypothesis 2a maintains that radical Islamist groups are more likely to tie together recruitment appeals that are often incompatible. To develop a measure of incompatibility, we investigated all potential pairs of recruitment appeals in RAID to determine the extent to which any pair of two appeals were used together. We examined the pairwise correlation between every potential pair of two variables to determine which appeals had a negative and statistically significant association with each other. This allowed us to determine, among the entire sample of groups, which combination of appeals were, and were not, commonly found together. After discovering the pairs of appeals in which the two variables had negative and statistically significant associations with each other, we constructed a dichotomous indicator of whether groups employed at least one combination of these incompatible appeals. Given that this variable is dichotomous, we employ logistic regression analysis to test Hypothesis 2a.

Explanatory Variables

To evaluate the hypotheses, we use a dichotomous measure of whether a group has a radical Islamist ideology based on data in both the Women in Armed Rebellion Dataset (WARD) (Wood and Thomsas 2017) and the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (FORGE) dataset

[5] As robustness checks, we also employ negative binomial regression and OLS regression analysis. We continue to find support for the central hypothesis (**Table A16, Online Appendix**).

(Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020). 50 of the 232 groups (21.55%) of the groups in RAID have a radical Islamist ideology.

Utilizing data from RAID, we also include a dichotomous measure of whether a group has a multi-ethnic membership. This variable does *not* measure whether groups explicitly mobilize around ethnic lines, but simply whether they have a multi-ethnic membership. Of the 227 groups for which this variable is available, 100 (44.05%) have multi-ethnic memberships. To assess how foreign fighters condition the relationship between radical Islamist ideology and the breadth of recruitment appeals groups employ, we use Moore's (2019) binary indicator of whether a group recruits foreign fighters in general. This variable is available for only 210 groups in our sample. Of these, 70 (33.33%) recruit foreign fighters. We interact these variables with the measure of radical Islamist ideology to test Hypotheses 2b and 2c respectively. Given the missing data for the foreign fighters variable, we do not include it in the main models testing the other hypotheses. However, as robustness checks, we retest the other hypotheses, and the results hold even when controlling for the recruitment of foreign fighters (**Table A17 - A19, Online Appendix**).

For the tests of Hypotheses 2b and 2c, we include the marginal effects plots so that the nature of the interactive relationship can be more easily interpreted (Brambor et al. 2006). In line with the recommendations in prior literature (Brambor et al. 2006; Zhirnov et al. 2023), we present the marginal effects of having a radical Islamist ideology when the modifying variables both have values of 0 and 1 since these variables (ethnic diversity and presence of foreign fighters) are dichotomous.

Control Variables

We also include a variety of potentially confounding covariates. First, we employ a binary indicator of whether a group has secessionist aims, which is based on multiple sources, including information in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Conflict Encyclopedia and the NSA dataset (Cunningham et al. 2013). Second, using data from WARD and FORGE, we include a binary indicator of whether a group has a communist or any other left-wing ideology. We also use the NSA dataset's five-point ordinal indicator of an armed group's strength and include a binary indicator from the NSA dataset of whether a group controls territory. Additionally, we use data from the Rebel Contraband Dataset (Walsh et al. 2018) to create a binary indicator of whether a group exploited any natural resources during the course of its life.

Moreover, we use data from Sawyer et al. (2017) to employ a binary indicator of whether a group received any funding from external actors during its lifespan. We include a dichotomous indicator of whether at least one other rebel group was present in the country the year the group enters the UCDP Armed Conflict Dataset (Davies et al. 2024; Gleditsch et al. 2002). Additionally, we include a binary indicator of whether a group was active after 2003. Finally, we also hold country-level factors, such as democracy scores and per capita GDP, constant. See the online appendix for additional discussion on these control measures.

Results

The results are displayed in the tables below. The standard errors are clustered by country in all models. The results for Hypotheses 1, 2a, 2b, and 2c are presented in **Tables 1 - 4** respectively.

