Complex Conflicts

Causes and Consequences of Multiparty Civil Wars

Nynke Salverda

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

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Abstract

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Civil wars are inherently complex and often feature a myriad of actors, whose interactions influence the intensity, duration and outcome of the conflict. The larger the number of actors involved in a conflict, the more complex it gets. While civil wars are often portrayed as a dyadic interaction between the government and a single rebel group, this is far from the reality. Between 1946 and 2015, more than half of those countries that experienced civil wars saw two or more active rebel groups. Understanding multiparty conflicts better is important, as they are deadlier, more difficult to solve and more dangerous for civilians. This dissertation studies the causes and consequences of multiparty civil wars. It suggests that all actors in a conflict system with several actors influence each other, which impacts conflict dynamics. Four essays shed light on different aspects of these civil wars. Essay I studies the differences in formation rates of rebel groups across the states of Northeast India. It finds that potential rebel groups will only form when rebellion is perceived as a legitimate way to address grievances and when competition from already existing groups is not too high. Essay II looks at rebel group splintering: It focusses on relationships within rebel groups and finds that both vertical and horizontal relations affect the likelihood of splintering. Essay III studies violent interactions between rebel groups and investigates how different conflict dynamics influence interrebel fighting. It demonstrates that interrebel fighting is more likely when one of the rebel groups is more successful against the government and when negotiations are ongoing. Finally, Essay IV widens the scope of conflict actors by studying why rebels decide to fight against UN peacekeeping operations. It shows that only relatively strong rebel groups are likely to attack blue helmets. Taken together, this dissertation furthers our understanding of the causes and consequences of multiparty civil wars. It highlights the intricate web of relations that form between actors and that influence civil war dynamics. These relations matter not only for studying civil wars, but also for preparing negotiations or planning a peacekeeping mission.

Keywords: rebel groups, civil war, UN peacekeeping, non-state violence, splintering, fragmentation, formation, dynamics

Nynke Salverda, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Box 514, Uppsala University, SE-75120 Uppsala, Sweden.

To Tom and Johannes

List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

I   Salverda, N. (2017). How Many is too Many? A Density Dependence Approach to Understanding Rebel Group Formation in Northeast India. Unpublished Manuscript

II   Otto, S. & Salverda, N. (2017). Inside Rebel Groups: The Impact of Vertical and Horizontal Relations on Rebel Group Splintering. Unpublished Manuscript

III   Salverda, N. (2017). Fighting to be Seen: Battle Outcomes, Negotiations and Interrebel Violence. Unpublished Manuscript

IV   Salverda, N. (2013). Blue Helmets as targets: A quantitative analysis of rebel violence against peacekeepers, 1989-2003. *Journal of Peace Research,* 50(6), 707-720.

Contents

Essay I: How Many is too Many? A Density Dependence Approach to Understanding Rebel Group Formation in Northeast India

Essay II: Inside Rebel Groups: The Impact of Vertical and Horizontal Relations on Rebel Group Splintering

Essay III: Fighting to be Seen: Battle Outcomes, Negotiations and Interrebel Violence

Essay IV: Blue Helmets as Targets: A Quantitative Analysis of Rebel violence against Peacekeepers

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Of course, while this dissertation has profited tremendously from all the input by colleagues and friends, the mistakes remaining are solely mine.

Berlin, September 2017

Nynke Salverda

Introduction to the dissertation

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of the causes and consequences of multiparty civil wars. It shows that actors in a civil war are interlinked and that the actions of one actor can influence behavior of any other actor and even the behavior of potential actors. Civil wars are complex and often feature a myriad of actors that influence the intensity, the duration and the outcome of the conflicts as well as the different types of violence. The larger the number of actors involved in a conflict, the more complex these dynamics become. While civil wars are often portrayed as a dyadic interaction between the government and a single rebel group, this is far from reality. Between 1946 and 2015, in more than half of those countries that experienced civil war two or more rebel groups were active.[1] However, governments and rebel groups are not the only actors in civil wars: Frequently pro-government militias, foreign sponsors, and peacekeeping missions also influence the behavior of conflict actors, conflict dynamics and conflict outcomes.

A recent and extreme example of a multiparty civil war is the conflict in Syria. Here, observers, experts and participants alike have problems even identifying how many actors are taking part in the conflict (D. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2016; UCDP, 2017b). Some list over a thousand actors (BBC, 2013). These actors form continuously switching alliances only uniting in the common goal of targeting the government, and fight against each other for power and control. Not only rebel groups contribute to the proliferation of actors in Syria. The country has also seen several foreign actors involved, including direct interventions by Russia and the United States. All of this combined produced an intractable civil war that has claimed almost half a million lives, displaced more than six million people internally and forced over five million people to flee the country (UNHCR, 2017). While the Syrian civil war is extreme in several ways, many other contemporary civil wars such as those taking place in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Colombia testify to similar dynamics. It is thus paramount to gain a better understanding of the causes and consequences of civil wars with a multitude of actors.

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[1] These statistics include only the most violent rebel groups, those that are involved in at least moderate levels of violence against the government in a given year. Many rebel groups do not reach this threshold at all, or not every year, and are thus not included in these statistics. This implies that these statistics are most likely underreporting reality and that many more conflicts involve more than two rebel groups.

It is only in recent years that academic research has started to focus on the consequences of multiparty civil wars. Important findings are that conflicts with more actors last longer, are deadlier and are more difficult to solve (D. Cunningham, 2006; D. Cunningham et al., 2016). Conflicts in which two rebel groups fight against each other also see more violence against civilians (Wood & Kathman, 2015). Another strand of research has looked into fragmentation within ethnopolitical movements, finding, for instance, that the more fragmented the movement is, the more likely it is that a civil war is going to erupt (K. Cunningham, 2013), the higher the levels of violence against the state is going to be, and the more fighting between these factions is going to occur (K. Cunningham, Bakke, & Seymour, 2012). Others have studied diverse aspects of interrebel conflict (e.g., Christia, 2008; Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Nygård & Weintraub, 2014; Warren & Troy, 2015); rebel group splintering (Asal, Brown, & Dalton, 2012; Driscoll, 2012; Findley & Rudloff, 2012; Metelits, 2009; Staniland, 2012) and cooperation between rebel groups (Akcinaroglu, 2012; Bapat & Bond, 2012; Christia, 2012). While this literature has been growing, the causes and consequences of civil wars with several actors are still poorly understood. In this dissertation, I address this gap by exploring the causes and consequences of multiparty civil wars.

More specifically, Essay I and Essay II focus on reasons why some civil wars have multiple actors. Essay I studies differences in the formation rate of rebel groups across the seven states of Northeast India. It investigates why some conflicts only have one rebel group, while others see multiple groups becoming active. Essay II (co-authored with Sabine Otto) studies a specific way in which a new rebel group can join a conflict, namely by breaking away from an already existing group to form a splinter group. The essay looks specifically into the organizational structures of rebel groups, combining hierarchical and social relationships in order to explain rebel group disintegration. Essay III and Essay IV move away from the reasons behind why a conflict can see more than two actors and focus on the consequences of this. Essay III studies violent interactions between rebel groups and asks how different conflict dynamics, specifically negotiations and battles between a rebel group and the government, influence interrebel fighting. Finally, Essay IV widens the scope of conflict actors by studying why rebels decide to fight against UN peacekeeping operations.

