

Rebels With Too Many Causes: Diverse Recruitment Appeals and the Intractability of Civil Conflicts

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Abstract

Do rebel groups benefit from attempting to appeal to larger segments of society by mobilizing around more diverse ideologies? Prior work has examined a variety of dimensions of ideological 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 suffer from attempts to appeal to a diversity of ideological issues. When rebel organizations represent diverse identities and ideological interests, internal fractionalization and credible commitment problems are exacerbated. These issues complicate the bargaining process, rendering conflicts more intractable. Using novel data on the diversity of ideological-based recruitment appeals employed by armed groups, I find evidence that rebel groups that mobilize around a greater number of ideological issues fight in more protracted conflicts and are not more likely to achieve favorable outcomes.

Keywords

rebel recruitment, conflict duration, ideology and political violence

Do rebel organizations benefit from mobilizing constituencies around diverse ideologies? Armed groups face a dilemma when deciding how diverse their recruitment appeals should be. Militant groups can diversify their ideological appeals in the hopes of increasing their popularity and subsequently gaining more recruits (Gabbay 2008; Schwab 2023; Tokdemir et al. 2021). However, rebel movements that organize around a variety of ideologies often struggle to garner sufficient support and are plagued by internal divisions between factions with diverse goals (Khan and Whiteside 2021; Perkoski 2019).

Despite the relevance of this dilemma, scholarship on rebel ideology and civil war outcomes typically focuses on the effects of either the extent to which militant movements rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment (Weinstein 2005, 2007) or specific types of ideologies, including religious ideologies (Basedau et al. 2022; Keels and Wiegand 2020; Nilsson and Svensson 2021; Svensson 2007), ethnonationalism (Goddard 2006; Keels and Wiegand 2020), and Marxism (Balcells and Kalyvas 2025).

This research tends to overlook that armed groups often mobilize around a mixture of different ideologies and identities (e.g., Acosta 2022; Belgioioso and Thurber

2024; Brosché and Sundberg 2024; Keels et al. 2025; Olzak 2022; Soules 2023; Tokdemir et al. 2021). Indeed, militant movements often adopt multiple ideologies, including militant groups that have both religious and ethnonationalist ideologies (e.g., the Ninjas, FIAA, Kamajors, and ADF), left-wing and ethnonationalist ideologies (e.g., the PKK, and JVP), religious and left-wing ideologies (e.g., MeK), and other combinations. Relatedly, groups often combine broader, established ideologies, with more specific grievances. For instance, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb mobilizes around both religious and local political grievances (Soules, 2023, p. 1819).¹ Such strategies appear to be common practice. Nearly 60 percent of the rebel groups in the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID) employed at least two kinds of ideological recruitment appeals (Soules 2023).

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Given the frequency at which rebel groups diversify the ideologies they mobilize around, and the scholarly divide over the effectiveness of this diversification, it is important to examine the consequences of employing broad recruitment appeals. I argue that rebels with diverse platforms will fight prolonged civil wars because this diversification introduces problems into the bargaining process. First, such recruitment strategies result in there being greater diversity of interests and goals within groups. The presence of factions with different ideological identities might undermine negotiations.

Second, rebel movements with diverse ideologies have difficulty credibly committing that the multiple goals within their organizations have all been satisfied by negotiations, and that more dissatisfied factions will not splinter off or remobilize. These issues are related, as when more competing interests are involved, the opposition will have difficulty credibly committing that all their internal factions (who might have divergent interests) will abide by the peace agreement.

Thus, when rebels mobilize around multiple issues, it complicates the bargaining process, resulting in prolonged conflicts. Using novel data on the diversity of recruitment appeals employed by a global sample of rebel groups, I find support for my central argument. I find evidence of an association between more diverse recruitment appeals and longer conflicts. However, I do *not* find evidence of an association between diverse recruitment appeals and groups achieving favorable outcomes.

This study makes a contribution by providing one of the only quantitative analyses on the *consequences* of rebel organizations mobilizing around multiple ideologies. Olzak (2022) finds the terrorist organizations with ambiguous ideologies have a harder time garnering support, which diminishes their operational capacity and decreases their lifespans. However, I examine issue diversity, not ambiguity. The data I employ also cover a greater diversity of issues, beyond the typical categories covered in existing studies, such as religious, left-wing, and nationalist ideologies.

Furthermore, I show that employing multiple, ideological recruitment appeals is associated with longer, not shorter, conflicts. Most studies focus on the consequences of either specific types of ideologies or grievances (e.g., Basedau et al. 2022; Keels and Wiegand 2020; Nilsson and Svensson 2021; Svensson 2007) or reliance on ideological appeals over material incentives for recruitment (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2005, 2007). This study shows that the *diversity* of rebels' recruitment appeals is also important. Related work shows that multi-party civil wars are particularly intractable because there are more actors who must agree to a settlement (Cunningham 2006). However, this paper examines how diverse interests *within* rebel organizations make conflicts difficult to settle.

Defining Ideological Diversity

I am interested in the diversity of ideological appeals that armed groups organize around. Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood (2014, 215) define ideology as a systematic set of ideas that include an identity and/or political-based referent group, identification of goals, a (sometimes vaguely defined) set of actions, and grievances to be addressed. 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 et al. 2014).

I take a broad view of ideological appeals, analyzing both recruitment appeals commonly associated with major ideologies (e.g., Marxism or radical jihadism), as well as appeals to various other grievances not associated with a well-defined ideology (e.g., mobilizing against foreign military intervention, external exploitation of resources, etc.) (Soules 2023). I expect that the greater number of ideological interests that are represented in rebel groups, the more difficulty these organizations will have in bringing their conflicts to an end. Throughout the paper, I use the terms ideologies, ideological appeals, and ideological platforms interchangeably.