Table 1: Radical Islamist Groups and Diversity of Recruitment Appeals

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Count of Appeals			Multiple Appeals		
Radical Islamist	0.367***	0.408***	0.417***	1.570***	1.638***	1.704***
	(0.0561)	(0.0682)	(0.0723)	(0.391)	(0.431)	(0.493)
Secessionist Aims		-0.0198	-0.0647		-0.0838	-0.405
		(0.0869)	(0.0982)		(0.406)	(0.521)
Left-Wing		0.162*	0.131		0.822*	0.704
		(0.0775)	(0.0838)		(0.399)	(0.433)
Multi-Ethnic Membership		-0.116	-0.103		-0.176	-0.176
		(0.0857)	(0.0869)		(0.334)	(0.340)
Natural Resource Exploitation		0.0283	-0.0393		0.0198	-0.275
		(0.0652)	(0.0659)		(0.295)	(0.294)
External Funding		-0.00841	0.0266		0.110	0.332
		(0.0806)	(0.0823)		(0.334)	(0.355)
Group Age		0.00733*	0.00804**		0.0273+	0.0295+
		(0.00294)	(0.00295)		(0.0160)	(0.0170)
Relative Rebel Strength		0.0829+	0.0921+		0.0743	0.0977
		(0.0485)	(0.0486)		(0.216)	(0.217)
Territorial Control		0.00636	0.0690		0.0509	0.326
		(0.0792)	(0.0866)		(0.261)	(0.289)
Rebel Competition		-0.0105	-0.0260		-0.197	-0.260
		(0.0700)	(0.0679)		(0.348)	(0.337)
Active Post-2003		0.0261	-0.0314		-0.0395	-0.213
		(0.0754)	(0.0754)		(0.320)	(0.322)
Democracy Score			0.546**			2.798**
			(0.172)			(0.859)
per capita GDP (Logged)			-0.0631			-0.170
			(0.0795)			(0.365)
Constant	0.500***	0.244*	0.113	0.0880	-0.363	-1.012+
	(0.0459)	(0.122)	(0.116)	(0.151)	(0.601)	(0.556)
Observations	232	213	211	232	213	211
Chi^2	42.86	122.3	145.5***	16.12***	43.39***	48.70***
Log Likelihood	-334.5	-303.6	-298.7	-148	-128.5	-122.9

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Across all models in **Table 1**, we see that having a radical Islamist ideology has a positive and statistically significant association with the count of recruitment appeals employed by groups

(**Models 1 - 3**) and the binary indicator of making two or more appeals (**Models 4 - 6**). Said differently, we find consistent support for the argument that radical Islamist groups are more likely to employ diverse recruitment appeals. Secessionist goals have a negative but statistically insignificant association with the breadth of recruitment appeals made by groups. Left-wing ideologies have a positive association with both measures of recruitment diversity, but the association does not consistently achieve traditional levels of statistical significance. Thus, we find consistent evidence in support of Hypothesis 1.

Figure 2 shows the marginal effects of radical Islamist ideologies on the number of recruitment appeals groups employ, with all other covariates held at their means. Non-Islamist groups are predicted to make about 1.59 recruitment appeals, while their radical Islamist counterparts are predicted to employ about 2.41 such appeals. While this might appear to be a relatively small increase, the median number of appeals made by groups is 2, and about 41% of groups make 1 or 0 appeals. Thus, an increase in approximately 1 appeal is non-negligible.