Taken together, this dissertation makes several theoretical and empirical contributions to the civil war literature. Theoretically, the dissertation demonstrates the importance of interlinkages and interconnectedness between different actors in a civil war. When a civil conflict has merely two actors, it is clear that the actions of one actor influence the other actor. I provide evidence that this also holds up when a civil war has multiple actors. The essays in this dissertation indicate that actors update their information and make strategic choices dependent on the number of other actors in a conflict and their actions. I suggest that rebel groups can be influenced by other groups that they do not

directly interact with, but who are in geographic proximity, fighting against the same government. This implies that it is important to move beyond the dyad and consider interactions between all conflict actors when studying the causes and dynamics of civil conflicts. This dissertation gives theoretical insight into different aspects of civil conflicts with multiple actors. For instance, Essay III shows that when a rebel group is successful in battles against the government, it is more likely to be involved in fighting with other rebel groups. What happens in one conflict cleavage thus appears to influence other cleavages. In Essay I, I find evidence that conflict dynamics can also influence rebel groups who are considering joining this conflict system. The essay suggests that potential rebel leaders will decide whether or not there is space for their new organization depending on the number of actors already active in the system.

This dissertation also makes a set of empirical contributions to the field. I move beyond the standard actors in conflict research. For instance, in Essay I, I study not only those rebel groups that have reached the common 25 battle-related deaths threshold, but also smaller groups that have not (yet) reached this threshold, arguing that these rebel groups also influence the behavior of other groups. In Essay IV, I introduce peacekeepers as conflict actors to my analysis. Widening the scope of actors increases our understanding of conflict dynamics and aligns the analysis closer to the reality of these conflicts. This is not only important from an academic point of view, but also for policy makers: in the end, all actors in a conflict influence the conflict dynamics and need to be taken into account, for example, during mediation attempts, negotiations or interventions. Some of the essays also make novel data contributions or new empirical applications of existing data: in Essay I, I collect unique data on actors in Northeast India, also including those actors that have not reached commonly employed fatality thresholds. Essay IV includes novel data on violence against peacekeepers, including not only violence that results in peacekeeper deaths but also other violent acts such as being held hostage or their injury. Essay II is the first study to include a global analysis of rebel group splintering, by using existing data from the UCDP on splinter groups.[2]

This chapter serves as the introduction for this dissertation. It proceeds as follows: In the next section, I discuss the key theoretical concepts. I then provide an empirical overview of civil war actors. Following this, I situate the dissertation in the existing body of research and identify and describe in more detail the research gaps that this dissertation aims to fill. In the section that follows, I lay out the overarching theoretical foundation of the dissertation. Subsequently, I introduce all four essays. I conclude by highlighting the contributions this dissertation makes to civil conflict research. Finally, I also draw

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[2] Other studies focus on specific regions (Asal et al. 2012) or study splintering at the conflict level (Fjelde & Nilsson 2017).

implications from the findings of this dissertation, both for future research as well as for policy-makers.

Key concepts

The most central concept in this dissertation is that of a 'civil war'. Here, I define a civil war as a violent conflict between a government and one or more organized rebel groups, where the contested incompatibility is either control over a certain territory or over the whole country. This definition closely follows the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) definition of armed conflict. However, it leaves out the threshold of 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year that UCDP employs and instead studies all violent conflict in which a rebel group is involved. Considering that even smaller groups can still influence the dynamics of a civil war in significant ways, I find it important to also study those groups not reaching this threshold. For reasons of data availability and comparability with existing research, I do rely on UCDP data in three of the four essays in the dissertation (Essay II, Essay III and Essay IV). This means that empirically I often use the threshold of 25 battle-related deaths. When it comes to defining rebel groups, I follow UCDP in its definition of formally armed groups: "Any non-governmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force." (UCDP, 2017a). These armed groups can fight against the state, against other armed groups, against other conflict actors (such as peacekeepers) or against civilians.

It is crucial for our understanding of civil wars to note that they are not limited to one rebel group, but can contain multiple rebel groups. It is also important to note that a country can be ravaged by several civil conflicts at the same time. Take for instance Ethiopia, a country troubled by civil conflicts since the last emperor, Haile Sellasie, was overthrown. The UCDP lists a total of eight separate but concurrent conflicts. Seven of these conflicts are between government and rebel groups that want control over a certain territory (among these territories were Eritrea, Oromiya and Ogaden), and one is over control over government power. In this last conflict, the Ethiopian government has faced at least three different rebel groups. It ended when the biggest group, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), ousted the military junta led by Mengistu Mariam and seized power in 1991.

Another key concept in this dissertation is that of a conflict system. I follow Wood and Kathman (2015), who argue that a conflict system consists of all actors in a given geographic area that influence each other. The actors can range from rebel groups, governments, peacekeepers to pro-government militia. The geographical area can also differ from a country to a province or state. It is important that the actors are relevant to each other, either competing for similar goals, against similar actors, in the same conflict or depending on similar resources. It is in this conflict system that actors influence each other.

Similarly to studying civil wars with a number of actors, a large part of the literature focuses on dynamics within ethnopolitical separatist movements (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012; K. Cunningham et al., 2012; Mosinger, 2017; Seymour, 2014; Seymour, Bakke, & Cunningham, 2016). Bakke, Cunningham and Seymour define a movement as those representing "an underlying group in whose name and interest it – and its constituent organizations – claims to act" (2012, p. 267). A movement can thus comprise several different groups, both those acting violently and those using non-violent means. It is important to note that while I contribute to this literature on the fragmentation of movements in the dissertation, I choose to move beyond the movement level of analysis. A conflict system can contain multiple movements, and I suggest that actors in a movement will not only interact with groups in their own movement, but also with groups outside of their movement. For instance, Bakke Cunningham and Seymour (2012, p. 77) list the Bodo movement, which is active in the Indian province of Assam. This movement consists of, in total, 14 separate groups.[3] If one instead treats the province of Assam as a conflict system, the analysis would – excluding non-violent groups - also include three violent groups belonging to the Adivasi movement, three factions representing the Dimasa movement and four groups fighting for the Karbi people, besides the (arguably largest) Bodo movement.

Painting the picture: Multiparty civil wars

In this section I provide descriptive statistics of multiparty civil wars. The aim of this section is twofold: First, to show that a large amount of conflicts involve multiple rebel groups, and second, to illustrate the variation in this. The empirics demonstrate that it is important to focus on civil conflicts with several actors, as these are increasingly common in conflicts around the world, and thereby highlight the relevance of this dissertation.

Figure 1 plots the number of rebel groups and the number of conflicts in the world from 1946 till 2015. It shows that in most years there are more rebel groups than conflicts, indicating that at least some conflicts have several rebel groups. The data is drawn from the UCDP dyadic dataset, version 4-2016 (Harbom, Melander, & Wallensteen, 2008; Melander, Pettersson, & Themnér, 2016). Note that here I refer only to state-based conflicts, meaning between the government and an organized rebel group. This thus excludes conflicts between rebel groups and/or rebel groups that have not fought the government yet. It also only counts rebel groups in years that they are considered active, disregarding years in which they have not reached the 25 battle-related deaths threshold. Figure 1 also shows that the difference between the total number of

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[3] Note that Bakke, Cunningham and Seymour include violent and non-violent groups.

