

## **Unhappy Campers in a Big Tent: Rebels' Use of Diverse Recruitment Appeals and the Intractability of Civil Conflicts**

### **Abstract:**

Do rebel groups benefit from attempting to appeal to larger segments of society by mobilizing around more diverse grievances? Prior work has examined a variety of dimensions of grievance-based recruitment in civil wars but has tended to overlook the ways in which the breadth of recruitment appeals made by rebels matters. I argue that rebel organizations actually suffer from attempts to appeal to a diversity of grievances. Specifically, when rebel organizations represent a diversity of interests, a variety of bargaining issues are exacerbated, including credible commitment problems, information asymmetries, and issue indivisibilities, rendering conflicts more intractable. Using novel data on the diversity of grievance-based recruitment appeals employed by armed groups, I find support for my argument that conflicts are less likely to resolve when rebels mobilize around a greater number of grievances.

Do rebel organizations benefit from attempting to mobilize constituencies with diverse grievances and ideological beliefs? Related work on rebel ideology and civil war outcomes typically focuses on the effects of either (1) the extent to which militant movements rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment (Weinstein 2005, 2007) or (2) specific types of ideologies, including religious ideologies (Svensson 2007; Keels and Wiegand 2020; Nilsson and Svensson 2021; Basedau, Deitch, and Zellman 2022), ethnonationalism (Goodard 2006; Keels and Wiegand 2020), and Marxism (Balcells and Kalyvas 2022).

However, this research tends to overlook the fact that armed groups often mobilize around a mixture of different grievances (e.g., Piazza 2009; Soules 2023). Indeed, militant movements often adopt multiple ideologies, including militant groups that are both religious and ethnonationalist (e.g., the Ninjas, FIAA, Kamajors, ADF), left-wing and ethnonationalist (e.g., the PKK, JVP), religious and left-wing (e.g., MeK), and a variety of other combinations. Relatedly, groups often combine these broader, established ideologies, with more specific grievances. For instance, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) mobilizes around its broader religious ideologies as well as local political grievances (Armstrong 2011).<sup>1</sup> Such mobilization strategies appear to be common practice. In the sample of rebel organizations he collected recruitment data for, Soules (2023) found that nearly 60% of them employed at least two kinds of ideological and/or grievance-based recruitment appeals. Said differently, some rebel groups mobilize around more diverse, grievance-based platforms than others.

Scholars are somewhat divided on the question of how tapping into multiple grievances affects rebels' ability to mobilize support. Rebel groups often diversify their grievance-based

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about these groups, see the qualitative narratives that accompany RAID, the dataset used for the analysis in this paper (Soules 2023).

appeals in the hopes of increasing their popularity and subsequently gaining more recruits and material support (Gabbay 2008; Tokdemir et al. 2021; Schwab 2023). Other scholars posit, however, that militant movements that organize around a variety of grievances or ideologies often struggle to garner sufficient support and are plagued by internal division between factions with diverse beliefs and interests (Khan and Whiteside 2021).

Given both the frequency at which rebel groups diversify the grievance-based platforms they mobilize around, as well as the scholarly divide over the effectiveness of this diversification, it is important to examine the consequences of rebel organizations employing broad recruitment appeals. In this article, I argue that rebels with diverse platforms will fight more prolonged civil wars because this diversification introduces a variety of problems into the bargaining process. First, rebel movements with diverse, grievance-based platforms have difficulty credibly committing that the multiple interests within their organizations have all been satisfied by negotiations, and that certain, more dissatisfied factions will not splinter off or remobilize to continue fighting. Second, appealing to multiple grievances and/or ideologies can increase popular support sometimes, but alienate potential supporters other times, generating uncertainty about the capabilities and resolve of these “big tent” groups. Third, when more interests are represented within a rebel group, there is a greater probability that at least some issues will be viewed as more indivisible, further undermining efforts to bargain.

Thus, I argue that when rebel groups mobilize around multiple issues, it complicates the bargaining process, resulting in prolonged conflicts, as negotiated settlements become more difficult to reach. Using novel data on the diversity of recruitment appeals employed by 232 rebel groups, active across the world, I find strong support for my central argument. Specifically, the results indicate that conflicts last significantly longer when rebel organizations employ

multiple types of ideological and/or grievance-based recruitment appeals. These findings are robust to a battery of alternative tests, including controlling for different types of rebel ideologies; excluding different types of recruitment strategies; and an alternative measure of recruitment diversification.

This study makes several contributions. First, it provides one of the only quantitative analyses, to the best of my knowledge, on the *consequences* of rebel organizations mobilizing around multiple issues. In a related study, Olzak (2022) finds the terrorist organizations with ambiguous ideologies have a more difficult time garnering support, which diminishes their operational capacity and decreases their lifespans. However, I examine issue diversity, rather than ambiguity. The data I employ also cover a greater diversity of issues, beyond the typical categories covered in such studies, such as religious, left-wing, and nationalist ideologies.

Furthermore, I show that in the context of civil wars, employing multiple, non-material recruitment appeals is associated with longer, not shorter, conflicts. Again, most studies tend to focus on the consequences of either specific types of ideologies (e.g., Svensson 2007; Asal and Rethemeyer 2008; Piazza 2009; Hoover Green 2016, 2018; Polo and Gleditsch 2016; Keels and Wiegand 2020; Polo 2020; Nilsson and Svensson 2021; Sarwari 2021; Basedau, Deitch, and Zellman 2022) or reliance on ideological appeals over material incentives for recruitment (Weinstein 2005, 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006). This study shows that the diversity of rebel organizations' recruitment appeals is also important.

Second, this study contributes to our understanding of how rebel recruitment tactics affect their fate. While existing work expects that rebel groups will suffer from relying more heavily on material incentives than ideological appeals for recruitment (Weinstein 2005, 2007), the results of this paper show that, relative to using exclusively material incentives or mobilizing around

just a single ideological or grievance-based issue, employing multiple recruitment appeals makes it more difficult for rebel organizations to bring their conflicts to a definitive end. Thus, I show that the breadth of recruitment appeals rebels employ is consequential, not just the choice of relying more on material or ideological appeals.