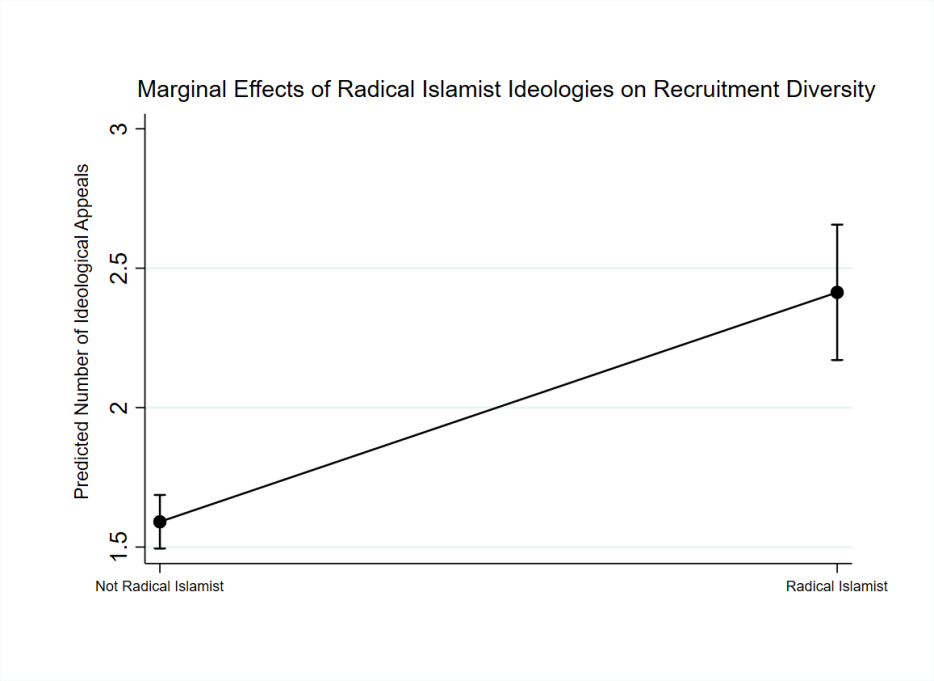

Figure 2: Marginal Effects of Radical Islamist Ideologies on the Number of Recruitment Appeals Employed

Moving to Hypothesis 2a, the results in **Table 2** show the association between radical Islamist ideologies and the binary indicator of whether a group makes recruitment appeals that are generally incompatible among the entire sample. Across all models, we find positive and statistically significant associations between these two variables. Thus, in support of Hypothesis 2a, we find consistent evidence that radical Islamist groups are more likely to tie together incompatible recruitment appeals. As **Figure 3** shows, the effects are also substantively significant. While non-Islamist groups have a 23.62% chance of using incompatible appeals, this number increases to 66.27% for radical Islamist groups. This shows that radical Islamist groups are significantly more likely to combine appeals that most groups do not.

Table 2: Radical Islamist Groups and the Use of Incompatible Recruitment Appeals

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Radical Islamist	1.131**	1.589**	1.849***
	(0.438)	(0.489)	(0.490)
Secessionist Aims		-0.348	-0.617
		(0.381)	(0.428)
Left-Wing		0.763*	0.502
		(0.327)	(0.370)
Multi-Ethnic Membership		-0.102	-0.00327
		(0.415)	(0.411)
Natural Resource Exploitation		-0.198	-0.582+
		(0.276)	(0.319)
External Funding		-0.473	-0.282
		(0.395)	(0.399)
Group Age		0.0270*	0.0310*
		(0.0133)	(0.0139)
Relative Rebel Strength		0.872***	0.877***
		(0.248)	(0.239)
Territorial Control		-0.155	0.173
		(0.372)	(0.374)
Rebel Competition		0.797*	0.688*
		(0.325)	(0.321)
Active Post-2003		0.248	-0.00255
		(0.292)	(0.286)
Democracy Score			3.257**
			(1.049)
per capita GDP (Logged)			-0.909
			(0.614)
Constant	-0.890***	-3.293***	-3.844***
	(0.190)	(0.722)	(0.760)
Observations	232	213	211
Chi^2	6.660**	27.21**	43.37***
Log Likelihood	-144.1	-120.1	-113.4

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

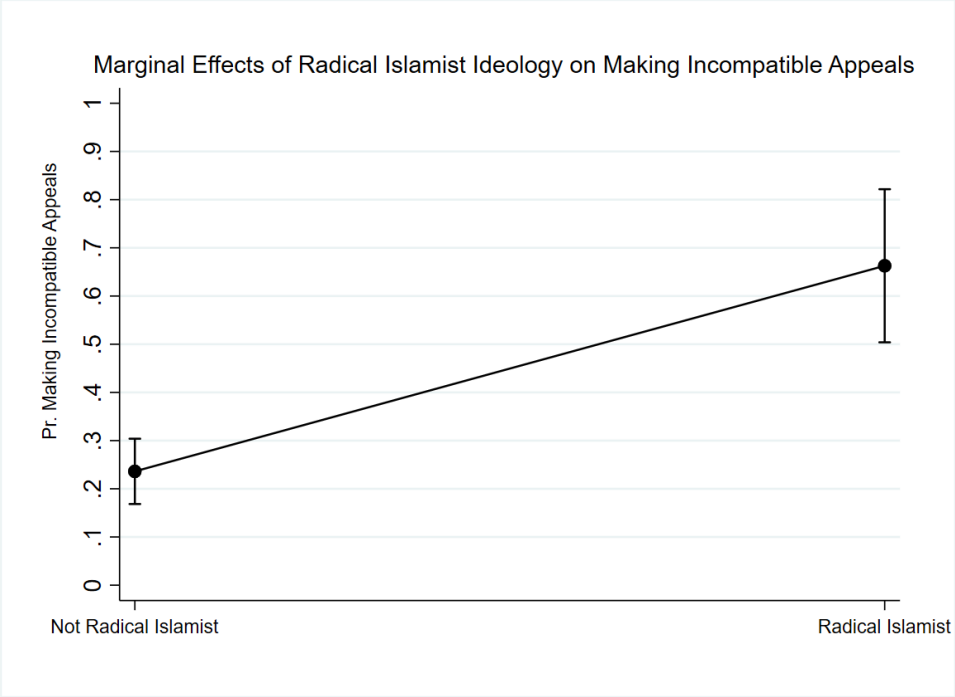

Figure 3: Marginal Effects of Radical Islamist Ideologies on Making Incompatible Recruitment Appeals