Ideological Mobilization and Conflict Intractability

Weinstein (2005, 2007) posits 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. In contrast, Weinstein argues that when groups do not have access to 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, as they must be willing to sacrifice short-term gains for the possibility of long-term benefits. Weinstein thus posits that groups will be more resilient when they rely more on ideological recruitment appeals.

Scholars also examine how specific types of rebel group ideologies influence conflict outcomes. This includes work on how ideologically driven recruits, particularly religiously motivated rebels, are more devoted to the cause, and thus, continue fighting, even when their groups are struggling (e.g., Basedau et al. 2022). Ideology also introduces problems into the bargaining process, which contribute to the intractability of conflicts (Keels and Wiegand 2020; Nilsson and Svensson 2021; Svensson 2007). Conflicts are also more likely to recur when peace agreements fail to address the stated ideological issues rebels mobilize around (Keels et al. 2025). Conflicts in which rebels mobilize around many different

issues tend to feature more intense fighting (Belgioioso and Thurber 2024; Brosché and Sundberg 2024), which could also make it difficult to resolve such conflicts.

Why Diversify Ideological Recruitment Appeals?

It is important to discuss the potential benefits of such recruitment strategies. This can help shed light on why groups employ diverse ideological appeals, despite the associated risks. In general, diversifying recruitment appeals can help rebel groups attract more members. Making diverse appeals can also help groups appeal to the “median voter,” as they become more likely to represent the interests of the average member of society (Gabbay 2008). Tapping into multiple ideologies can be attractive to civilians who do not feel represented by other armed movements (Schwab 2023). This can help militant movements stand out from competing non-state actors (Tokdemir et al. 2021). Diversifying ideological appeals can also help persuade civilians to join the cause who might have otherwise supported the government (DeNardo 1985). Armed groups are more successful at recruiting when there is a higher demand for the agenda, which is more likely to be the case if they represent multiple ideological interests (Uzonyi and Koren 2024). Furthermore, adopting multiple ideological positions can aid militant organizations in strategically forging and sustaining alliances with other armed groups (Balcells et al. 2022; Blair et al. 2022; Christia 2012).

Certain types of rebel groups might be particularly well-positioned to mobilize individuals with diverse ideological identities. Radical Islamist groups, for instance, have been effective at uniting recruits with diverse interests through their emphasis on a shared Islamic identity (e.g., Ahmad 2016; Hegghammer 2009; Walter 2017) and the idea that Islam is under threat (e.g., Hegghammer 2009). Thus, such groups are better able to mitigate the costs associated with employing diverse recruitment appeals.

Societal-level factors also shape recruitment strategies. For instance, in autocracies, resistance movements can cast a wide net when they mobilize, as many identity-based groups are excluded from power (Acosta 2022). However, in democracies, where more identity-based groups are included in formal political processes, armed groups are more likely to focus on recruiting the narrower set of identity-based groups that have been excluded from power (Acosta 2022). This dynamic is particularly salient in ethnically factionalized democracies (Mann 2005). Thus, groups have varying incentives for diversifying their ideological appeals. However, I expect that such recruitment strategies will still be, on average, associated with greater intractability of conflicts.

Ideological Diversity and Bargaining Problems

Employing diverse recruitment appeals introduces two interrelated problems into the bargaining process that render conflicts more intractable: the presence of multiple, internal factions with diverse goals and the exacerbation of credible commitment problems.² These issues reinforce each other, as movements with diverse goals will have a difficult time credibly committing that all factions will be willing to abide by terms of the peace agreement (Cunningham 2013).³

Competing Factions

In general, the diversity of interests represented within rebel groups that mobilize around multiple issues will narrow the bargaining range, making it difficult to end the conflict. This point builds off Cunningham (2006), who argues that the presence of multiple rebel factions introduces various problems to the bargaining process, which increases the duration of conflicts. Rebel factions who are willing and able to continue fighting if they are dissatisfied with the potential terms of a negotiated settlement can significantly prolong conflicts (Cunningham 2006). Specifically, Cunningham expects that a rebel group can spoil negotiations and thus prolong conflicts when it (1) has preferences that are sufficiently different from other actors in the war; (2) is internally cohesive enough to maintain its bargaining position; and (3) it is able to continue fighting, even if other parties come to a negotiated settlement (Cunningham 2006).

Both the number of actors involved, and how divergent their preferences are, affect the size of the bargaining range, as it becomes more difficult to find an agreement that satisfies all parties (Cunningham 2006). While Cunningham focuses on the effects of the presence of multiple independent rebel factions, his argument translates well to factions *within* a single rebel group. Militant groups often have multiple units or factions, led by subcommanders, whose support is important to maintain (e.g., Duursma and Fliervoet 2021).

An underlying risk during negotiations is that at least one unit subcommander becomes dissatisfied with the terms of the proposed settlement and forms a breakaway faction with their subordinates. Fractionalization during the peace process can threaten negotiations and prolong conflicts (e.g., Duursma and Fliervoet 2021; Plank 2015). The fewer members that are satisfied with a peace agreement, the higher the likelihood that groups splinter, undermining the negotiation process (Plank 2015).

Mobilizing around multiple ideological issues narrows the range of acceptable settlements as rebel groups come to represent more goals that must be negotiated over.