conflicts and the total number of rebel groups increased significantly after 1975.[4]
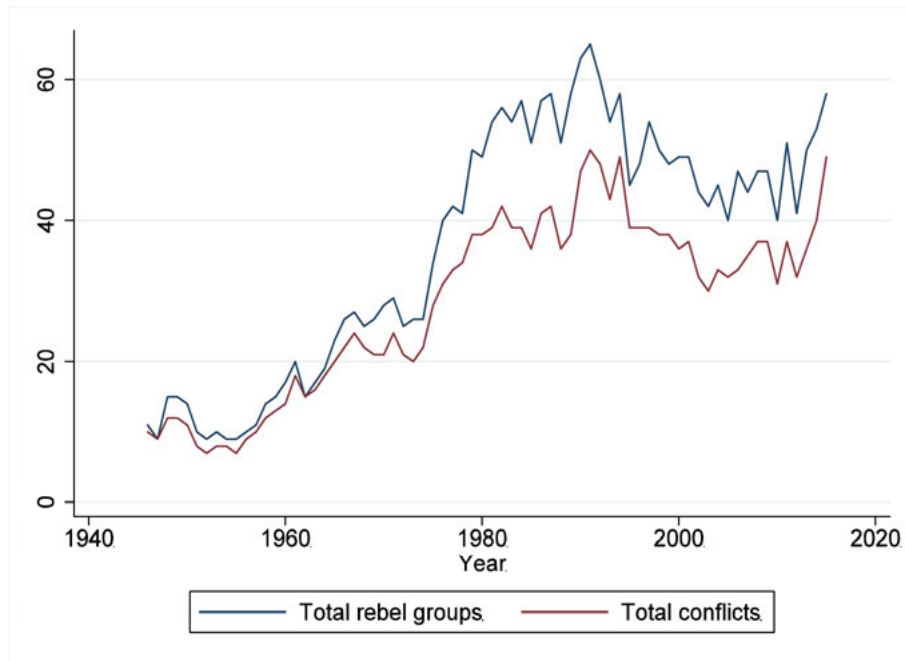
Figure 1. Total number of rebel groups and conflicts, 1946-2015

I now widen the scope to include all formally organized rebel actors and look specifically at the time-frame 1989-2015 using the UCDP Georeferenced Events Dataset (GED; Croicu & Sundberg, 2016; Sundberg & Melander, 2013). This means that I include all rebel groups, regardless of whether they fought against the government, other rebel groups or civilians. All these rebel groups have at some point in time been involved in at least 25 battle-related deaths, but are also included in periods where they do not reach this threshold, giving a more accurate picture of the number of groups active. Drawing on this data, Figure 2 shows the total share of conflicts between 1989 and 2015 that had two or more non-state actors. On average, a quarter of conflicts in this time period involve two or more actors.

Given that multiple conflicts can take place in a country simultaneously, influencing government- and conflict resolution strategies, it is also interesting to look at the number of countries that face more than two rebel groups. Figure 3 is again based on the UCDP GED dataset and pictures the share of countries (only those involved in conflict) with more than two rebel groups

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[4] Note that this increase can also be due to increased coding rules, instead of an actual increase in the number of rebel groups (Harbom, Melander, & Wallensteen, 2008).

active at the same time. It also shows that a large number of countries (on average 44 percent) witness at least two rebel groups active at the same time.
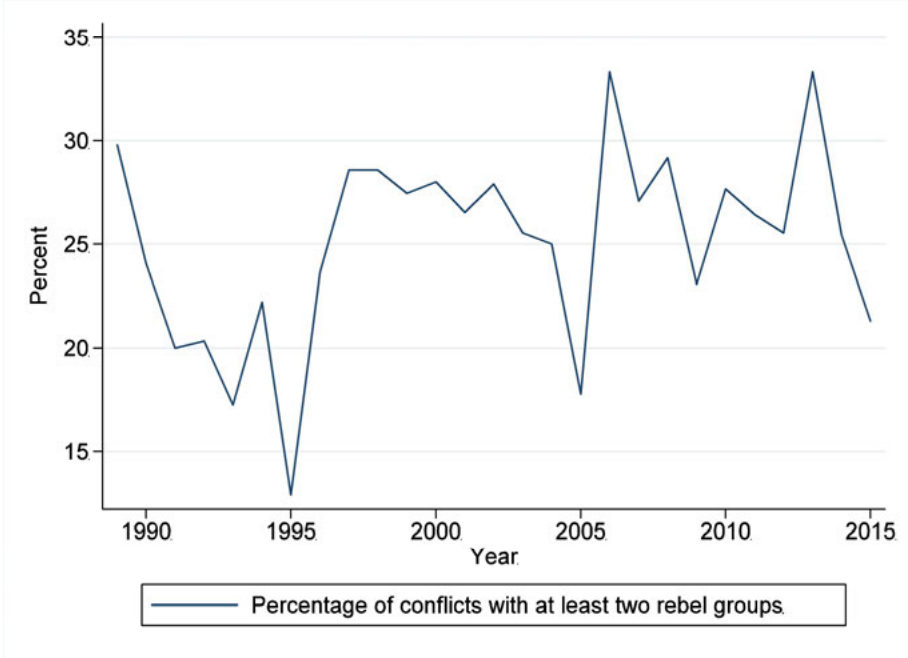
Figure 2. Share of conflicts with at least two non-state actors
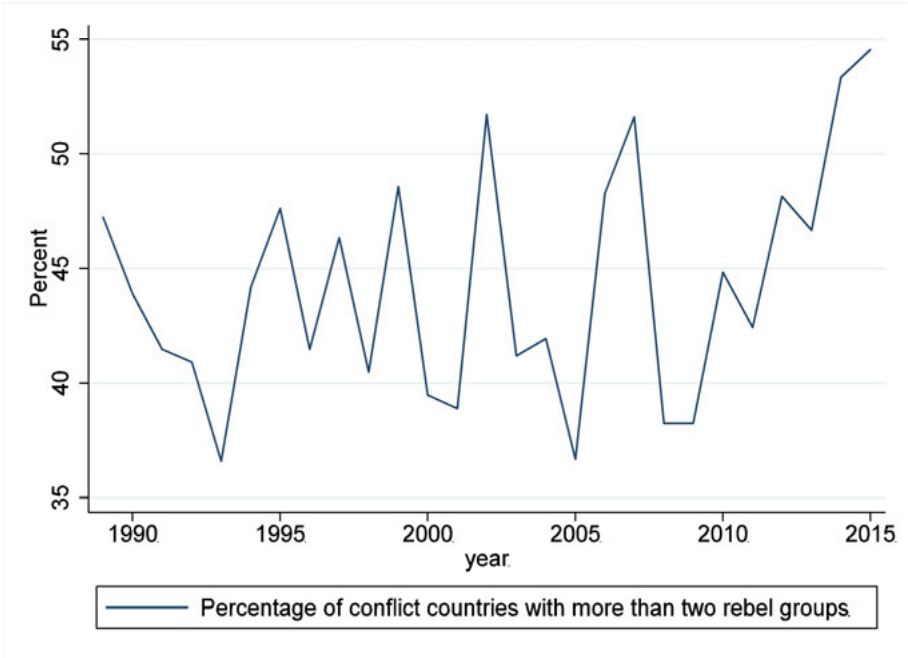
Figure 3. Share of conflict countries with at least two non-state actors