Moving to **Table 3** (H2b), we find fairly consistent support for Hypothesis 2b. Indeed, the interaction between radical Islamist ideologies and multi-ethnic memberships is statistically significant in five of the six models ($p < 0.1$) but drops just below in Model 4 ($p \sim .124$). **Figure 4** shows that radical Islamist groups are only more likely to make a greater number of recruitment appeals than their non-Islamist counterparts when the groups have ethnically heterogeneous memberships.

Among ethnically homogenous organizations, non-Islamist groups are predicted to make approximately 1.73 appeals, while radical Islamist organizations are expected to make 2.23 appeals. This difference is *not* statistically significant. However, this difference is statistically significant among ethnically heterogeneous groups. Non-Islamist, multi-ethnic groups are expected to make approximately 1.43 recruitment appeals, while ethnically diverse Islamist groups

are predicted to use approximately 2.56 types of recruitment appeals. While the difference of approximately one appeal between ethnically diverse, (non)Islamist groups might not seem large, the change is greater than one standard deviation and about 41% of the sample makes either one or no recruitment appeals. Thus, radical Islamist groups appear better able to tap into the varied interests of multi-ethnic recruits than do non-Islamist organizations.

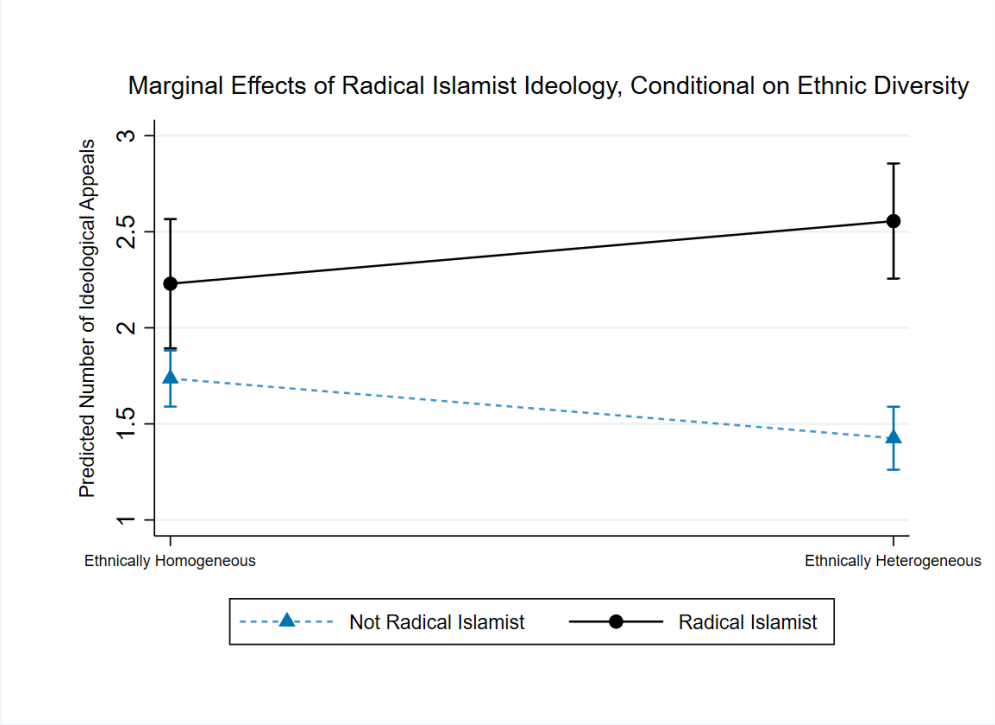

Figure 4: Marginal Effects of Radical Islamist Ideology on the Number of Recruitment Appeals Employed, Conditional on Ethnic Diversity in Rebel Ranks

Table 3: Radical Islamist Groups, Multi-Ethnic Membership, and Diversity of Recruitment Appeals