Rebel leaders risk alienating some factions of their organizations if they are perceived to prioritize certain ideological goals over others. If these factions are sufficiently dissatisfied, they can splinter off, including during negotiations (Duursma and Fliervoet 2021). Even if they do not splinter, the presence of dissatisfied factions can undermine the cohesion of rebel groups, weakening their bargaining power. These bargaining issues prolong conflicts (e.g., Duursma and Fliervoet 2021). Indeed, the failure of peace agreements to address the core demands of rebel organizations can result in continued fighting (Keels et al. 2025). When rebel groups mobilize around multiple ideological issues, it will be difficult for proposed peace agreements to satisfy all ideological factions, increasing the risk that the fighting continues.

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 difficulty credibly committing that they will not violate the terms of settlements (Fearon 1995). Mobilizing around diverse ideologies exacerbates credible commitment problems for rebels because the negotiating process can satisfy certain factions more than others, creating the risk that the more dissatisfied factions splinter off or remobilize in the future.

Ideologically driven groups do not always have the incentive to negotiate. 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 goals being compromised on. Relatedly, ideologically driven recruits are more likely to defect or demobilize when their groups shift ideological goals (Oppenheim et al. 2015).

Thus, ideologically driven recruits who are committed to the cause could become aggrieved if their groups pursue compromises that they view as conceding too much ground on their preferred goals. Given the need to maintain a certain level of ideological purity, rebel organizations that employ ideological-based recruitment strategies can have difficulty credibly committing to negotiations (Keels and Wiegand 2020).

This problem is particularly poignant for groups that mobilize around multiple ideologies. When groups mobilize around more ideologies they, on average, take on more goals, creating more issues that must be bargained over. When this occurs, there is greater opportunity for any one segment of a rebel organization to become dissatisfied, as rebel leadership might find it difficult to satisfy all these interests. Indeed, rebel group splintering

often occurs during peace processes because of internal disagreements over which goals to prioritize (Duursma and Fliervoet 2021). Ideologically committed recruits are also more likely to remobilize when core issues in conflicts have not been resolved (Mironova et al. 2020). Thus, the risk rebel leaders face of alienating at least some of their supporters through compromising is exacerbated when multiple ideologies, and their corresponding goals, are represented in their ranks, which makes it difficult for them to credibly commit to peace settlements (Keels and Wiegand 2020).

Relatedly, rebel groups that mobilize around narrower sets of ideological issues tend to attract fewer recruits, but members tend to be more like-minded, and consequently, are more cohesive (Perkoski 2019). In contrast, rebel groups that mobilize around multiple ideological issues have a harder time satisfying all the different interests in their groups, and consequently, are more likely to be plagued by high levels of defection and infighting (Perkoski 2019). Divided opposition movements have difficulty credibly committing that they can control all their factions and maintain peace following negotiations (Cunningham 2013).

Thus, it will be more difficult, on average, for rebel groups to achieve internal cohesion when they represent diverse ideological interests and goals. 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. Even if these dissatisfied factions do not splinter off or remobilize, the looming threat that they will continue fighting can be enough to deter governments from bargaining.

Conflict Intractability

Internal factions with differing goals and credible commitment problems decrease the probability that conflicts will be settled. The struggles of rebel organizations with diverse ideological goals can be observed in a variety of contexts. For instance, the Irish National Liberation Army experienced an uptick in infighting between hardline nationalists and socialist factions during a ceasefire (Perkoski 2019). In the Philippines, competing interests and goals of different factions in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) made it difficult for the group to compromise with the government (Malan and Solomon 2012). The Mouvement populaire de l'Azawad in Mali was plagued by ideological and tribal differences that complicated efforts to negotiate with the government (Thurston and Lebovich 2013). In Burundi, the CNDD-FDD was hesitant to negotiate because internal, ideological divisions undermined its coherence and subsequent ability to bargain (Nindorera 2012). These examples

highlight how recruiting with diverse ideological appeals can prolong conflicts. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: Civil wars will last longer when rebel groups employ more types of ideological recruitment appeals.

Living Long and Prospering?

A potential counterargument is that diversifying appeals enhances rebels' recruitment, allowing them to draw in more members, increasing their survival and *success*. Rather than making conflicts more intractable because of bargaining issues, ideological diversification could increase groups' power to resist defeat by the government. For instance, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) have survived over 20 years, in part, because its appeals to Islamist, ethnonationalist, and secessionist goals help it adapt to new challenges and recruit new members (Nantulya 2019). These benefits could help rebel groups survive long enough to achieve favorable outcomes, either through negotiated settlements or outright victory. This produces the following hypothesis:

H2: Rebel groups that employ more types of ideological recruitment appeals have a greater likelihood of achieving favorable outcomes.

However, I do not expect to find support for this hypothesis. Instead, I posit that mobilizing around diverse ideologies undermines groups' ability to achieve success. First, the presence of internal disagreements over goals and credible commitment problems makes it difficult for groups to enter negotiations with governments, decreasing the probability they earn concessions.

Second, it is difficult for such groups to achieve outright victory. Internal divisions over which ideological goals to prioritize undermines cohesion, making it difficult for groups to fight effectively (Perkoski 2019). Furthermore, they risk signaling a lack of commitment to any one cause to the public, which makes it difficult to garner civilian support (Cronin-Furman and Arulthas 2024). The lack of civilian support makes it difficult to achieve total victory.

For instance, while the ADF's ideological diversity helps it gain recruits, it has been involved in an intractable conflict. 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. In Sri Lanka, the LTTE was able to consolidate power and gain widespread civilian support, in part, because *other* Tamil separatist movements were perceived as focusing on *too many* other issues that distracted from independence (Cronin-Furman and Arulthas 2024).