Third, this paper contributes to the rich literature on the causes and consequences of rebel recruitment strategies (Lichbach 1994, 1995; Gates 2002; Weinstein 2005, 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Oyefusi 2008; Eck 2009, 2014; Oppenheim et al. 2015; Mironova, Alhamad, and Whitt 2020; Lewis 2020; Sawyer and Andrews 2020; Hanson 2021; Plapinger 2022). Again, while this important existing work focuses on questions such as differences between material or ideological recruitment appeals; distinctions between different types of ideologies; and the role of persuasion versus coercion and force in recruitment; the role of platform diversification, or the breadth of recruitment appeals, is largely overlooked.

As a roadmap for the rest of the study, I begin by more thoroughly defining the scope conditions of this paper. Next, I provide an overview of the literature on rebel recruitment, ideology, and conflict resolution. I then move to explaining how rebels mobilizing around diverse platforms hampers the bargaining process through exacerbating problems related to credible commitments, information asymmetries about the capabilities and resolve of rebels, and issue indivisibilities. I expect that these issues make it more difficult for rebels to bring their conflicts to a definite end. Following this, I present the research design and findings. I conclude by discussing the implications of the results.

## Scope Conditions

Before delving into the rest of the paper, it is important to clearly establish the scope of my analysis. First, I am interested in the diversity of *grievances* that armed groups organize around. In the context of civil wars, grievances can be thought of as the dissatisfaction caused by the failure of material reality to meet expectations (Buhaug, Cederman, and Gleditsch 2014). Grievances can stem from a variety of issues, ranging from ethnic and/or economic inequalities, to more general dissatisfaction with poor governance or changing social norms.

Ideology is an important and related concept. Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood (2014, p. 215) define ideology as “a more or less systematic set of ideas that includes the identification of a referent group (a class, ethnic, or other social group), an enunciation of the grievances or challenges that the group confronts, the identification of objectives on behalf of that group (political change – or defense against its threat), and a (perhaps vaguely defined) program of action.” Commonly represented rebel ideologies in civil wars include radical jihadism, Marxism, and ethnonationalism. As Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood explain, these ideologies all include the identification of grievances that these systems of beliefs attempt to address.

However, I take a broader view of grievances, analyzing both grievances commonly associated with these major ideologies, as well as various other grievances that rebels mobilize around that are not specifically associated with a well-defined ideology, like Marxism or jihadism. Beyond recruiting with common ideological appeals related to ethnonationalism, religion, or left-wing politics, militant organizations often tap into a diversity of other grievances, including dissatisfaction with local governance and opposition to the exploitation of local resources by external actors, among a variety of other issues (Soules 2023).

I expect the specific grievances rebels organize around to be relevant, not just their broader ideologies, as the more issues they tap into, the more interests they represent. As I detail throughout the paper, I expect that the greater number of grievance-based interests (whether tied to a specific ideology or not) that are represented in rebel groups, the more difficulty these organizations will have in bringing their conflicts to an end. Much of the literature I engage with in this paper focuses on ideological mobilization, which is related to some (but often not all) of the types of grievances militant organizations recruit around. Throughout the paper, in my discussion of rebel organizations diversifying the number of grievances they mobilize around, I use the terms grievances, grievance-based appeals, and platforms interchangeably.

Second, scholars are particularly interested in the intractability of conflicts and the factors that make some conflicts more likely to be brought to a quick end than others. These studies are often concerned with how factors that undermine the bargaining process decrease the probability of conflicts terminating (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017; Wood and Allemang 2022). Thus, the scope of this paper is that I am examining how the diversity of grievances (broadly defined) that rebel organizations mobilize around affect the probability that their conflicts are brought to a definitive end.

### **Grievance-Based Mobilization and Conflict Intractability**

As noted earlier, previous literature tends to focus on both the effects of relative reliance on ideological appeals and material incentives, as well as specific categories of ideologies that rebel organizations frequently mobilize around. Weinstein (2005, 2007) posits that militant movements with access to significant material resources for recruitment face a “resource curse.” Specifically, he argues that material-based recruitment strategies, such as the offer of salaries or promises of

loot, tend to attract a significant number of opportunistic individuals who care more about short-term material benefits than long-term political or social change. Consequently, material recruitment appeals often draw in uncommitted individuals who prioritize individual gains over the good of the group.

In contrast, Weinstein argues that when groups do not have access to such large “material endowments,” they instead rely on “social endowments,” such as shared ideological and identity-based ties, to recruit. These appeals tend to attract highly committed individuals, or the “true believers,” as they must be willing to sacrifice short-term gains for the possibility of long-term benefits. Weinstein expects that recruits motivated by grievances will be more committed, including being better disciplined and less likely to desert or defect than their materially driven counterparts. Weinstein thus posits that groups that rely more on material incentives than ideological or grievance-based appeals for recruitment will encounter a variety of problems because their ranks are full of uncommitted individuals. In line with Weinstein’s argument, other studies find that recruits who are more ideologically motivated are less likely to desert or defect (Oppenheim et al. 2015; Altier et al. 2017).

There is also a significant portion of the literature that examines how specific types of rebel group ideologies influence conflict outcomes. Again, these studies tend to focus on the broader ideologies of groups, rather than the specific grievances (related to the ideology or not) that they mobilize around. One branch of this research focuses on how ideology affects rebel capacity. This includes work on how ideologically driven recruits, particularly religiously motivated rebels, are more devoted to the cause, and thus, will continue fighting, even when their groups are losing (e.g., Weinstein 2005, 2007; Basedau, Deitch, and Zellman 2022). Relatedly, there is also scholarship examining how ideological extremism alienates potential supporters and



increases the probability of rebel infighting, which decreases the probability that such rebels can bring about swift victory (Hafez 2018).

Another branch of this scholarship examines how ideology introduces problems into the bargaining process, which then contributes to the intractability of conflicts. This includes work on how ideology exacerbates problems related to issue indivisibilities (Svensson 2007; Keels and Wiegand 2020); credible commitments (Keels and Wiegand 2020), and information uncertainty about the capabilities and resolve of ideologically driven militant organizations (Nilsson and Svensson 2021).