All figures above have looked at rebel groups that have at some point in time crossed the 25 battle-related deaths threshold. This means that these data do not capture rebel groups which have not managed to cross this threshold. These groups might nonetheless influence conflict dynamics. In Essay I, for the seven states of Northeastern India I have coded the period of activity of rebel groups that have not crossed this threshold, but where there is evidence that they have been active. Here, I use these data to show the difference between groups in the UCDP and groups not coded by the UCDP. Figure 4 shows this discrepancy. It demonstrates that at the highest peak, in 2012, the difference between groups coded by the UCDP and groups that I found to have existed at this point in time was 49. I coded 52 groups active in the Northeastern Indian states in this year, whereas UCDP only included three active groups. While it is likely that many of the groups that are not included in UCDP data are not as politically relevant, they may still influence conflict dynamics.[5]
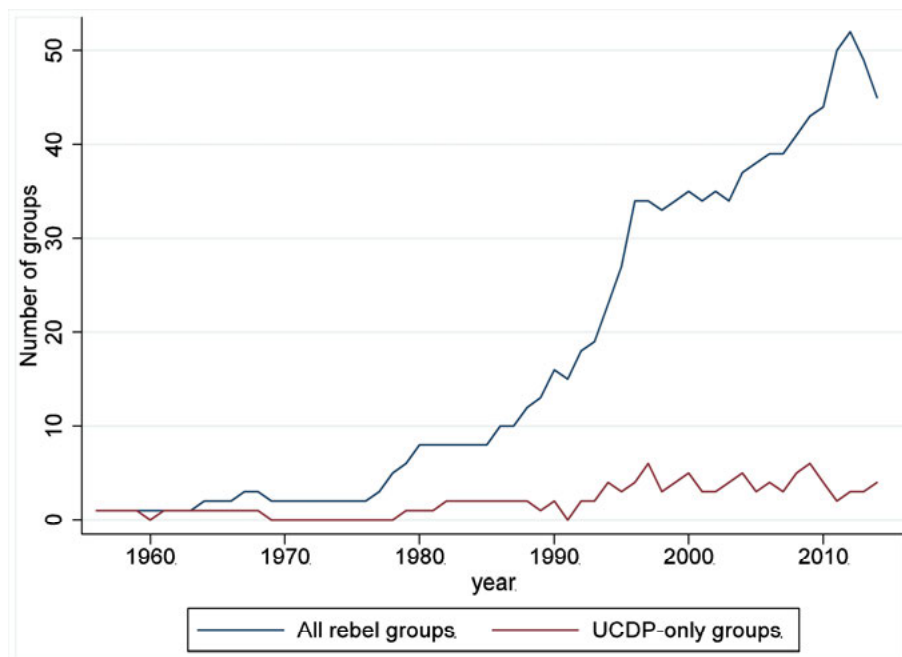
Figure 4. Active groups included in the UCDP data and those that are not coded by UCDP in the seven Northeast Indian states, 1956-2014.

These descriptive statistics show that many conflicts have more than two actors, and it is thus important to know more about how these conflicts become

[5] I am however aware that it is not possible on a global level to systematically include these small groups, as there is no reliable data available, and they are often not mentioned in news sources. The India analysis was only possible due to a reliable source listing all groups active in India (SATP, 2017), and hand-coding in a limited geographic area.

multiparty, and how this influences the conflict dynamics. In the next section, I will introduce all literature studying the causes and dynamics of civil wars with several actors.

Literature review

In recent years, a growing number of scholars has started studying civil wars with multiple actors. Two strands of research are especially relevant for this dissertation: first, a body of literature that focuses on the causes of rebel group fragmentation and second, those studies that look at the dynamics and consequences of civil wars with several actors. In this section, I will introduce these fields and identify the research gaps that this dissertation addresses.

Causes of multiparty civil wars

While there is a growing literature investigating the consequences and dynamics of civil wars with multiple actors, the question of *why* these conflicts have more than two actors remains understudied. Two fields of study can be identified, a small field focusing on the causes of fragmentation within a rebel movement, and a larger field studying factions of a rebel group breaking off and starting a new group. I will discuss both fields here.

First, focusing on movement fragmentation, Bakke, Cunningham and Seymour (2012) pioneered this field of study. They conceptualize fragmentation as the interplay between the number of organizations in a movement, the degree of institutionalization across these organizations, and the distribution of power within the movement (p. 266). This implies that movements not only consist of rebel groups, but also include non-violent political groups representing a certain group. Mosinger (2017) builds upon this work and studies how a rebel group's relations with a civilian constituency influences fragmentation. He finds that rebel groups that are 'stationary' and foster consensual relationships with civilians rather than coercive ones are less likely to fragment. However, when there are widespread civilian grievances, rebel movements are more likely to fragment, as these grievances motivate the formation of more dissident groups (Mosinger, 2017).

Seymour, Bakke and Cunningham (2016) focus specifically on ethnopolitical movements (and study both violent and non-violent actors within this movement). They show that the dynamics both within a movement and between different movements influence the number of actors in a movement. More specifically, the type of demands, repression, accommodation and the presence of violence as well as foreign fighters lead to movement fragmentation. Fragmentation within a movement already matters before a civil war breaks out. The more fragmented a self-determination movement is, the more

likely it is to be involved in a civil conflict as it faces credibility and information problems, making bargaining more difficult (K. Cunningham, 2013). Fjelde and Nilsson (2017) explain why some conflicts see more rebel groups through a barriers-to-entry approach. They argue that aspiring groups in a conflict where there is already a rebel group present will face certain costs that the original group did not have. They find that in environments where the already existing group has strong ethnic or leftist ties, there are strong structural barriers to entry, leading to a lower risk of fragmentation. On the other hand, when negotiations are ongoing, the barriers to entry are lower and fragmentation is more likely.

Second, one specific way in which a new rebel group can join a conflict system is when a group breaks apart from an already existing rebel group and becomes a new conflict actor. The literature on why an established rebel group experiences splintering is well developed, and has two points of focus. First, those who study the effect of different conflict dynamics on rebel group splintering and second, those who study the effect of organizational characteristics on the likelihood that an organization experiences a split. A common argument is that splintering occurs due to disputes over leadership and strategy (Asal et al., 2012; K. Cunningham, 2011; Kenny, 2010) or more specifically when moderates and extremists within the group disagree (Kydd & Walter, 2002; Stedman, 1997; Zirakzadeh, 2002). This is especially relevant when there are attempts to resolve the conflict and factions within a group disagree. Building on this, Olson Lounsbery and Cook (2011) find that rebel groups are significantly more likely to splinter when mediation occurs. Battlefield dynamics can also be a cause of rebel group splintering. Woldemariam (2014), for instance, looks at the Eritrean Liberation Front and finds that splintering is more likely to occur both when groups make significant battle gains and when they incur great battle losses. When rebels loose battles, this leads to the questioning of strategy and leadership. Whereas when rebel groups win on the battlefield, questions about the potential post-war division of resources are brought up, which were previously suppressed in light of collective self-defense (Woldemariam, 2014). External sponsors can also cause rebel groups to split. Given that internal disagreement about strategy is common in rebel groups (Staniland, 2014; Tamm, 2016), state sponsors can use that to force a rebel group to fragment. By creating imbalances through the allocation of funding within a rebel group, especially through channeling funds to an internal rival of the rebel group leader, state sponsors can enlarge the likelihood of an organizational split (Tamm, 2016).

While dynamics external to the rebel group, such as negotiations, battle outcomes and state sponsors can influence splintering, internal dynamics within the group can also increase the probability of splintering. There are two explanations for splintering based on a rebel group's organizational structure. The first explanation focuses on the formal organizational structure of a rebel

group and argues that certain organizational structures are conducive to organizational fragmentation. Asal, Brown and Dalton (2012) for instance argue that organizations with factional and/or competing leadership structures are more likely to splinter. Johnston (2008) finds that centralized organizations are less likely to splinter than decentralized organizations. A second explanation for rebel group splintering focuses on the informal structures in a group. Short social distance in terms of ideology or ethnicity (Gates, 2002) and reliance on pre-existing networks for a social basis (Staniland, 2012, 2014) increase the ability of a group to stay coherent. Additionally, the type of recruits a group is able to take onboard influences its coherence. Weinstein argues that groups who can offer recruits non-material rewards are more likely to stay united, since their recruits will be more committed to the group cause than individuals attracted by material rewards (Weinstein, 2007).