Thus, mobilizing around diverse ideologies does not necessarily help groups achieve their goals. I do *not* expect, however, that groups that mobilize around diverse ideologies will be systematically less likely to achieve favorable outcomes. Indeed, factors that promote rebel group longevity do not necessarily promote success (Cunningham et al. 2009). Longer conflicts are often indicative of bargaining failures in which warring sides fail to reach any concrete outcome (Sawyer et al. 2017; Wood and Allemang 2022). Prior work has also failed to find a direct connection between rebel recruitment tactics and their long-term success (Soules 2025). However, I examine the association between recruitment diversity and rebel outcomes to highlight how such strategies can contribute to the intractability of conflicts *without* helping rebels achieve their goals.

Research Design

To test the hypotheses, data are needed that capture the diversity of ideological appeals that rebel groups mobilize around. I employ data from the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID), which contains data on a diversity of ideological recruitment appeals made by rebels (Soules 2023), providing an opportunity to capture extensive diversity of interests within armed movements. RAID contains a sample of 232 rebel movements, taken from the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (Cunningham et al. 2013), that operated across the world, at some point between 1989 and 2011. A group can enter RAID before this period, or exit after, so long as it was active, at some point, during this period.

Explanatory Variable

RAID includes 10 separate binary indicators of whether groups make specific types of ideological appeals. These include appeals to (1) women's rights; (2) fighting military intervention or Western dominance; (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) ethnonationalism or regionalism; (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 he generated data based on detailed, qualitative narratives that were constructed on the recruitment practices of rebel organizations. While some of these appeals are captured in other datasets, such left-wing, religious, and ethnonationalist ideologies (e.g., Basedau et al. 2022; Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020; Keels and Wiegand 2020; Wood and Thomas 2017), other

appeals, including resistance to violent government repression and opposition to the external exploitation of resources, are not (Soules 2023). Thus, I use RAID because it captures a greater diversity of ideologies 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. The first is a count of the number of ideological appeals, based on these ten categories, that rebel groups make. This variable ranges from 0 (for the 14 groups in RAID that rely exclusively on material recruitment incentives and employed no ideological appeals) to 5. The median number of appeals employed was 2. Figure 1 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 ideological appeals. Approximately 59 percent of groups in RAID (137 organizations) mobilized around two or more grievances.

Outcome Variable

To test the first hypothesis about conflict duration, 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). I am interested in the

overall duration of conflicts, as the length of conflicts is indicative of persistent failure of bargaining (e.g., Sawyer et al. 2017; Wood and Allemang 2022).

I employ semiparametric Cox Proportional Hazard models to assess how the diversity of rebels' appeals affects the duration of a conflict episode, in years, from the date of the first battle-related death to when it is coded in the Conflict Termination Dataset as 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., Conrad et al., 2019; Cunningham et al. 2009; Sawyer et al. 2017; Wood and Allemang 2022).⁴

To evaluate the second hypothesis, I employ the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset's measure of the ways in which rebel groups end. Following the precedent of existing studies (e.g., Cunningham et al. 2009; Fortna 2015), I compare the probability that rebels experience the following outcomes: negotiated settlements, total victory over government forces, total defeat by government forces, or ending through low levels of activities. The former two are considered favorable outcomes, while the latter two are considered unfavorable (Fortna, 2015). I employ competing risk analysis to test Hypothesis 2. Competing risk models allow users to evaluate the probability that one outcome occurs *relative* to others and they help account for right-censoring and temporal dependencies in the data (Fortna, 2015; Phayal et al., 2019).

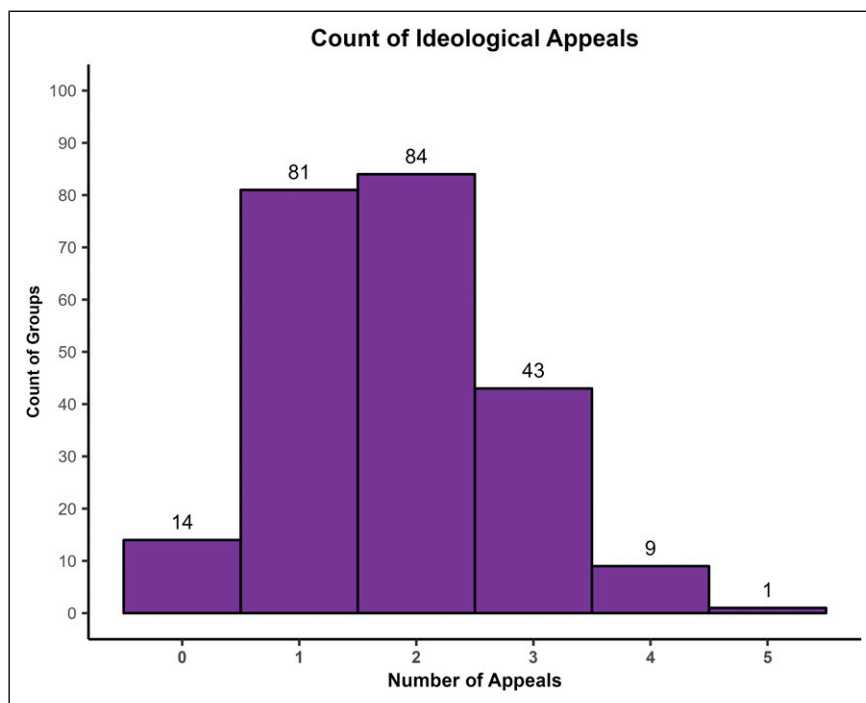


Figure 1. Distribution of the count of ideological recruitment appeals.