### **Ideological Diversity and Bargaining Problems**

Three interrelated issues create difficulties in settling conflicts: private information about capabilities and resolve, and incentives to misrepresent this information; credible commitment problems; and issue indivisibilities (Fearon 1995). This includes work on how bargaining problems are exacerbated by various dynamics including rebels' choices in violent tactics (Wood and Katham 2014; Findley and Young 2015; Fortna 2015), incentives of rebel and government leaders (Prorok 2016, 2018; Ryckman and Braithwaite 2020), external support for rebels (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017), and access to natural resources (e.g., Fearon 2004; Hegre 2004; Hinkkainen Elliott and Kreutz 2019), among other factors.

These issues have been applied to explain why certain types of ideologies create barriers to the settlement of civil wars (e.g., Svensson 2007; Keels and Wiegand 2020; Nilsson and Svensson 2021; Basedau, Deitch, and Zellman 2022). However, it is also important to consider

these arguments in the context of the diversity of grievances that rebel organizations mobilize around.

### ***Credible Commitment Problems***

Warring parties are less likely to bring the fighting to an end if they cannot trust each other to uphold potential peace settlements (Fearon 1995; Walter 1997). Thus, when actors in a conflict have an incentive to renege, they have particularly difficulty in getting their adversaries to trust them and to credibly commit that they will not violate the terms of any settlement (Fearon 1995). I expect that ideological diversity exacerbates credible commitment problems for rebel groups because (1) rebel leaders want to avoid alienating ideologically committed recruits through compromising with governments and, relatedly, (2) the negotiating process can satisfy certain ideological factions more than others, creating the risk that the more dissatisfied factions splinter off or remobilize in the future.

In general, ideologically driven groups often do not have the incentive to negotiate or compromise. Keels and Wiegand (2020) posit that when there are stark ideological divides between rebel groups and governments, rebel leaders risk alienating supporters by making concessions, as supporters might be dissatisfied about their ideological positions being compromised on. Relatedly, ideologically driven recruits are more likely to defect or demobilize when their groups shift ideological positions (Oppenheim et al. 2015).

Said differently, ideologically driven recruits who are committed to the cause could become quite alienated and aggrieved if their groups pursue compromises that they view as giving up too much ground. As a result, groups with ideologically committed recruits can have difficulty

negotiating, as they risk alienating their cadres by compromising. Given this need to maintain a certain level of ideological purity, rebel organizations that employ ideological-based recruitment strategies can have difficulty credibly committing to negotiations because they often have such strong incentive to not compromise (Keels and Wiegand 2020).

I posit that this problem is particularly poignant for groups that mobilize around multiple grievance-based issues. Given that there are a larger number of issues that these types of rebel groups can negotiate over, there are more contingents within a group that have the potential to feel alienated by the bargaining process. Said differently, when there are more issues to bargain over, there is greater opportunity for any one segment of an ideologically diverse rebel organization to become dissatisfied, as rebel leadership might find it difficult to satisfy all the interests within their organizations.

Thus, the obstacle rebel leaders face of not alienating their supporters through compromising on ideology is exacerbated when multiple ideologies are represented in their ranks. Again, the desire to remain ideologically pure makes it difficult for rebel groups to credibly commit to abiding to peace settlements (Keels and Wiegand 2020), so representing a diversity of interest might make it even more difficult for groups to credibly commitment to uphold the peace.

A second and related issue is that rebel groups will have a difficult time credibly committing that all factions of their organization will be sufficiently satisfied with the terms of a negotiated settlement. In negotiating with governments, rebels with diverse platforms might have an easier time garnering concessions in some issue areas over others, particularly depending on how extreme certain ideological positions are perceived to be by the government (e.g., Jones and Libicki 2008). Said differently, in the bargaining process, rebel groups that mobilize around multiple issues might receive more concessions based on certain demands than others. Relatedly,

rebel leaders might feel pressured to compromise on certain issues to receive greater concessions in other areas.

These processes could alienate some cadres if they perceive the rebel leadership to be prioritizing certain grievance-based goals over others. There is then the risk that rebel factions that do not feel as well represented in the bargaining process splinter off or remobilize later to try to achieve their goals. Indeed, rebel group splintering often occurs during peace processes (Duursma and Fliervoet 2021). Ideologically committed recruits are also more likely to remobilize when core issues in conflicts have not been resolved (Mironova, Alhamad, and Whitt 2020). Thus, rebel leadership will have a difficult time credibly committing that less satisfied factions of their group will abide by a peace agreement and not splinter off or remobilize in the future to fight for the interests of their factions. Even if these dissatisfied factions do not splinter off or remobilize in certain contexts, the looming threat that they will continue fighting can be enough to deter governments from bargaining with such rebels.

### ***Private Information and Incentives to Misrepresent***

Fearon (1995) also explains that disagreements actors have over each other's military capabilities and resolve can make peaceful settlements less likely to occur. I address each of these issues in turn.

### ***Capabilities***

First, the strength of an actor, relative to their opponent, affects their willingness to fight or reach a negotiated settlement, as rational actors will avoid fighting in conflicts that they are

unlikely to win. However, information about an actor's military capabilities is private and often largely unavailable to their opponents. Actors have the incentive to misrepresent this information about themselves to both avoid aggression from other actors and to make them more likely to agree to a peace settlement (Fearon 1995).

This logic has also been applied to understanding how rebel ideology affects the intractability of certain types of civil wars. Nilsson and Svensson (2021) argue that Islamist insurgencies are particularly intractable due to the specter of support from transnational jihadist networks. Nilsson and Svensson note that on the one hand, governments fear that the Islamist insurgents they are fighting could become more powerful in the future if they receive more external support, such as money or foreign fighters. However, on the other hand, they also explain that the radical nature of these ideologies can alienate a significant portion of the population, making it difficult for them to gain support, rendering such groups weak. Thus, from the perspective of the governments, there is a great amount of uncertainty surrounding whether Islamist groups will grow stronger or weaker over time. This ambiguity surrounding the capabilities of Islamist insurgencies increases uncertainty during bargaining, making it more difficult to bring these conflicts to a definitive end (Nilsson and Svensson 2021).