While there are explanations for why some conflicts are multiparty while others are not, there are several research gaps to be identified. First, most studies that look at the reason behind conflicts being multi-party focus on the ethno-political movement as a level of analysis (for an exception, see Fjelde and Nilsson (2017)). This underplays the agency of individual groups and overlooks those groups who are not motivated by ethnic grievances. Furthermore, this literature also does not investigate the interactions between movements. Often, several movements can be found in any one country, and these movements are likely to influence each other. Second, looking specifically at the literature on rebel group splintering, a large part of the field studies the impact of organizational characteristics on the likelihood of splintering. More specifically, there are two bodies of literature, those looking at the effect of the formal make-up of a rebel group and those looking at the informal structures in a group. However, these relationships have not been looked at jointly. Given that every rebel group has formal and informal structures, these should also have a joint impact on the likelihood that a group will experience splintering.

Consequences and dynamics of multiparty civil wars

A large part of the literature that acknowledges that many civil wars have more than two actors focuses on the consequences and dynamics of this empirical fact. In this section, I will discuss the literature on the consequences of civil wars with several rebel groups, the dynamics of these conflicts and how peace-keepers can become a conflict actor.

   Those that study the consequences of civil wars having more than two actors look at the effect of the presence of multiple rebel groups on the duration and outcome of a civil war. In an initial move beyond the study of civil war as simply being dyadic, Cunningham (2006) shows that civil wars with multiple veto-players are more difficult to resolve. He identifies veto-players as groups that have distinct preferences from other actors, are internally cohesive and

have the ability to continue the conflict unilaterally. Therefore, they can effectively 'veto' any comprehensive peace agreement, political solution or settlement unilaterally. Reasons for this can be that there are shifting alliances between different actors, but also because there are fewer agreements that are acceptable to all, and actors have an incentive to hold out and force other actors to their reservation points (D. Cunningham, 2006). Findley and Rudloff (2012) on the other hand find that civil wars where there is actor fragmentation do not necessarily last longer and are likely to end in a negotiated settlement. One potential reason they offer for this counterintuitive finding is that actors might fragment because part of the group is more interested in a settlement. Similarly, Nilsson (2010) finds that weaker rebel groups are more likely to sign a peace agreement with the government when there are more rebel groups active in the conflict.

The presence of multiple rebel actors can also have an adverse effect on peace processes. Spoilers can undermine negotiations or deviate from peace agreements (Nilsson, 2008; Nilsson & Söderberg Kovacs, 2011; Stedman, 1997), leading to conflict recurrence. Spoilers are usually seen as conflict actors (or factions within conflict actors), who use violent and non-violent means to undermine negotiations and peace processes. Spoiling can be part of the bargaining process when, for example, actors try to change the terms of negotiations, but can also fall outside of the bargaining process when actors deliberately try to halt the process. Spoilers range from strong to weak actors, and will choose their actions on the basis of their capability and opportunity structures (Zahar, 2010), which is influenced by, among other things, conflict dynamics.

When a civil conflict has multiple rebel groups, it opens up a wide range of dynamics, from side-switching and alliance formation to different types of violence. One of the ways that rebel groups can benefit from other rebel groups active in the same conflict is by forming alliances. The formation of alliances is a tactical process, allowing rebel groups to join forces and together become stronger vis-à-vis the government and other actors (Akcinaroglu, 2012; Bapat & Bond, 2012; Christia, 2012). However, alliances also complicate the dynamics of civil wars, because they are often fragile and can shift. From a rational choice perspective, rebel groups want to form the smallest possible alliance that has the chance to win. Within this alliance, they want to be the strongest group (Christia, 2012). This leads weaker rebel groups to stay out of alliances, resulting in shifting alliances and longer conflicts. Shifting alliances lead to larger information asymmetries on the battlefield, but can also make negotiated solutions more difficult (D. Cunningham, 2006). Interrebel alliances can complicate the dynamics of civil wars further by bringing in external state actors as enforcers of the alliance, which is especially true for alliances between weaker rebel groups (Bapat & Bond, 2012). Alliances formed during civil wars can also lead to civil war recurrence, since they can render parties

unable to overcome the commitment problem, hence causing civil war onset by themselves (Zeigler, 2016).

Not only do alliances form and change in civil wars, sometimes parties completely switch sides. Research has mostly focused on ethnic groups defecting to 'the other side'. Kalyvas (2008) was among the first to argue that ethnicity is fluid and that coercion, opportunism and especially revenge play large roles in ethnic defection. Staniland (2012) builds on this and argues that weaker groups within an ethnic movement are more likely to switch sides, especially when a stronger group has hegemonic tendencies. Seymour (2014) studies the fluid ethnic relations in the civil war in Sudan and finds that ethnic groups' side-switching is stimulated by short-term opportunities and benefits based on political rivalries. Factions align with more powerful groups to gain weapons and military support against local competitors. Armed actors, however, not only need a motive to switch sides, they also need to be capable of doing so. Those groups that are more homogenous and cohesive are able to overcome internal coordination problems and thus have the capability to switch sides. When the number of armed actors on their side increases, or when the government is weak, groups are more likely to switch sides, given the capabilities to do so (Otto, 2017).

Whereas alliances and side-switching are non-violent dynamics between rebel groups, civil conflicts with multiple rebel groups also often see violent interactions between different groups. Given that all groups fight against the government, rebel groups need to position themselves relative to one another. The literature has provided different explanations as to how and why rebel groups fight against each other. Focusing on ethnic movements, a large strand of the literature studies the violent interactions between different groups making up an ethnic movement (Christia, 2008; K. Cunningham et al., 2012; Lilja & Hultman, 2011; Warren & Troy, 2015). Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour (2012) study ethnopolitical movements and find that the more factions there are using violence, the more likely it is that these factions also fight amongst themselves. The violence occurs between those factions that can gain political relevance due to military strength. Lilja and Hultman (2011) also focus on ethnic groups and argue that rebels fight against co-ethnic rebels in order to gain leadership dominance. In this case, their goal is to be the sole group to represent the ethnic community. Looking at the organizational structures of ethnic movements, Warren and Troy (2015) argue that violence within ethnic groups happens because of subgroup entrepreneurs who want to secure their own leadership position or a larger portion of the group's resources. However, they show that this only happens when groups are medium-sized. Small groups lack the internal opportunities for this type of violence, because the group's leadership is more easily able to repress it. In large groups, it is the state in which the group operates that suppresses this type of behavior (Warren & Troy, 2015).

Moving beyond ethnic movements and studying rebel violence in general, several authors argue that interrebel fighting can be explained through rebels aiming to increase their political or material leverage (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Nygård & Weintraub, 2014). Fjelde and Nilsson (2012) argue that rebels fight against other rebel groups in order to gain both material and political leverage. More precisely, they find that interrebel violence is more likely when rebels operate in areas that have drugs, when groups are relatively strong or relatively weak, when groups control territory that is out of reach of the government and when the government is weak. Also focusing on the distribution of resources, Nygård and Weintraub (2014) provide a formal model that shows that interrebel fighting occurs mostly when the status-quo in terms of resource distribution does not adequately reflect each rebel group's military strength.

Civil wars with several rebel groups often see different types of violence. One can broadly distinguish violence between the government and rebel groups, violence between rebel groups, and violence directed against civilians. Violence against civilians can also be linked to an environment with several rebel groups (Wood & Kathman, 2015). Wood and Kathman (2015) show that rebels are more likely to target civilians when they are in fierce competition and especially when a new rebel group has entered the conflict system. Changes in the balance of power reduce the number of agreements that are acceptable to all parties and increase information asymmetries, leading to the targeting of civilians.