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 in all models. Again, groups in RAID can enter the dataset before 1989 or exit after, so long as they were active at some point during this period. Thus, a group can enter the analysis in this study before 1989 and exit after 2011.⁵

Controls Variables

I hold constant a variety of potentially confounding variables. First, extending data from the NSA dataset (Cunningham et al. 2009), I control for whether a group has *secessionist aims*, as goals could affect rebel recruitment strategies 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 (Cunningham et al. 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 NSA dataset (Cunningham et al. 2009). Natural resource wealth affects recruitment strategies (Weinstein 2005) and conflict termination (e.g., Conrad et al., 2019). Thus, 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).

Furthermore, with data from the NSA dataset, I employ an ordinal indicator of groups' *strength of territorial control* (none, low, moderate, or high) because such control affects rebel recruitment strategies (de la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca 2012) and rebel group outcomes (Cunningham et al. 2009). 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) and conflict outcomes (Balch-Lindsay et al. 2008). Competition from other armed non-state actors affects how rebel movements tailor their ideological platforms (e.g., Schwab 2023; Tokdemir et al. 2021) and the intractability of conflicts (e.g., Cunningham 2006). Thus, I include a binary indicator of whether any other rebel groups were active in the country the year a dyad-episode begins.

Additionally, I control for country-level factors. I use the Varieties of Democracy dataset's measure of Electoral Democracy (Coppedge et al. 2024). Regime type affects conflict resolution (Cunningham et al. 2009) and dissident mobilization strategies (Acosta 2022). With data from

Fariss et al. (2022), I also control for the logged per capita GDP and logged population of the country of the government that the group is fighting. Conflicts last longer in lower income countries (Cunningham et al. 2009) and state capacity and economic conditions could affect how rebels recruit.

Results

The results for the tests of Hypotheses 1 and 2 are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. For Table 1, I include multiple models, gradually adding control variables to each, to address the concern that missing data could drive the results. For Table 2, I present only the models with the full sets of control variables due to space constraints. However, results with varying numbers of control variables are presented in the supplemental materials (Tables A1–A4). The standard errors are clustered on the rebel group and hazard ratios are reported in all models.

In Table 1, I find that both the number of ideological appeals rebels make, as well as 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 ideological appeals is associated with an approximately 9.9 percent chance that a rebel group survives in a given period, while the binary indicator is associated with about a 20.8 percent chance. Figure 2 displays the Kaplan-Meier survival estimates with 90 percent confidence intervals.

As the results in Table 2 show, there is not a statistically significant association between making diverse recruitment appeals and achieving negotiated settlements. Even when fewer control variables are included, increasing the number of observations, this relationship is never statistically significant (Table A1). The count measure of diverse appeals has a statistically significant association with rebel groups achieving victory more quickly, but the binary measure does not. Furthermore, this finding is frail, as the association loses statistical significance in any model with fewer control variables (Table A2). Both measures of recruitment diversity have a statistically significant association with quicker defeat by government forces, but this finding holds only when the full set of control variables is included (Table A3). Finally, recruitment diversity is associated with more time until a group ends through low levels of activity (i.e., fizzles out). This finding is robust regardless of the number of control variables (Table A4).

In sum, the only outcome that diverse recruitment appeals have a consistently statistically significant association with is fizzling out. The finding that rebel groups are less likely to fizzle out when they make diverse

Table 1. Diversity in Ideological Recruitment Appeals and Conflict Termination.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Count of appeals	0.833*** (0.0402)	0.837*** (0.0405)	0.901** (0.0410)			
Multiple appeals (binary)				0.723*** (0.0622)	0.720*** (0.0610)	0.792*** (0.0674)
Secessionist aims		1.014 (0.108)	1.085 (0.128)		1.018 (0.107)	1.085 (0.124)
Relative rebel strength		0.995 (0.0678)	0.980 (0.0741)		0.983 (0.0678)	0.985 (0.0744)
Natural resource wealth		0.639*** (0.0603)	0.708*** (0.0654)		0.644*** (0.0601)	0.719*** (0.0659)
Territorial control		0.928 (0.0433)	0.911** (0.0386)		0.914* (0.0433)	0.898** (0.0379)
Externally supported rebels		0.847* (0.0774)	0.783*** (0.0656)		0.864 (0.0802)	0.783*** (0.0654)
Externally supported state		0.973 (0.0876)	0.833* (0.0781)		0.947 (0.0829)	0.819** (0.0745)
Any competition		0.945 (0.0921)	1.013 (0.0993)		0.952 (0.0931)	1.020 (0.102)
Democracy score			1.609* (0.434)			1.542* (0.403)
per capita GDP (logged)			0.900 (0.115)			0.913 (0.115)
Population (logged)			0.803*** (0.0671)			0.812** (0.0670)
Observations	424	388	368	424	388	368

Standard errors in parentheses.

Hazard ratios reported.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

recruitment appeals is largely consistent with the idea that these groups also survive longer. Thus, I find evidence of an association between diverse recruitment appeals and conflict intractability, but *not* favorable outcomes.

An important caveat is that I cannot establish causality given the time invariant nature of the explanatory variables. It is possible that when rebel groups live longer, they have greater opportunity to expand their ideological appeals. I cannot fully rule out the possibility of reverse causality, and thus, the findings should be interpreted as correlation rather than causal. However, later in the paper, I provide (1) a brief qualitative examination of a case and (2) a robustness check in which I use an alternative measure of diverse ideologies that helps address concerns related to the timing of the adoption of appeals.

The Conflict in Mindanao

The multi-decade long, territorial-based conflict in the Mindanao region of the Philippines exemplifies how conflicts can become protracted when rebel groups mobilize around multiple ideologies. This conflict, based heavily on Moro nationalist and radical Islamist

ideologies, has been intractable since the 1970s, despite multiple efforts to bring about negotiated settlements ([UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia](#)). The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLFF) particularly highlights the issues underpinning the theory. In RAID, the MNLFF is coded as employing multiple ideological appeals, including radical Islamist, anti-government violence, and ethnonationalist appeals ([Soules 2023](#)).