Similarly, I expect that there is often uncertainty surrounding the capabilities of groups with diverse platforms, complicating the bargaining processes in which they are involved. Diverse recruitment appeals could help strengthen rebel groups by appealing to a larger percentage of the population and thereby attracting more recruits and material support. Such diversification can help rebel organizations gain support by standing out from their competitors and providing alternative options to aggrieved civilians who did not previously feel well-represented by existing armed movements (Tokdemir et al. 2021; Schwab 2023). Indeed, in mobilizing around

multiple types of grievance-based appeals, rebels can appeal to the “median voter,” enabling them to capture the support of diverse segments of the population (Gabbay 2008).

There is evidence of a variety of rebel organizations diversifying their ideological appeals to attract more recruits, including the Islamic Army in Iraq (Gabbay 2008), the EPL in Colombia (Martin 2011), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Zenn 2012), and the PKK in Turkey (Özcan 2007). Thus, platform diversification can help strengthen rebel organizations, as they appeal to larger segments of the population, which helps bring in more recruits and material support.

However, there can be adverse effects of ideological diversification as well. Specifically, mobilizing around a diversity of ideological issues might both deter support as well as undermine internal cohesion. Rebels who are perceived to have diffuse and fractured ideologies can have a difficult time gaining and consolidating power (Khan and Whiteside 2021). Relatedly, showing commitment to a specific ideological cause is important for rebels to gain legitimacy (Cronin-Furman and Arulthas 2021), and thus, if militant groups mobilize around a variety of issues, they might appear uncommitted to any single cause. Appearing uncommitted to any specific cause can thus undermine the ability of groups to garner support. Ideologically diverse militant organizations also often suffer from greater internal cohesion than groups that stick firmly to a single ideology (Khan and Whiteside 2021).

The Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), for instance, was able to gain more support and consolidate power because its more ideologically diverse rivals suffered from internal divisions, while ISI was able to operate more cohesively (Khan and Whiteside 2021). These issues suggest that ideological diversity might sometimes undermine rebel group capacity.

Thus, it can often be unclear how much support an ideologically diverse rebel group has. In one regard, such groups might become strong through appealing to the “median voter,” and thus, enjoy wide support. In another regard, ideological diversification might make rebels appear non-committal, harming their reputations and subsequent support, as well as undermining their internal cohesion. Ideological diversification can therefore contribute to uncertainty about rebels’ capabilities, undermining the bargaining process, and decreasing the probability that conflicts will come to a definitive end.

A related possibility exists that platform diversification enhances rebels’ recruitment, allowing them to draw in more members and survive longer. Said differently, rather than making conflicts more intractable because of bargaining issues, platform diversification could help increase groups’ power to resist defeat by the government. For instance, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) have been able to survive over 20 years, in part, because its appeals to Islamist, ethnonationalist, and secessionist goals helps it to adopt to new challenges and continue to recruit new members (Nantulya 2019).

However, while the group’s ideological diversity might help it gain recruits, it has been involved in an intractable conflict. Multiple attempts between the ADF and Ugandan government to negotiate have failed (International Crisis Group 2012). The extent of the influence of its nationalist and Islamist ideologies is often unclear (Beevor 2019). O’Farrell (2021) argues that the group’s mixture of local political issues with its connection to the Islamic State have complicated efforts for the government to deal with the group and that negotiations are now unlikely. Thus, as the ADF highlights, even if recruitment diversification helps bring in more recruits, enhancing groups’ survival, such diversity can still undermine the possibility that a conflict is settled.

## *Resolve*

Warring sides also have the incentive to strategically misrepresent their resolve, or willingness to continue fighting, to try to gain better bargaining positions. Thus, there is often great uncertainty around the resolve of actors, making it difficult to reach a settlement (Fearon 1995). I expect that platform diversification generates uncertainty surrounding the resolve of rebel organizations. On one hand, ideology and grievances can motivate rebels to continue fighting, even when conflicts become more intense (Basedau, Deitch, and Zellman 2022). On the other hand, insincere rebel leaders sometimes pander to aggrieved civilians to mobilize support. However, civilians often turn against groups when they realize these appeals are insincere (Thaler 2022). Rebels might particularly be perceived to be pandering if they mobilize around diverse issues, rather than devoting themselves to a single cause.

Thus, governments might have a difficult time ascertaining whether rebel organizations are sincerely devoted to the causes they are publicly mobilizing around, or whether they are simply pandering. This can lead governments to be less willing to bargain with rebels, whose intentions they are unsure of, contributing to these conflicts becoming more intractable.

## ***Issue Indivisibilities***

Third and finally, bargaining is also less likely to result in a settlement when the issues at hand are perceived to be indivisible, meaning parties are unwilling to negotiate as they perceive compromise to diminish the value of the disputed goods too drastically (Fearon 1995). The unwillingness of parties to compromise on certain issues prolongs conflicts (Goddard 2006). In the context of civil wars, Keels and Wiegand (2020) argue that indivisibility is on a spectrum, as actors are more willing to compromise on some issues than others.



Building off work by Hassner (2003), Svensson (2007) identifies two different dimensions of indivisibility that help explain the intractability of religious conflicts. First, when the division of an issue or resource would result in the perception that its subjective value had been significantly diminished, compromise will be less likely. For instance, groups that want to implement a religious government, or control a territory with religious significance, will perceive the sharing of these resources with secular actors to be diluting their religious value (Svensson 2007). Second, issue indivisibility is also present when there is a perception that there is no other concession that could be given that is of equal or greater value to the demand being made (Svensson 2007). Thus, when an involved party will not accept a division of a certain resource, or a substitute for it, negotiated settlements are more difficult to achieve.

Platform diversification can exacerbate these problems by providing more issues that must be negotiated over, increasing the opportunity for there to be an issue that rebels and/or the government are unwilling to compromise on. Relatedly, many groups mobilize around combinations of both more radical, and more moderate, ideologies (e.g., Piazza 2009). Groups that mobilize around both moderate and radical appeals might have difficulty achieving even their more moderate goals if the indivisibilities associated with their radical demands undermine the entire negotiation process. Overall, ideological diversification can increase the probability that issue indivisibilities interfere with the bargaining process, and if negotiations collapse due to indivisibilities, this can undermine the ability of groups to achieve both their more radical and more moderate ideological and/or grievance-based goals.