There are, however, more actors in a civil war than just rebel groups and governments. A wide range of 'outside' actors also influence conflict dynamics, ranging from pro-government militias (e.g., Carey & Mitchell, 2017; Otto, 2017) to third party interventions (e.g., Balch-Lindsay, Enterline, & Joyce, 2008; Findley & Marineau, 2015; Findley & Teo, 2006; Gleditsch, 2007; Regan, 2002). Particularly interesting actors in this regard are peacekeeping operations. Impartial to other conflict actors, but not neutral to the outcome of a conflict, peacekeepers can influence conflict dynamics as soon as their boots are on the ground. Their impact on conflict dynamics is evident through the number of attacks on blue helmets. Nearly half of all UN peacekeeping operations are, at some point, targeted by rebel groups (Salverda, 2013). There is a handful of explanations for rebel violence against peacekeepers. In Essay IV, I am among the first to provide a cross-national study of rebel violence against peacekeepers. Arguing that peacekeepers are often seen as preventing the defeat of weaker parties, I find that especially stronger groups are likely to target these missions. Similarly, Ruggeri, Gizelis and Dorussen (2012) argue that weaker rebel groups are more likely to cooperate with peacekeeping operations. Fjelde, Hultman and Lindberg Bromley (2016) find that battlefield outcomes can explain rebel violence against peacekeepers: When rebel groups face losses, they are more likely to target peacekeepers in order to derail the peace-process *and* to promote internal cohesion. These studies convincingly

show that 'outside parties' are often seen as 'full actors' in a civil war and influence the conflict dynamics.

The literature focusing on the dynamics and consequences of civil war with multiple actors has developed significantly in recent years. Studies have moved away from looking at civil wars in purely dyadic terms and have acknowledged that these conflicts often are waged by several actors and that this, in turn, influences the dynamics of the conflicts. While the literature has evolved significantly, there are two noticeable research gaps.

First, many of the arguments focusing on the dynamics and consequences of civil wars with several rebel groups focus directly or indirectly on political relevance (Akcinaroglu, 2012; Bapat & Bond, 2012; Christia, 2012; K. Cunningham et al., 2012; Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Lilja & Hultman, 2011; Nygård & Weintraub, 2014; Warren & Troy, 2015; Wood & Kathman, 2015). Arguments related to interrebel violence, alliances and civilian targeting all build on the idea that rebels behave in a certain way to improve their bargaining position. Indeed, the stronger a rebel group is, the better its bargaining position in potential negotiations with the government and the more likely it is to be a veto-player (D. Cunningham, 2006), or to even win the conflict. The consequences of this interrebel bargaining are often studied (e.g., K. Cunningham et al., 2012; Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Wood & Kathman, 2015). However, we do not know how different conflict dynamics influence this bargaining. For instance, how does the outcome of battles influence interrebel bargaining, or foreign support? How does interrebel bargaining play out during peace processes? Given that a group's primary reason for existing is a conflict with the government, it is puzzling that the influence of a group's conflict with the government on the entirety of the conflict system has not yet been studied. If all actions in a conflict influence the conflict system, then a rebel group's violent and non-violent interactions with the government need to influence the dynamics of a civil war with several actors.

Second, the literature that aims to move beyond the dyad focuses mostly on rebel groups as actors and does not acknowledge outside actors, even though these are also likely to influence conflict dynamics. A notable exception here are Bapat and Bond (2012), who argue that alliances between weaker rebel groups require outside enforcement in order to be sustainable. Yet, few studies have acknowledged that civil wars also become multi-party conflicts when outside actors join them. Potential external actors include third party interventions, peacekeepers and state-sponsors. Depending on the circumstances, these actors can be as much a part of the conflict system as the primary warring parties are.

Theoretical foundation

All essays in this dissertation study the relationship between actors in civil wars. While they focus on different aspects, they are built on one theoretical foundation. In short, all essays study how rebel groups can become viable *and* successful challengers against the state, and how other actors influence this. In this section, I will develop this theoretical foundation further.

The key concept that binds all essays together is that of a conflict system. This is a fluid and relational concept, which encompasses all actors in a given geographic area that influence each other (Wood & Kathman, 2015). When there are several actors in a conflict system, the actions of each actor will influence the behavior of other actors, leading to, for instance, interrebel fighting or violence against peacekeepers. Alternatively, potential actors can take into account the competition already present in a conflict system and decide for or against entering the system. I argue that relationships between actors in a conflict system, and even within actors, influence the ability of rebel groups to become, viable and successful challengers against the government.

A conflict system encompasses all actors active in a given geographic area. Often, this geographic area is a country, but it can also be a province, state or other sub-national geographic order. The geographical scope of the conflict system depends on how much actors rely on, and thus compete over, similar resources. In a large country, rebel groups that fight the government for different reasons, and are active on either side of the country, will not rely on similar resources, while the same rebel groups in a small country are likely to depend on similar resources. Actors in the conflict system can be governments, rebel groups, peacekeepers, other foreign actors and, in a wider sense, also civilians. What is important is that actors are relevant to each other, either competing for similar goals, against similar actors, in the same conflict or dependent on similar resources. A key example of a conflict system is the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu and Ituri, over 60 actors have been active from 1996 till 2015, excluding civilians. These actors include a large number of organized rebel groups, but also the government of the DRC, the UN peacekeeping operation MONUSCO, neighboring countries Uganda and Rwanda and several coalitions of different rebel groups (Croicu & Sundberg, 2016; Sundberg & Melander, 2013).

I assume that all actors in a conflict system act strategically. Their actions not only serve as a means to reach their primary goal (which is different for each actor), but also to influence the other actors in the conflict system. This logic rests on three assumptions: First, all actors in a conflict are rational actors. Second, all the actors aim to win or at least to be as strong as possible. While it is difficult for actors to win the entire conflict in a conflict system with several actors (D. Cunningham, 2006; Findley & Rudloff, 2012), actors will want to be perceived as being as strong as possible in order to have the

largest bargaining range in potential negotiations (Fearon, 1995). An exception is peacekeepers. While they are part of the conflict system, there goal is not to win a conflict, but to fulfill their mandate to the best of their capacity. Finally, I assume that most violent actions are visible and known to all actors within the conflict system. Violence is the best possible indicator for an actor's strength in the conflict system (Slantchev, 2003; Wagner, 2000). Actors in the system thus have information about each other's capacity and strength, and on the basis of this, form expectations about the future, which allows them to make decisions about which course of action to take.