The MNLFF formed as a breakaway faction from the Muslim Independence Movement. While containing some elements of radical Islamist beliefs, the group focused primarily on ethnonationalist aspirations. This caused the group to draw criticism that it was insufficiently Islamist ([Mapping Militant Organizations 2019](#)). In the late 1970s, Hashim Salamat and other members of MNLFF left to form what eventually became the MILF. Salamat was dissatisfied with the MNLFF for multiple reasons, including that he believed the group had not focused enough on promoting an *Islamic* breakaway nation ([Mapping Militant Organizations 2019](#)).

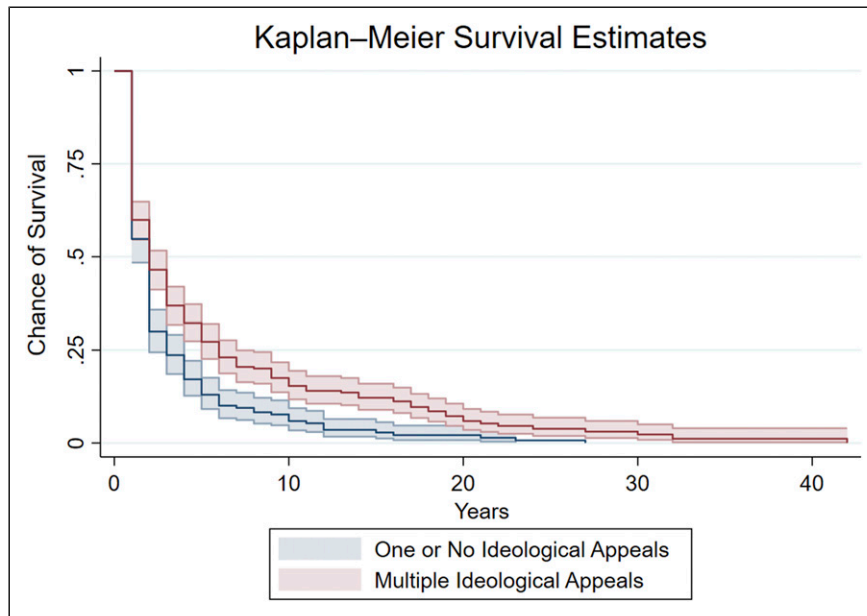
Failed talks between the MNLFF and the Filipino government further exacerbated ideological differences that led to this split ([Malan and Solomon 2012](#); [Mapping](#)

Table 2. Diversity of Ideological Recruitment Appeals and Conflict Outcomes.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Negotiated Settlement		Rebel Victory		Government Victory		Fizzling Out	
Count of appeals	1.012 (0.103)		1.465* (0.321)		1.537** (0.328)		0.828** (0.0692)	
Multiple appeals (binary)		1.012 (0.202)		2.615 (1.621)		2.088* (0.856)		0.726** (0.112)
Secessionist aims	1.075 (0.222)	1.072 (0.224)	0.224 (0.242)	0.261 (0.290)	0.592 (0.266)	0.561 (0.258)	1.069 (0.184)	1.072 (0.182)
Relative rebel strength	1.453*** (0.195)	1.454*** (0.198)	1.799 (0.723)	1.744 (0.698)	0.957 (0.335)	1.042 (0.337)	0.594*** (0.105)	0.589*** (0.104)
Natural resource wealth	1.065 (0.204)	1.064 (0.204)	2.079 (1.406)	2.032 (1.331)	0.960 (0.412)	0.894 (0.389)	0.867 (0.129)	0.887 (0.134)
Territorial control	1.131 (0.131)	1.132 (0.132)	1.534 (0.419)	1.523 (0.391)	1.120 (0.212)	1.199 (0.210)	0.863 (0.0801)	0.856* (0.0786)
Externally supported rebels	1.609** (0.356)	1.610** (0.356)	1.426 (0.840)	1.353 (0.784)	0.198*** (0.0970)	0.194*** (0.0954)	0.929 (0.141)	0.935 (0.142)
Externally supported state	1.367 (0.308)	1.367 (0.307)	0.305* (0.195)	0.348* (0.215)	0.564 (0.244)	0.620 (0.266)	0.977 (0.148)	0.962 (0.146)
Any competition	1.207 (0.252)	1.207 (0.253)	0.696 (0.499)	0.685 (0.492)	1.232 (0.489)	1.182 (0.465)	0.837 (0.131)	0.845 (0.132)
Democracy score	7.649*** (4.537)	7.721*** (4.527)	0.0409 (0.0913)	0.0415 (0.0881)	0.217 (0.299)	0.284 (0.384)	0.395** (0.149)	0.364*** (0.137)
per capita GDP (logged)	0.805 (0.225)	0.806 (0.226)	0.203 (0.243)	0.233 (0.277)	1.197 (0.710)	1.206 (0.696)	1.139 (0.226)	1.135 (0.231)
Population (logged)	0.667** (0.128)	0.667** (0.128)	0.619 (0.377)	0.625 (0.397)	1.145 (0.428)	1.233 (0.461)	1.316* (0.187)	1.324* (0.190)
Observations	368	368	368	368	368	368	368	368

Standard errors in parentheses.

Hazard ratios reported.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.**Figure 2.** Kaplan-Meier survival estimates for the use of multiple ideological appeals.