## **Conflict Intractability**

Credible commitment problems; disagreements over actors' relative capacity and resolve, and incentives to misrepresent this information; and issue indivisibilities, all introduce problems into the bargaining process, decreasing the probability that such conflicts will be settled. Platform diversification exacerbates credible commitment problems because compromising with governments can alienate ideologically devoted recruits, and thus, rebel leaders have difficulty credibly signaling that they are willing to negotiate. Relatedly, when diverse interests are represented within rebel ranks, groups have a difficult time credibly committing that factions of their movements that feel dissatisfied with the bargaining process will not splinter off and continuing fight or remobilize in the future.

Platform diversification also generates greater uncertainty around the capabilities and resolve of actors. While mobilizing around a variety of causes could help groups garner support from a larger portion of the public, such strategy could also create the perception that rebels are noncommittal as well as undermine internal cohesion. This generates uncertainty about their strength and resolve to continue fighting.

Finally, such diversity exacerbates the problem of issue indivisibilities by increasing the number of issues that must be negotiated over as well as undermining rebels' overall efforts to negotiate and earn concessions. Thus, platform diversification results in civil conflicts becoming more intractable by introducing a variety of problems into the bargaining process. This leads to the core hypothesis of this paper that:

*H1: Civil wars will last longer when rebel groups employ more types of grievance-based recruitment appeals.*

## Research Design

To test the central hypothesis, data are needed that capture the diversity of grievance-based appeals that rebel groups mobilize around. In response, I employ data from the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID), which contains a variety of indicators that capture the recruitment practices of militant organizations (Soules 2023). RAID contains information on a large diversity of grievance-based appeals that rebel organizations mobilize recruits around, and thus, provides sufficient opportunity to capture extensive diversity of interests and beliefs within armed movements.

RAID contains a sample of 232 rebel movements, taken from the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013), that operated across the world, at least at some point between 1989 and 2011. However, the data are neither left nor right-censored, and thus, a group can enter RAID before this time period, or exit after, so long as it was active, at some point, during the aforementioned period.

### *Explanatory Variable*

Prior work tends to focus either on specific ideologies of militant organizations (e.g., Blomberg, Gaibullov, Sandler 2011; Nilsson and Svensson 2021; Basedau, Deitch, and Zellman 2022), or the level of ideological polarization between rebels and governments (Keels and Wiegand 2020). While valuable, these studies do not directly capture the effects of groups mobilizing around multiple grievance-based issues, even though many rebel organizations often do employ a diversity of grievance-based appeals (Soules 2023).

RAID contains data not only on rebels' reliance on ideological and grievance-based appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, but the specific types of grievance-based

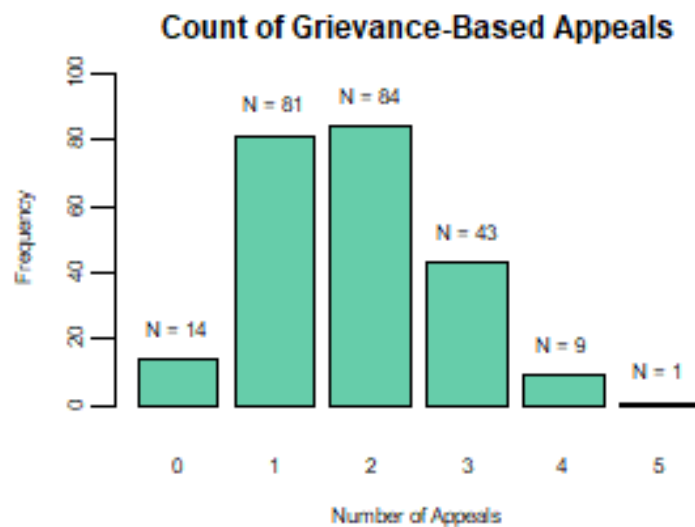
recruitment appeals they employ as well. Specifically, RAID includes 10 separate binary indicators of whether groups do, or do not, make specific types of appeals. These appeals include appeals to (1) women's rights; (2) against military intervention or Western dominance and imperialism; (3) protection against external exploitation of resources; (4) resisting violent government repression; (5) left-wing ideologies; (6) radical Islamist ideologies; (7) other religious ideologies; (8) ethnonationalist or regionalist appeals; (9) general grievances against the government; and (10) a miscellaneous or "other" category (Soules 2023).

These categories are based on the most predominant types of ideological recruitment appeals identified by Soules (2023), when generating data based on detailed, qualitative narratives that he and research assistants constructed on the recruitment practices of rebel organizations. While some of these ideological or grievance-based appeals are captured in other datasets, such as measures of left-wing, religious, and ethnonationalist ideologies (e.g., Wood and Thomas 2017; Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020; Keels and Wiegand 2020; Basedau, Deitch, and Zellman 2022), other types of appeals, including resistance to violent government repression and opposition to the external exploitation of resources, are typically not captured by other datasets (Soules 2023). Thus, I use RAID instead of other datasets primarily because it captures a greater diversity of grievances and interests that rebels mobilize around. Due to the difficulties associated with the data collection process, the recruitment variables in RAID are time invariant.

Using these ten binary indicators, I create two different variables to use for the main analysis. The first is a count of the number of ideological appeals, based on these ten categories, that rebel groups made. This variable ranges from 0 (for the 14 groups in RAID that relied exclusively on material recruitment incentives and employed no grievance-based appeals) to 5. Among the cross-section of the 232 groups in RAID, the median number of appeals employed was 2. As

discussed later, I also conduct robustness checks in which I exclude groups that rely entirely on material incentives for recruitment to ensure that they are not driving results. Even when excluding these groups, I continue to find strong support for the core hypothesis.