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
		Count of Appeals			Multiple Appeals	
Radical Islamist	0.258***	0.269**	0.250*	0.985+	0.906	0.802
	(0.0743)	(0.102)	(0.103)	(0.530)	(0.595)	(0.625)
Multi-Ethnic Membership	-0.156	-0.196*	-0.197*	-0.271	-0.434	-0.503
	(0.106)	(0.0972)	(0.0981)	(0.320)	(0.350)	(0.360)
Radical Islamist*Multi-Ethnic Membership	0.252+	0.266+	0.334*	1.465	1.676+	2.050*
	(0.138)	(0.140)	(0.138)	(0.951)	(0.981)	(1.002)
Secessionist Aims		-0.0354	-0.0938		-0.167	-0.529
		(0.0782)	(0.0882)		(0.391)	(0.499)
Left-Wing		0.156*	0.117		0.833*	0.699
		(0.0790)	(0.0860)		(0.408)	(0.449)
Natural Resource Exploitation		0.0179	-0.0596		-0.0181	-0.346
		(0.0626)	(0.0618)		(0.300)	(0.296)
External Funding		0.0261	0.0720		0.270	0.546
		(0.0817)	(0.0820)		(0.329)	(0.345)
Group Age		0.00724*	0.00802**		0.0264+	0.0288+
		(0.00303)	(0.00310)		(0.0156)	(0.0166)
Relative Rebel Strength		0.0766+	0.0867+		0.0504	0.0717
		(0.0465)	(0.0466)		(0.224)	(0.229)
Territorial Control		-0.00741	0.0583		0.0105	0.303
		(0.0807)	(0.0857)		(0.264)	(0.289)
Rebel Competition		-0.00929	-0.0284		-0.187	-0.277
		(0.0693)	(0.0652)		(0.358)	(0.345)
Active Post-2003		0.0377	-0.0212		0.00758	-0.191
		(0.0738)	(0.0733)		(0.320)	(0.319)
Democracy Score			0.630***			3.084***
			(0.164)			(0.849)
per capita GDP (Logged)			-0.0764			-0.233
			(0.0770)			(0.352)
Constant	0.561***	0.293*	0.153	0.219	-0.199	-0.843
	(0.0589)	(0.116)	(0.113)	(0.219)	(0.639)	(0.605)
Observations	227	213	211	227	213	211
Chi^2	50.02***	134.7***	176.2***	17.17***	54.27***	66.60***
Log Likelihood	-326.2	-303	-297.7	-143	-126.8	-120.5

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Finally, **Table 4** displays the results of the tests of Hypothesis 2c. Across all models, the interaction between radical Islamist ideologies and the recruitment of foreign fighters is positive and statistically significant. The marginal effects are presented below (**Figure 5**). Among groups with no foreign fighters, radical Islamist groups are predicted to employ approximately 2.12 recruitment appeals, while non-Islamist movements make an average of 1.72 appeals. However, this difference is not statistically significant. Among groups that recruit foreign fighters, those with radical Islamist ideologies are predicted to make about 2.56 appeals, while those without such ideologies employ only about 1.16 appeals.

As the figure shows, radical Islamist groups only become more likely to use a diversity of recruitment appeals when they also recruit foreign fighters. This lends some evidence to the argument that radical Islamist groups that internationalize their operations will also be more likely to diversify their recruitment appeals. Similar to the discussion for H2b, the difference in being more likely to employ one additional recruitment appeal is not substantively insignificant, given the typical range of appeals used by groups.

Table 4: Radical Islamist Groups, Foreign Fighters, and Diversity of Recruitment Appeals