Events in the conflict system will influence other actors in the same system. Take for example a conflict with three different rebel groups who are all fighting against the government: If the government fights against rebel group A, the other two groups, B and C, will take note of the battle outcomes and update their information accordingly. In this way, they have learned something about the strength of their opponent, and about the strength of a competitor. Depending on the outcome of the battle, they will update their expectations of the future. Similarly, if group B and C fight against each other, the government and group A will observe this and update their information. Even if we add peacekeepers to the system, the activities of a peacekeeping mission and its interactions with other actors will prompt all other conflict actors to update their information about other conflict parties. All actors will then make their strategic decisions in light of this information.
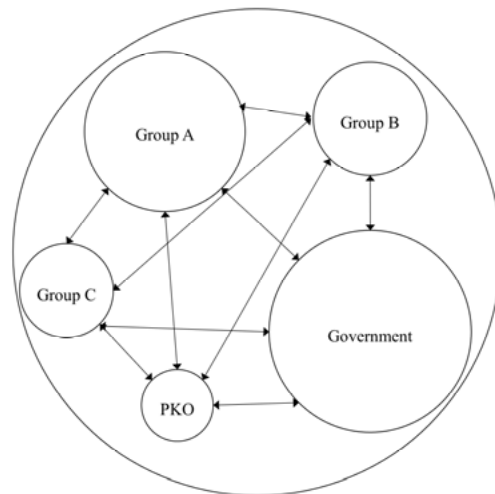

Figure 5. Graphical representation of a conflict system

Figure 5 shows a graphical representation of a simplified conflict system. It displays how relationships are formed between all actors. Each of these relationships, and actions between actors will influence the entire conflict system. While a rebel group's relationship (violent or nonviolent) with the government

is arguably the most central, this argument implies that relationships with other actors are also vital. Whereas most civil war literature that studies rebellion focuses on a group's interactions with the government, this framework builds upon the notion that the relationships and interactions between all members of the conflict system are important and influence future events in the system.

Summarizing, all essays in the dissertation depart from a similar theoretical logic: Relations between actors – parties in a conflict system or members of a rebel group – influence conflict dynamics.

Introducing the four essays

This dissertation consists out of four independent but interrelated essays. All essays contribute to our understanding of the causes and consequences of multiparty civil wars. In this section, I introduce the essays individually.

Essay I: How Many is too Many? A Density Dependence Approach to Understanding Rebel Group Formation in Northeast India

Essay I starts from the observation that the amount of rebel groups that form differs greatly across conflicts. Whereas some conflicts see the formation of over 20 rebel groups (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo), other conflicts only have one rebel group (e.g., civil war in Mozambique). Essay I aims to explain the variation in the formation rates of rebel groups. By doing so it makes three significant contributions: First, it is the first paper to study the variation in formation rates of rebel groups across conflicts. Given that conflicts with multiple, potentially competing, rebel groups last longer, are more difficult to solve and often see higher levels of violence against civilians (D. Cunningham, 2006; Wood & Kathman, 2015), exploring this variation is important. Second, it introduces a new theoretical argument to conflict research. Testing this argument not only further validates the theoretical logic, but also widens the theoretical scope of the field. Finally, in order to test the theoretical logic, I create a micro-level dataset including 100 rebel groups active in Northeast India. Doing so, I not only include rebel groups that have achieved high levels of violence against the government and are captured in regular datasets, I also capture most of the small groups that are often understudied.

In order to explain the variation in the formation of rebel groups across conflicts, I introduce a theoretical logic new to conflict research, called density dependence. This theoretical argument stems from evolutionary biology, but is often used in sociology and has been applied in political science, for instance, for explaining the formation of transgender interest groups (Nownes,

2010), interest group representation at the World Trade Organization (Hanegraaff, Beyers, & Braun, 2011), environmental justice organizations (Stretesky, Huss, & Lynch, 2012) and most recently private transnational regulatory organizations and international organizations in the climate change regime (Abbott, Green, & Keohane, 2016). Density dependence theory specifies that the formation rate of new organizations to a given population of organizations follows the form of an inverted U-curve. This U-curve is characterized by two stages, the legitimation stage and the competition stage. In the essay, I argue that a population of rebel groups is constituted by all rebel groups in a given political unit, as these groups are dependent on the same resources (material resources such as food, shelter and ammunition as well as immaterial resources such as information). When the density of rebel groups in the population is low, the organizational form of rebellion needs to gain legitimacy before more groups join the population. This is the legitimation stage. A potential rebel leader will need to decide whether rebellion is the best means to reach his/her goals, especially given the risks involved. However, there is room in the population for more rebel groups. The denser the population, the more rebellion is taken for granted as a means to reach a certain goal. At some point the population reaches its carrying capacity, and fewer new rebel groups form. This is the competition stage. Potential new rebel leaders will need to decide if there is place for them in the population. Given that rebel groups are dependent on the same pool of resources, the denser the population, the heavier the competition and the fewer new groups will be able to join a population. Taken together, the legitimation and competition stage lead to a hypothesis about an inverted U-curve between the density of the population of rebel groups in a given political unit and the formation of new rebel groups in the same population.

I test this argument using a novel dataset on rebel groups in Northeast India. Using a negative binomial model, I find that indeed the rate of rebel group formation in the Northeast Indian states follows the shape of an inverted U-curve, which gives credence to density dependence theory.

Essay II: Inside Rebel Groups: The Impact of Vertical and Horizontal Relations on Rebel Group Splintering (with Sabine Otto)

Essay II explores rebel group splintering. This essay studies a concrete way in which conflicts can become multiparty, namely by one group breaking apart into two or more groups. Previous explanations for this disintegration have either relied on organizational factors or on the social relations between rebels. Most of these studies have been based on case-study research or focused on specific regions, limiting their generalizability. In this essay, we combine the two strands of previous research and argue that both organizational factors and

social relations are important in explaining rebel group splintering. Furthermore, we carry out the first global, large-N study on rebel group splintering.

Theoretically, we unpack the assumption that rebel groups are unitary actors and stress the importance of the relations within rebel groups. We argue that there are two type of relations that are important, horizontal and vertical relations. Both contribute to important mechanisms that either facilitate structural integrity or splintering. Vertical relations are those that connect individuals in a top-down manner and define the hierarchy of a rebel group. These relationships affect the ability to communicate effectively, to control the behavior of members and sub-units, and to trust individuals and leadership. Horizontal relations are those that form social bonds between members regardless of their hierarchical position. Horizontal relations impact an individual's intrinsic incentives to comply with the organization's rules via the mechanisms of identification and trust.

First, vertical relations set up the hierarchical system of a rebel group. While every organization has a type of hierarchical set-up, how the power is devolved across the layers of the hierarchy differs greatly. We argue that this depends on the degree of centralization within an organization and focus on two ideal-type organizations, centralized and decentralized ones. These organizational set-ups perform very differently in terms of communication, control and trust. This leads to different predicted outcomes. We contend that centralized organizations are better at communicating clearly and sending messages up and down the information chain, limiting information asymmetries, facilitating controlling behavior and providing possibilities for debate and exchange as well as creating a sense of belonging. Compared with decentralized organizations, this should allow centralized organizations to be better able to control their members. A better information flow will enhance the ability to monitor and punish shirking behavior and increase the costs for belligerents to disobey decisions. This curbs the opportunity for splintering. Decentralized organizations lack effective monitoring and punishment systems and are likely to allow sub-commanders to follow private interests and goals, which can lead to organizational disintegration. Finally, centralized command structures should be better able to create trust between members and trust in the organization as a whole by providing clear hierarchical structures leading to predictability and certainty. Both predictability and certainty lead to higher levels of organizational identification and commitment. Taken together, we hypothesize that decentralized organizations are more likely to experience splintering than centralized organizations.

Second, horizontal relations allow for individuals to relate with other individuals in the organization, regardless of their position in the hierarchy. Horizontal relations create an intrinsic incentive for individuals to comply with the rules and norms of the organization, via the mechanisms of identification and internalization. Identification results from the believe that the organization and

its leadership are legitimate and have goals coherent with those of an individual (Tyler, Callahan, & Frost, 2007). Internalization gives a place for the organization's values in an individual's value system. This leads to an intrinsic motivation to comply with the rules because individuals believe in the content of the rules, orders and goals (Kelman, 1958). Thus, both identification and internalization lead to intrinsic incentives to comply with the rules, and lower the likelihood that individuals are joining or initiating a splintering faction. We also argue that the presence of strong horizontal relations can complement vertical relations. When vertical relations are weak and the likelihood of splintering is large, the presence of horizontal relations can make the likelihood of splintering smaller.