**Figure 1** below displays the distribution of this variable. To ensure that the irregular distribution of this measure does not drive the results, I also create a binary indicator of whether a group makes two or more grievance-based appeals. Approximately 59% of groups in RAID (137 organizations) mobilized around two or more grievance-based appeals.



**Figure 1: Distribution of the Count of Grievance-Based Recruitment Appeals**

Some of these grievance-based appeals will likely be more complimentary or compatible with some appeals than others. The more incompatible the appeals that rebel groups rely on are, the more they will likely struggle to bring their conflicts to a definitive end. For instance, groups with more divergent internal interests will likely have a particularly difficult time credibly

committing that all their factions will be satisfied enough with negotiations to neither splinter off or remobilize in the future to continue fighting.

The current structure of the data makes it difficult to determine which combinations of recruitment appeals are more incompatible than others. However, employing this measure provides a conservative test of the hypothesis by potentially showing that diversifying recruitment appeals, no matter their potential compatibility, presents rebel organizations with difficulties in bringing their conflicts to a definitive end, when compared to mobilizing around only one or no grievance-based appeals. More broadly, the measures constructed from RAID still capture the diversity of interests and beliefs within militant organizations in a way that previous datasets do not.

### *Outcome Variable*

The central hypothesis is concerned with how long rebel organizations continue fighting with governments. To analyze the length of conflicts, I use data from the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset (version 3-2021), which contains information on how and when conflicts end, and is updated from the original version developed by Kreutz (2010). As noted earlier, the main independent variables are time invariant. Thus, following the precedent of Wood and Allemang (2022), who also employ a time invariant explanatory variable, I use a dyad-episode unit of analysis. Again, the data are neither left nor right censored. Thus, a group can enter the analysis before 1989 and exit after 2011.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> However, to be included in the analysis, the dyad had to begin by at least 2011 (e.g., the Islamic State-Iraq dyad is included but NOT the Islamic State-Cameroon dyad).

I employ semiparametric Cox Proportional Hazard models to assess how the diversity of rebel groups' grievance-based appeals affects the duration of a conflict, in years, from the date of the first battle-related death to when it is coded in the Conflict Termination Dataset as becoming inactive or terminating. I use semiparametric Cox models because they are flexible and do not assume an underlying functional form (Cox 1972). Additionally, these models are commonly used to study the duration of civil conflicts (e.g., Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017; Conrad et al. 2019; Wood and Allemang 2022).

While civil conflicts end in a variety of manners, some scholars have examined overall duration instead. This is due to a variety of reasons, including that the factors that drive whether a conflict ends often differ from those that affect how they end; negotiations and concessions can occur without formal peace agreements; and relatedly, formalized peace agreements might occur long after the fighting actually ends. Similar to these prior studies, I am primarily interested in the overall duration of conflicts, as the length of conflicts is indicative of the persistent failure of bargaining (e.g., Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017; Wood and Allemang 2022).

### *Controls Variables*

I hold constant a variety of potentially confounding variables. First, groups' support bases and goals affect their recruitment tactics and long-term success. Militant organizations' recruitment strategies affect their degree of social heterogeneity (Weinstein 2007) and rebels with linkages to politically excluded ethnic groups survive longer (Wucherpfennig et al. 2012). Thus, I include a binary indicator of whether an organization has a *multi-ethnic membership*. This variable is taken from RAID. Additionally, I control for whether a group has *secessionist aims*, as

such goals affect rebel recruitment strategies (Soules 2022) and secessionist conflicts tend to be more difficult to resolve (Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000).

I also include a variety of indicators of rebel group capacity. Conflicts involving stronger rebels tend to end more quickly as more capable rebels can bring conflicts to an end sooner (Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan 2009) and rebels' resources affect their recruitment strategies (Weinstein 2005, 2007). Thus, I control for the ordinal measure of *rebel group strength, relative to the government*, from the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009). I also control for a dichotomous indicator of whether an organization received *funding from natural resources* at any point during its lifespan with data from the Rebel Contraband Dataset (Walsh et al. 2018). Natural resource wealth affects recruitment strategies (Weinstein 2005) and conflict termination (e.g., Conrad et al. 2019).

Furthermore, with data from the NSA dataset, I employ a binary indicator of whether a group *controls territory* because such control affects rebel recruitment strategies (de la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca 2012) and rebel group outcomes (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009). Additionally, with information from the NSA dataset, I include two binary indicators, one measuring external support for rebels, and the other capturing external support for the governments they are fighting. Material resources provided to rebel groups by foreign governments influence their recruitment tactics (Weinstein 2005). Certain types of external support also affect conflict outcomes (Balch-Lindsay, Enterline, and Joyce 2008). Competition from other armed non-state actors affects how rebel movements tailor their ideological platforms (e.g., Tokdemir et al. 2021; Schwab 2023) and their longevity (e.g., Phillips 2014). Thus, I include a binary indicator of whether any other rebel groups are active in the country the year a dyad-episode begins.



Additionally, I control for country-level factors as well. Specifically, I use the Polity2 measure of *regime type* from the Polity V dataset (Marshall and Gurr 2020). I control for regime type because it affects conflict resolution (Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan 2009) and because rebel groups in democracies are more concerned about their reputations (Stanton 2013), which could shape the recruitment appeals they employ. Using data from the World Bank (2021), I also control for the *logged per capita GDP* of the government that the group is fighting. I do this because conflicts last longer in lower income countries (Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan 2009) and state capacity and economic conditions could affect how rebels recruit. As a robustness check, I also conduct additional tests where I control for different rebel ideologies to ensure that specific ideologies are not driving the findings. *The results remain consistent even when controlling for whether groups have radical Islamist or left-wing ideologies.*

## **Results**

The results are presented in **Table 1**. The standard errors are clustered on the rebel group. I include multiple models, gradually adding control variables to each, to address the concern that missing data could drive the results, particularly given the sample size. The hazard ratios are reported for every variable. Thus, values below one indicate a decreased probability a conflict ends and values above one indicate an increased probability that the conflict is terminated.