Militant Organizations 2019). Subsequent peace talks were marred by internal ideological divisions within the MNLF (Plank 2015). Dissatisfied factions within the MNLF also opposed how some peace agreements were implemented, leading the group to continue fighting (Mapping Militant Organizations 2019). Even in periods when the MNLF was not attempting to negotiate with the government, the internal fractionalization significantly weakened its operational capacity (Malan and Solomon 2012), which might have made it difficult to achieve victory.

The MNLF thus highlights key theoretical mechanisms. Factions with conflicting ideological goals (e.g., the splinter faction led by Salamat) broke away, weakening the group on the battlefield and at the bargaining table (e.g., Malan and Solomon 2012). Dissatisfaction by some internal elements of the group with the terms and implementation of peace agreements led to continued fighting (Mapping Militant Organizations 2019). This likely made it difficult for the group to credibly commit to peace in the future. The MNLF also adopted multiple ideologies prior to the conflict becoming protracted, helping address concerns about reverse causality. Thus, the MNLF highlights the potential perils of organizing around multiple ideologies.

Robustness Checks

I conduct a battery of robustness checks to assess the strength of the findings. The results are available in the [supplemental materials](#).

Alternative Outcome Variable

While I have already examined several possible outcomes rebel groups can face, it is also important to consider whether such groups make it to the negotiating table in the first place. Indeed, an important element of the theory is that governments will be hesitant to negotiate with these groups. To do this, I replicate a study by Cunningham and Sawyer (2019), who examine how the ways in which rebel leaders come to power affect the probability that their groups enter negotiations with the governments they are fighting. Across all models, both the count (Table A5) and binary (Table A6) measures of recruitment diversity have a negative and statistically significant association with the probability that a rebel group enters negotiations, providing further evidence that such recruitment strategies help make conflicts more intractable.

Alternative Explanatory Variables

The main measures of recruitment diversity do not distinguish the compatibility of appeals. I expect that, on

average, more ideological appeals exacerbate credible commitment problems and the role of conflicting ideological goals, regardless of the specific appeals, as more interests will still be represented. However, appeals that are particularly *incompatible* with each other likely worsen these dynamics even further. To approximate incompatibility, I examine every possible pairing of individual recruitment appeals in RAID. I examined the pairwise correlations between these appeals. I then identified which of these pairings had negative and statistically significant associations (i.e., whether the two variables in a pair had a negative and statistically significant relationship with each other). I did so to determine which types of recruitment appeals were less likely to be seen together, to try to proxy for incompatibility.

After identifying these combinations, I built two different variables. The first is a binary indicator of whether rebel groups made at least one of these combinations of appeals. However, groups coded as 0 for this variable include those that make multiple ideological appeals that are not incompatible, as well as those who make one or no ideological appeals. Given that I expect that multiple appeals will still generate internal divisions, I also create an ordinal variable that captures whether a group makes no or one ideological appeal (0), multiple appeals that are all compatible with each other (1), or at least one pair of appeals that are generally incompatible (2). I expect that higher levels of this variable correspond to more diverse ideological goals.

I rerun the main analysis using these two variables. For Hypothesis 1, across all models, making incompatible recruitment appeals is associated with longer conflicts. This association is statistically significant in all three models using the ordinal measure and two of the three models with the binary indicator (Table A7). For Hypothesis 2, I do not find any evidence of a statistically significant association between incompatible recruitment appeals and conflicts ending through negotiated settlements, rebel victory, or government victory (Tables A8–A10). However, I continue to find consistent evidence between groups employing incompatible recruitment appeals and them being less likely to end through fizzling out (Table A11).

Alternative Sample

One potential issue with sample used in the main analysis is that it overlooks dissident armed groups that employ lowers levels of violence. This ignores smaller armed movements that still challenge the government but do not reach the threshold of violence required by the NSA dataset (Acosta 2019). This is relevant as the types of appeals groups make might affect whether they cross this threshold. To ensure that this selection process is not

driving the results, I employ data from the Revolutionary and Militant Organizations (REVMOD) dataset, which contains data on 536 diverse resistance organizations, including those that use violence, non-violent tactics, or a combination of both (Acosta 2019).

While REVMOD does not contain direct measures of recruitment, it does feature non-mutually exclusive, binary indicators of the ideologies of militant and revolutionary organizations. Using these variables, I created two measures. The first is an ordinal indicator of whether a group is coded as having zero, one, or two or more ideologies. The second is a binary measure of whether an organization has two or more ideologies. I use these measures as a proxy for the diversity of ideological appeals groups mobilize around, with the assumption that if a group adopts a larger number of ideologies, they will also have a larger number of recruitment appeals.

Using these measures, I examine how ideological diversity affects the survival of organizations (Table A12) and their success, using REVMOD's ordinal measure of the extent to which organizations achieve their goals (Table A13). Consistent with my earlier analysis, I find evidence that groups that mobilize around diverse platforms survive longer but are not more likely to be successful.

Capacity and Survival

Again, a plausible alternative explanation for my findings is that diverse recruitment appeals help increase the capacity of rebel organizations, enabling them to survive longer. In response, I examine the association between the diversity of groups' recruitment appeals and various measures of rebel capacity. Using the cross-section of groups in RAID as my sample, I employ the measure of recruitment diversity as the explanatory variable and use a variety of measures of rebel capacity as the outcome variables across multiple models. Using variables from the NSA dataset (Cunningham et al. 2009), I examine how recruitment diversity affects the strength of rebel groups relative to the government (Table A14), the approximate number of troops a group has (Table A15), and whether the group receives support from a foreign government (Table A16). I do *not* find consistent evidence of an association between recruitment diversity and any of these measures of capacity.

Excluding Non-Ideological Groups

It is possible that groups in the dataset that make no ideological 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 be intractable (e.g., Conrad et al. 2019). 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).