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Count of Appeals			Multiple Appeals		
Radical Islamist	0.233*	0.214+	0.206	0.777	0.612	0.465
	(0.0969)	(0.117)	(0.131)	(0.523)	(0.558)	(0.618)
Foreign Fighters	-0.324**	-0.399**	-0.394**	-0.764+	-1.064*	-1.065*
	(0.116)	(0.135)	(0.136)	(0.404)	(0.533)	(0.535)
Radical Islamist*Foreign Fighters	0.491**	0.585***	0.585**	3.002*	3.408**	3.707**
	(0.160)	(0.176)	(0.184)	(1.179)	(1.209)	(1.184)
Secessionist Aims		-0.0573	-0.103		-0.301	-0.740
		(0.0911)	(0.0983)		(0.431)	(0.564)
Left-Wing		0.118	0.0887		0.628	0.403
		(0.0761)	(0.0780)		(0.431)	(0.446)
Multi-Ethnic Membership		-0.162+	-0.156+		-0.305	-0.369
		(0.0864)	(0.0838)		(0.384)	(0.378)
Natural Resource Exploitation		0.00292	-0.0451		-0.0323	-0.328
		(0.0694)	(0.0695)		(0.333)	(0.316)
External Funding		0.0619	0.0957		0.409	0.694
		(0.0849)	(0.0899)		(0.404)	(0.427)
Group Age		0.00653*	0.00650*		0.0263	0.0308
		(0.00313)	(0.00320)		(0.0189)	(0.0203)
Relative Rebel Strength		0.0886+	0.0974+		0.0341	0.0494
		(0.0524)	(0.0553)		(0.226)	(0.236)
Territorial Control		0.0690	0.125		0.357	0.654+
		(0.0748)	(0.0831)		(0.283)	(0.340)
Rebel Competition		-0.00538	-0.0138		-0.163	-0.260
		(0.0709)	(0.0684)		(0.363)	(0.366)
Active Post-2003		0.0402	-0.0134		0.0427	-0.195
		(0.0740)	(0.0760)		(0.319)	(0.322)
Democracy Score			0.445*			3.004**
			(0.185)			(0.957)
per capita GDP (Logged)			0.00888			0.0478
			(0.0817)			(0.375)
Constant	0.547***	0.330**	0.204+	0.204	-0.0777	-0.754
	(0.0547)	(0.122)	(0.119)	(0.191)	(0.603)	(0.569)
Observations	210	195	193	210	195	193
Chi^2	65.21***	211.3***	231.2***	16.18**	52.65***	68.65***
Log Likelihood	-297.9	-273.1	-268.6	-127.2	-111.6	-105.9

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

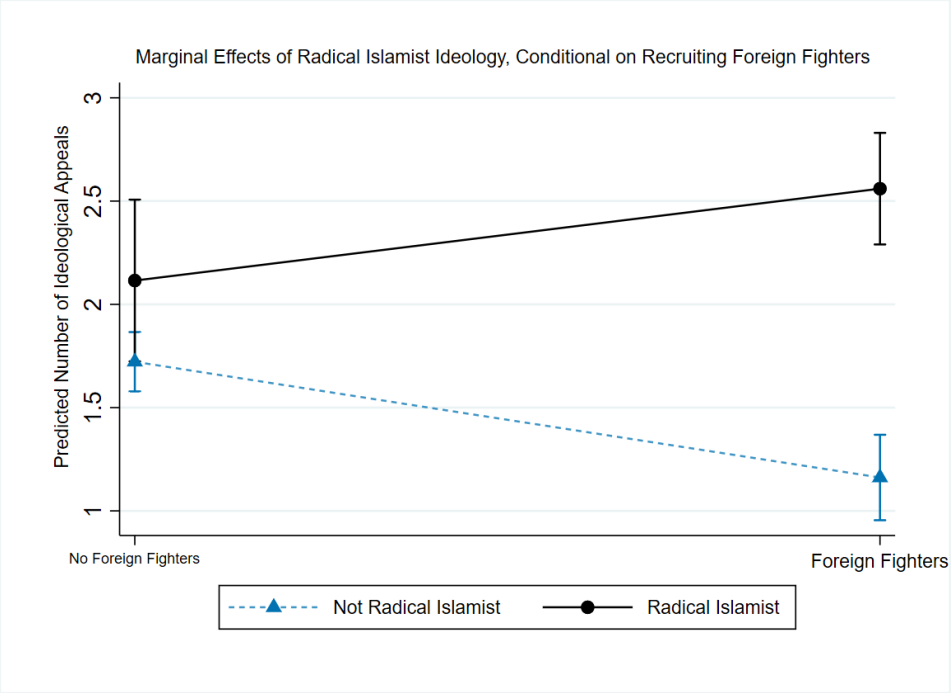

Figure 5: Marginal Effects of Radical Islamist Ideology on the Number of Recruitment Appeals Employed, Conditional on the Recruitment of Foreign Fighters

Robustness Checks

We also conduct a series of robustness checks to assess the strength of the findings for the core hypothesis (H1). The results are available in the online appendix.

Alternative Measures of Recruitment Diversity

One potential issue with the construction of the main outcome variable is that it captures some recruitment appeals that are directly related to the measures of ideology that we use as independent variables (i.e., radical Islamist, left-wing, and nationalist-separatist appeals). However, recruitment diversity could be conceptualized as the number of appeals that groups make that differ from its core ideological focus or its parent ideology (e.g., radical Islamist making non-religious appeals).