**Table 1: Diversity in Grievance-Based Recruitment Appeals and Conflict Termination**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Count of Appeals	0.864*** (0.0351)	0.874*** (0.0373)	0.855*** (0.0396)			
Multiple Appeals (Binary)				0.721*** (0.0623)	0.711*** (0.0620)	0.662*** (0.0590)
Multi-Ethnic Rebels		0.995 (0.108)	1.035 (0.123)		0.988 (0.103)	1.013 (0.114)
Secessionist Aims		0.990 (0.116)	0.988 (0.126)		0.990 (0.114)	0.984 (0.118)
Relative Rebel Strength		0.970 (0.0642)	1.010 (0.0809)		0.957 (0.0640)	1.009 (0.0838)
Lootable Resources		0.668*** (0.0703)	0.689*** (0.0814)		0.653*** (0.0662)	0.680*** (0.0776)
Territorial Control		0.918 (0.0943)	1.001 (0.106)		0.916 (0.0956)	0.984 (0.107)
Externally Supported Rebels		0.848* (0.0794)	0.803** (0.0806)		0.871 (0.0833)	0.829* (0.0839)
Externally Supported State		1.010 (0.0925)	0.994 (0.0998)		0.989 (0.0865)	0.968 (0.0947)
Any Competition		0.922 (0.0905)	0.918 (0.0984)		0.931 (0.0911)	0.925 (0.0977)
Polity2			1.000 (0.00833)			1.002 (0.00830)
per capita GDP (Logged)			1.083** (0.0397)			1.078** (0.0365)
Observations	424	382	314	424	382	314

Robust standard errors in parentheses

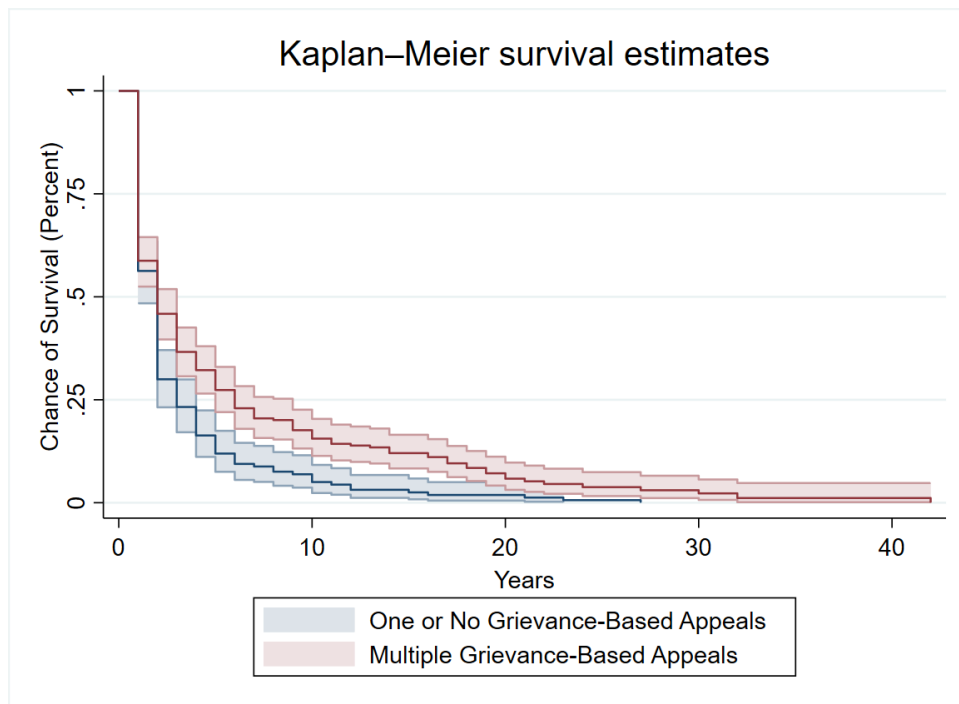
Hazard ratios reported

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Across all models, I find strong support for the central hypothesis that conflicts will be less likely to terminate when rebel organizations mobilize around multiple grievance-based issues. Both the number of grievance-based appeals rebels make, as well the binary indicator of whether

they make two or more appeals, have a strong association with the probability they continue fighting.

In the models with the full set of control variables, the count of the number of grievance-based appeals is associated with an approximately 14.5% chance that a rebel group survives in a given period, while the binary indicator is associated with an almost 34% chance of the group continuing to fight. **Figure 2** displays the Kaplan-Meier survival estimates with 95% confidence intervals.



**Figure 2: Kaplan-Meier survival estimates for the use of multiple grievance-based appeals**

Thus, these results provide strong evidence for the argument that mobilizing recruits around a variety of issues generates barriers to resolving civil conflicts. This suggests that rebels' efforts to appeal to broad segments of society, or the "median rebel" (Gabbay 2008), might sometimes backfire. These findings also provide nuance to our understanding of the benefits that

ideological-based recruitment strategies are alleged to provide to militant movements (e.g., Weinstein 2005, 2007).

### **Robustness Checks**

I conduct a battery of robustness checks to assess the strength of the findings. The results are available in the appendix. First, it is possible that groups in the dataset that make no grievance-based appeals (i.e., they rely entirely on material incentives) are driving the results, as rebels that primarily pursue material wealth often fear losing access to such wealth as part of peace negotiations, leading conflicts over natural resources to last longer (e.g., Fearon 2004).

To address this issue, I rerun the main analysis, excluding all groups that are coded in RAID as relying exclusively on material incentives for recruitment (Soules 2023). Across all models, I continue to find strong support for the central hypothesis. Thus, even among a sample of only groups that make at least some grievance-based appeals, employing a larger number of appeals is still associated with a lower probability of conflict termination.

Relatedly, the extent to which groups recruit with ideological or grievance-based appeals or material incentives could be driving the results. Specifically, rebel groups that rely more on ideological appeals than material incentives for recruitment are expected to be more resilient (Weinstein 2005, 2007). They are also likely in a better position to make a wider diversity of ideological appeals as well. Said differently, the degree to which armed groups rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, might make conflicts more intractable, rather than the diversity of ideological or grievance-based appeals themselves.

In response, I use the aforementioned variable from RAID, which is a five-point ordinal indicator measuring the extent to which rebel groups rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment. Higher values of this variable indicate greater reliance on ideological or grievance-based appeals, lower levels indicate greater reliance on material incentives, while middling levels capture more mixed approaches (Soules 2023).