I continue to find strong support for an association between diverse recruitment appeals and longer conflict duration (Table A17). I do not find statistically significant evidence of an association between ideological diversity and either negotiated settlements (Table A18) or rebel victory (Table A19). Interestingly, ideological diversity has a statistically significant association with quicker time until government victory in five of six models (Table A20) and longer time until the conflict fizzles out (Table A21).

Additional Control Variables

In the main analysis, I included a limited number of control variables given the relatively small number of observations. However, to ensure that the results are not driven by omitted variable bias, I rerun the main analysis, adding in other potentially confounding, group-level factors. First, I include 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). These ideologies might affect rebel groups' recruitment strategies and their longevity.

Next, using data from RAID (Soules 2023), I add a binary indicator of whether a group has a multi-ethnic recruitment base. This is because having broader constituencies might affect both groups mobilization strategies and their survival (Acosta 2022; DeNardo 1985; Mann 2005). Finally, some rebel groups have a clear top leader, while others are run through a power-sharing agreement (Acosta et al. 2023). Groups that are led through a power-sharing agreement might represent a greater diversity of ideologies and have more difficult negotiating with governments. Thus, using data from the Rebel Organization Leaders (ROLE) dataset (Acosta et al. 2023), I include a binary indicator of whether a group's leadership has a power-sharing agreement.

I rerun the models with these additional control variables. Across all models, I continue to find statistically significant evidence that diverse recruitment appeals are associated with longer conflicts (Table A22). I do not find consistent evidence of a statistically significant association between diverse appeals and conflicts ending in negotiated settlement, rebel victory, or government victory (Table A23–A25). I continue to find consistent evidence of an association between diverse appeals and a lower likelihood of rebel groups fizzling out (Table A26).

Accounting for Specific Appeals

To ensure that individual types of ideological 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.) (Tables A27–A36). For nine of the ten types of appeals, the main independent variables have 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 employ ethnonationalist appeals are excluded from the analysis, the main independent variable remains statistically significant in four of the six models (Table A30).⁶

For Hypothesis 2, I do not find consistent evidence of an association between the diversity of ideologies and group outcomes (Table A37–A76). Ideological diversity rarely has a statistically significant association with rebels ending through negotiated settlement, victory over government forces, or defeat by governments forces across the various models. There is more evidence of a statistically significant association between groups mobilizing around ideological appeals and having a lower likelihood of ending through fizzling out, but even this finding is sensitive to model specification.

Reverse Causality

It is also important to account for the possibility of 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. Given that the data in RAID are time invariant, they cannot be used to account for the timing of when groups adopt specific recruitment strategies.

However, data in the aforementioned FORGE dataset (Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020) capture the initial ideologies of rebel organizations, and thus, are not reflective of groups adopting these positions later in their lifespans. Using data from 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 (Table A77). For

Hypothesis 2, I find evidence of a statistically significant association between diverse ideologies and longer duration until negotiated settlements in two of the three models (Table A78). I do not find a statistically significant association between diverse ideologies and conflicts ending through rebel victory (Table A79), government victory (Table A80), or rebels fizzling out (Table A81).

Discussion and Conclusion

Rebel groups often attempt to mobilize recruits around a variety of ideologies. However, I posit that rebels that mobilize around multiple ideologies have more difficulty bringing their conflicts to definitive ends. This is because rebel movements that organize around diverse ideologies 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 internal factions with incompatible goals and generate 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. 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 ideological appeals, and that such rebels are *not* more likely to be successful.

Future research could build off this paper to examine the factors that condition the association between ideological diversity and conflict duration. For instance, scholars could examine whether some types of rebel organizations are better at managing ideological diversity than others. For example, researchers could investigate if high-capacity groups and/or those that devote extensive resources to post-recruitment ideological indoctrination benefit more from ideological diversity. Scholars could also explore whether third-party mediation is an effective tool for resolving conflicts in which rebels mobilize around many different issues (see Cunningham 2006).

Ideological diversity is a factor 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). In addition to examining the role of material versus ideological approaches and the degree of ideological extremeness, we must more fully consider the breadth or diversity of ideologies that rebel organizations mobilize around. Indeed, this study provides evidence that conflicts become more intractable when rebel organizations mobilize around too many causes.

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Data Availability Statement

Replication materials are available at: <https://www.michaelsoules.com/research>.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. For more information about these groups, see the qualitative narratives that accompany Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (Soules 2023).
2. Mobilizing around diverse ideologies could create uncertainty about the capabilities and resolve of rebel groups. While appeal diversification can draw in large numbers of recruits (e.g., Gabbay 2008; Schwab 2023; Tokdemir et al. 2021), it can also lead to internal divisions that weaken groups (e.g., Khan and Whiteside 2021). However, given that these countervailing mechanisms do not directly impede the ability of the government to observe the material strength of rebels, I do not expect that platform diversification will have a significant effect on information asymmetries about rebel capabilities and resolve.
3. It is also possible that recruiting with diverse appeals increases the probability of issue indivisibilities arising, as there are more individual issues that have the potential to be viewed as indivisible. However, issue indivisibilities are linked to more radical ideologies (Svensson 2007), which should not be conflated with the number of appeals groups mobilize around.
4. Across all models, I test the proportional-hazards assumption based on the Schoenfeld residuals. I do *not* find evidence of any of the variables violating the proportional-hazards assumption (see pages 88 and 89 of the [supplemental materials](#)).
5. 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).
6. I conducted principal component analysis using all ten appeals. The only appeals that loaded onto the same factor were radical Islamist and anti-intervention appeals. However, as noted above, the results hold when excluding either type of group from the analysis (Tables A27, A37-A40, A31, A53-A56).

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