Thus, a plausible measurement strategy would be to exclude these core ideologies from the indicators of recruitment diversity.

However, there are two reasons why we do not exclude groups' core ideologies. First, taking this strategy risks disproportionately lowering the recruitment appeal diversity score of groups with clear core ideologies (e.g., religious, left-wing, and ethnonationalist), relative to those that mobilize around only a narrow set of grievances. For instance, the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (NPA) mobilized around a variety of issues, including left-wing ideological appeals and appeals against government corruption (Domingo 2013; Soules 2023). In Sierra Leone, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) (Peters 2006) and the West Side Boys (WSB) (UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia) also mobilized troops around fighting government corruption but failed to tap into other types of recruitment appeals (Soules 2023).[6] However, if we took the approach of excluding parent ideologies, this would make the level of recruitment diversity between the NPA and the AFRC and the WSB look more similar.

This ties into a second potential issue: distinguishing the core ideologies or grievances groups mobilize around from other types of grievance-based appeals they employ. For instance, in FORGE, the aforementioned AFRC and WSB are not coded as having any specific ideologies (Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020). The groups mobilized around grievances related to government corruption (Soules 2023). However, it would be difficult to classify the "parent" ideologies of groups like the AFRC and WSB. Again, this risks coding a group like the NPA (which has a left-wing parent ideology) as being more similar in their ideological diversity to groups like the AFRC and WSB than they might be in practice.

[6] In RAID, appeals against government corruption fall into the "General Anti-Government Appeals" category (Soules 2023).

Another related challenge is when groups have multiple parent ideologies. For instance, the proposed coding scheme would mean counting neither radical Islamist nor ethnonationalist recruitment appeals made by Chechen rebels. However, rebel leaders in this conflict have had to manage tensions between more religiously and more secularly motivated cadres (e.g., Bakke 2014). We believe that accounting for diversity in such parent ideologies is important in understanding rebel groups' willingness and ability to mobilize around diverse grievances.

However, to account for this possibility, we still conduct additional analyses in which we exclude these parent ideologies from our measures of recruitment diversity. To do this, we build on data from the aforementioned WARD and FORGE datasets. Using this information, we then constructed an alternative version of the dependent variable in which recruitment appeals directly related to the founding ideologies of groups were *not* included in the count of the number of recruitment appeals made by groups. See the online appendix for more details.

Using this information, we created two variables. The first is the count of the number of recruitment appeals groups made, excluding their parent ideologies. The second is a binary measure of whether groups made two or more appeals, based on this more restrictive scale. Using these variables, we conducted two sets of analyses. The first used the entire sample of the 232 organizations in RAID. The second excludes the 14 groups that employed only material incentives for recruitment (and thus made no ideological appeals). We conduct this second set of analyses in case groups that do not make any ideological appeals are driving the results.

When analyzing the full sample, we find a positive and statistically significant association between radical Islamist ideologies and both measures of recruitment diversity across all models (**Table A1, Online Appendix**). When restricting the model to only groups that make at least some ideological recruitment appeals, we continue to find a positive and statistically significant

association between radical Islamist ideologies and the binary measure of recruitment diversity in all models. However, while always positive, the association between radical Islamist ideologies and the count measure of recruitment diversity is only statistically significant in the bivariate model (**Table A2, Online Appendix**). Overall, even when using these more restrictive measures, we continue to find fairly consistent support for the idea that radical Islamist rebel groups are more likely to make diverse recruitment appeals.

Ideological Diversity

As noted above, RAID captures only ideological messaging that is used specifically for recruitment (Soules 2023). Thus, ideological messaging that is not directly used for recruitment is not captured in RAID. We focus on recruitment appeals in the main analysis as existing data on recruitment practices tends to cover a broader range of issues than most existing data on rebel group ideologies (Soules 2023). Specifically, while other datasets capture broader ideologies like ethnonationalism, radical jihadism, and leftism, other issues are more unique to RAID, such as mobilizing troops around appeals against government violence, foreign intervention, and external resource exploitation (Soules 2023). Thus, the data in RAID capture a variety of issues that motivate rebels. This is theoretically relevant because we expect that the more grievances groups mobilize around, the greater number of interests will be represented in their ranks, on average. Again, we expect that radical Islamist groups will be better at managing these various interests.