I first rerun the main models, substituting this variable for the measures of ideological diversity. Across all models, I do not find a statistically significant association between groups' relative reliance on ideological or material appeals and their longevity. Next, I reconduct the original analysis, and include measures of diversity in grievances and reliance on ideological appeals in the same model. Even when holding constant rebel organizations' relative reliance on grievance-based appeals, I continue to find strong support for the argument that a greater number of appeals contributes to conflicts becoming more intractable.

Another potential issue is that specific ideologies or grievances, rather than the number of grievances organized around, cause some conflicts to be more intractable than others. For instance, Nilsson and Svensson (2021) find that radical Islamist and left-wing rebel groups tend to last longer. Thus, I run additional models in which I control for two separate binary indicators of whether groups have a radical Islamist or left-wing ideology, with combined data from the Women in Armed Rebellion Dataset (WARD) (Wood and Thomas 2017) and the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (FORGE) dataset (Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020). The main results hold across all models.

Relatedly, to ensure that individual types of grievance-based appeals are not driving the results, I rerun all the main models again, each time excluding groups that make each of the ten types of ideological appeals individually across the different sets of tests (e.g., a set of tests

excluding groups that make radical Islamist appeals; a set of tests excluding groups that make appeals against government violence; etc.).

For nine of the ten types of appeals, the main independent variable has a statistically significant association with increased survival of rebel organizations, *across all models*, when these types of appeals are dropped from the analysis. The only exception is that when groups that make anti-foreign intervention appeals are excluded from the analysis, the main independent variable remains statistically significant in four of the six models, dropping just below traditional levels of statistical significance in two models ( $\sim p = .111$  and  $\sim p = .108$ , respectively).

Next, to ensure that idiosyncrasies of RAID are not driving the results, I construct an alternative measure of ideological diversity. Specifically, using data from the aforementioned FORGE, which contains several non-mutually exclusive, binary indicators of whether rebel groups were founded on specific ideologies (e.g., left-wing, religious, nationalist, etc.), I create a three-point ordinal variable measuring whether the group was founded around no, one, or two or more ideologies specified in FORGE. Across all models, having a larger number of ideologies has a statistically significant association with a lower probability of conflicts being terminated.

Another benefit of using data from FORGE is that they can help address concerns related to reverse causality. Specifically, it is possible that when groups survive longer, they both have more opportunity to make new types of ideological recruitment appeals and that they make new appeals out of desperation to continue surviving. However, the data in FORGE capture the initial ideologies of rebel organizations, and thus, are not reflective of groups adopting these positions later in their lifespans. The findings from these supplemental tests thus suggest that conflicts are more intractable when rebels mobilize around multiple ideologies from the outset.

Finally, it is possible that diverse ideological appeals benefit rebel organizations in the long-run by drawing in more recruits, thereby increasing their strength and subsequent bargaining power. To account for this possibility, I once again use data from the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset (version 3-2021) (Kreutz 2010). Following the precedent of prior studies (e.g., Fortna 2015), I employ competing risk analysis to assess how diversity in grievance-based appeals affect the probability that rebel groups experience the following outcomes: peace settlement, rebel victory, government victory, or the rebel group “fizzling out” through low levels of activity. Recruitment diversity does not have a statistically significant association with the probability of peace agreements, rebel victory, or government victory occurring. There is limited evidence that such recruitment strategies are associated with a decreased chance that groups ends by “fizzling out,” but these results are inconsistent. Thus, while recruiting around a diversity of issues contributes to the intractability of conflicts, such strategies do not help bring conflicts to a definitive end, including in ways that benefit rebel organizations.

Thus, across a variety of alternative tests, I continue to find support for the central hypothesis that conflicts become more intractable when rebel organizations mobilize around a diversity of types of grievance-based appeals.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Rebel groups often attempt to mobilize recruits around a variety of grievances. In many cases, militant leaders likely hope that they will appeal to broad segments of the population and draw in a significant number of recruits and material resources if they do so. However, I posit that rebel organizations that mobilize around multiple grievances have more difficulty bringing their conflicts to definitive ends.

This is because rebel movements that organize around diverse grievances represent a greater number of interests, which, in turn, introduces a variety of problems into the bargaining process. Specifically, diverse interests within rebel organizations can create credible commitment problems as there will be lower confidence that all factions of rebel movements are satisfied enough by negotiations to not take up arms again; generate uncertainty about the level of support and subsequent capabilities and resolve of these organizations; and exacerbate issue indivisibilities. Using novel data on the diversity of recruitment appeals made by rebel organizations, I find support for my argument that conflicts will be more intractable when armed groups mobilize around a larger number of grievances.

This study provides one of the first, to my knowledge, quantitative examinations of the *consequences* of the breadth or diversity of rebel recruitment appeals. It also contributes to our understanding of how ideology and grievances affect the outcomes of civil conflicts. Moreover, these results suggest that it might actually be ineffective for rebels to try to appeal to the “median voter” or to take a “big tent” approach.

Scholars can build off this study in a variety of ways. First, they can examine whether specific combinations of grievance-based recruitment appeals are more effective than other mixtures of appeals. Second, they can examine if and how rebel organizations are able to offset the problems of diverse constituencies, through practices such as indoctrinating members (e.g., Hoover Green 2016, 2018). Third, scholars could use the data to examine other consequences of making diverse recruitment appeals, including its effects on rebels’ treatment of civilians. Fourth and relatedly, scholars could employ measures for this study to investigate the factors that drive armed movements to mobilize around wide or narrow grievance-based platforms.



Ideologies and grievances are factors that scholars of civil wars and other forms of political violence should continue to take seriously (e.g., Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2014; Leader Maynard 2019). However, in addition to examining the role of material versus ideological approaches, the degree of ideological extremeness, and persuasion versus coercion and force, we must more fully consider the breadth or diversity of issues that rebel organizations mobilize around. Indeed, this study provides evidence that conflicts become more intractable when rebel organizations take a “big tent” approach to recruitment.

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