However, it is possible that any ideological messaging, regardless of whether it is directly used for recruitment, could still attract recruits. Thus, in examining only recruitment appeals, we might be overlooking other ideological features of rebel organizations. This is relevant as some types of

rebel organizations (e.g., radical Islamist groups) might be better positioned to diversify their ideological messaging than others.

The data in RAID focus on recruitment appeals, not just the broader ideologies of groups. However, it is possible that radical Islamist groups are more likely to diversify their broader ideologies than other types of rebel organizations. To account for this, we conduct additional analyses using two alternative measures of ideological diversity within rebel organizations. First, FORGE contains multiple, non-mutually exclusive binary indicators of whether groups had specific founding ideologies (i.e., communist, other left-wing, right-wing, nationalist, religious, and/or any other ideology that did not fit these categories). Using these variables, we create a count measure of the number of founding ideologies groups have. Second, the UCDP Conflict Issues Dataset (CID) (Brosché and Sundberg 2024) contains non-mutually exclusive, dichotomous measures of ideologies groups represented (i.e., socialism, decolonization, nationalism or conservatism, Islamist, anti-communist, and/or anti-Zionist). We also use this information to create a count variable of the number of ideologies a group represents.

We reconduct the main analysis, using these indicators for the dependent variable instead. Across a series of Poisson regression analyses, we find consistent, positive, and statistically significant associations between radical Islamist ideologies and both measures of the overall number of ideologies held by groups (**Tables A3 and A4, Online Appendix**).

Excluding Different Groups

Next, we exclude all groups in RAID that are coded as relying exclusively on material incentives to show that radical Islamist groups are more likely to make diverse recruitment appeals,

even when compared only to rebel organizations that make at least some ideological appeals (**Table A5, Online Appendix**). Additionally, to ensure that none of the individual ideological recruitment appeals are driving the results, we rerun the main analysis, each time excluding all groups that make one of the nine non-Islamist recruitment appeals in RAID. Across all models, we continue to find consistent support that radical Islamist rebel organizations make a greater diversity of recruitment appeals (**Tables A6 - A14, Online Appendix**).

Alternative Baseline Categories

We also rerun the main tests, removing the indicators of left-wing ideologies and secessionist goals, so that they become part of the baseline. Unlike the previous set of robustness tests, we do not drop any groups from these analyses, we just exclude these control variables. Across all models, radical Islamist ideologies continue to be a strong predictor of groups making a variety of ideological recruitment appeals (**Tables A15, Online Appendix**). Thus, across a variety of alternative tests, we continue to find robust support for the central hypothesis.

Conclusion

A central question in the study of civil wars is how rebel groups mobilize recruits. However, despite its relevance, there has been little systematic, cross-rebel group analysis of the factors that drive militant organizations to choose some recruitment strategies over others. Specifically, we examine how the ideologies of rebel organizations drive the diversity of the types of recruitment appeals they employ. Using novel data on the recruitment practices of rebel organizations, we find robust evidence that radical Islamist organizations employ a wider range of ideological recruitment

appeals. Subsequent analysis supported the argument that radical Islamist groups are particularly likely to diversify their recruitment appeals when they need to unify cadres with diverse (ethnic) identities and when they internationalize their operations.

However, one important caveat to our findings is that they may not be generalizable to earlier periods, as they do not capture many of the groups that were active during the Cold War. This is relevant as many left-wing groups internationalized their struggles and blended left-wing beliefs with other ideologies (e.g., nationalism) during the Cold War (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). Thus, it is possible that during the Cold War, left-wing groups made more diverse recruitment appeals. Consequently, our findings should be interpreted as applicable to rebel groups that were active after the Cold War.

Future research could also investigate a variety of other factors that shape choices in rebel recruitment tactics. For instance, scholars could examine how the life experiences of individual rebel leaders shape their choices in recruitment strategies. Relatedly, with data on the founding of rebel movements (Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020), researchers could analyze how rebel organizations' prewar foundations shape their mobilization practices. Additionally, it is important to highlight that some Islamist organizations, most notably Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in Syria, have moved away from transnational jihadist ideology in recent years, emphasizing their concern with local politics. Additional scholarship could explore how the localization efforts of Islamist groups affect the diversity of their appeals to recruits. Overall, given the importance of rebel recruitment practices to organizational longevity and success, future scholarship can continue exploring why rebel movements select certain recruitment tactics over others and what factors shape these decisions.

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