In order to test these hypotheses, we combine a number of different datasets. We operationalize horizontal relations in four different ways: recruitment along ethnic lines, having strong ideological motives, group size and forced recruitment (which is a negative operationalization). Controlling for different conflict and group-level variables, we find that decentralized organizations are more likely to experience splintering than centralized ones. We also find some evidence that having strong horizontal relations reduces the likelihood of splintering. Looking at the conditional effect, we surprisingly find no conclusive evidence that strong horizontal relations can mitigate the effect of having weak vertical relations. These findings show that it is important to unpack group structures and to look at the different types of relationships within a rebel group together.

Essay III: Fighting to be Seen: Battle Outcomes, Negotiations and Interrebel Violence

Essay III addresses one of the consequences of a conflict becoming a multi-party civil war, namely interrebel violence. Interrebel violence creates an additional risk for civilians and is likely to make a conflict more protracted. In order to explain conflict between rebel groups, I build on previous research which has argued that competition is the main cause for violence between rebel groups (K. Cunningham et al., 2012; Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Nygård & Weintraub, 2014). I argue that there are specific conflict dynamics that aggravate this competition, leading to interrebel violence. The paper makes two main contributions: First, whereas previous research has argued that interrebel violence is due to competition between rebel groups, I provide a more detailed theoretical argument about *when* this competition becomes so aggravated that it leads to violent interactions. Second, I contribute to our understanding of why conflicts with several rebel groups are likely to become protracted (Christia, 2012; D. Cunningham, 2006), by showing that what happens in one conflict cleavage affect other conflict actors.

The essay departs from the assumption that outcomes of battles between any dyad in a conflict system are visible to all other actors in the conflict system. I argue that in a conflict system with several actors, battles serve two purposes. First, they serve to make military gains and second, they serve as a means of providing information to other actors in the system (Slantchev, 2003; Wagner, 2000). This information is received by different audiences which update their believes on the strength and political relevance of the relevant actors. For instance, when a group that is previously thought of as weak wins a battle, this forces other actors to update their believes on the political relevance of this group. This can shape the expectations, and subsequently the behavior of conflict actors.

I argue that interrebel violence is strongly connected to dynamics in the conflict system. More precisely, there are two conflict dynamics that aggravate competition between rebel groups so that it leads to violent interactions. First, when rebel groups are successful in battles against the government, they are more likely to be involved in interrebel violence. This can either be because other rebel groups aim to prevent the successful group from becoming too strong and a future threat to a potential division of resources or because the successful rebel group can decide to make use of its increased strength and target other rebel groups in a hegemonic bid, as for instance, is found in the behavior of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. Thus, interrebel violence should be more likely when a rebel group is successful against the government.

Second, incidences of negotiations aggravate competition and are likely to lead to interrebel fighting. During negotiations, those groups that are thought of as being more relevant are more likely to get concessions from the government (D. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2009). While rebel groups want to show the government that they are powerful and important, they are not likely to target the government or civilians for fear of repercussions. Targeting rival rebel groups then serves two goals. First, it sends the message that the group is relatively strong and demonstrates how much of a threat the rebel group is to, e.g., a peace processes. Second, it shows that the defeated rebel group is neither as strong nor as relevant. Thus, interrebel violence should be more likely during ongoing negotiations.

I test these hypotheses using novel data on rebel group success against the government (Strandow, 2013) and UCDP data on non-state conflict from the GED dataset (Sundberg & Melander, 2013). I aggregate these data to the monthly level of analysis. Controlling for a number of conflict characteristics, I find that the likelihood of interrebel violence indeed increases when a rebel group remains or gains control over territory after a battle with the government. When negotiations are ongoing, the likelihood that a rebel group is involved in conflict with another rebel group increases from 8% to 17%. These results are robust to many different model specifications and show that conflict dynamics cannot be seen independently of each other.

Essay IV: Blue helmets as targets: A quantitative analysis of rebel violence against peacekeepers, 1989-2003. Published in *Journal of Peace Research,* vol. 50(6), 2013.

In Essay IV, I study rebel violence towards peacekeepers. I start from the observation that the government and rebel groups are often not the only actors in a civil war. If present in a civil war, peacekeepers also become a conflict actor and contribute to the dynamics of a conflict. The main justification for this departure point is the notion that while peacekeepers are neutral actors, they are not impartial. They will always aim to prevent total defeat of one party in the conflict, regardless of whether it is the government or a rebel group.

This implies that rebel groups see the role of peacekeepers differently, dependent on what they aim to achieve from the presence of the blue helmets. If a rebel group is relatively weak, peacekeepers will serve to protect them and can thus serve as a way to overcome the commitment problem. If, on the other hand, rebel groups are relatively strong, peacekeepers stand in their way to either victory or a beneficial negotiated outcome. Stronger rebels would prefer the non-deployment of peacekeepers or a mission with a risk-avoiding strategy, so that rebels can keep aiming to achieve all of their goals. Violence against peacekeepers is then used as a strategy to destabilize the peacekeeping mission and undermine its ability to achieve peace or stabilize the conflict. Historical examples show that using excessive force against peacekeepers can lead to withdrawal from the mission. Prominent examples are the departure of US forces from Somalia in 1994 and the withdrawal of Belgian peacekeepers from Rwanda in the same year.

In the paper, I argue that while rebel groups that are relatively strong are more likely to fight against a peacekeeping operation, they will only do so if the peacekeepers are actually able to protect the weaker party. Small observer missions are not able to stand in the way of stronger rebel groups. Thus, the larger the peacekeeping operation, the more they are capable of hindering a group in achieving its goals and the more likely the mission is to be targeted by rebel groups. To test these arguments, I construct a novel dataset of violence against UN peacekeeping operations based on a chapter VI mandate, from 1989 to 2003. In the rebel-group-peacekeepers dyad dataset, I employ a broad definition of violence. I do not only include killings, but also include incidences of wounded blue helmets and kidnappings. In this way, I capture all violence aimed at influencing the behavior of the peacekeeping operation. My data collection shows that of the 24 UN peacekeeping operations that were active in this time period, at least 13 experienced violence directed against them.

Using data on the relative strength and fighting capacity of rebel groups, I find support for my first hypothesis. Stronger rebel groups are indeed more likely to fight against peacekeepers. I do not find support for the argument that

stronger rebels will be more likely to fight against larger peacekeeping operations. These findings contribute to our understanding of the role that peacekeepers can play in a conflict. They show that when peacekeepers are active in an ongoing conflict, they need to be seen as an actor in their own right, because they influence the conflict dynamics. Additionally, they show that the size of a peacekeeping operation does not matter for the risk it faces.

Conclusions

In this dissertation, I study the causes and consequences of multiparty civil wars. All essays directly target specific gaps in the literature and make individual contributions enhancing our knowledge of civil wars. In Essay I, I introduce a novel theoretical approach to the field of conflict research and test it empirically using a newly created dataset of rebel groups in Northeast India. In Essay II, my co-author and I combine two fields of research that have not been tested jointly and carry out the first global analysis of rebel group splintering. Essay III is the first to look at how specific conflict dynamics influence competition between rebel groups in such a way that leads to interrebel conflict and to test this dynamic argument empirically. Finally, Essay IV introduces a new actor to the conflict system and is the first to look at how peacekeepers influence conflict dynamics and which risks peacekeepers face when deployed in an ongoing conflict.

Besides individual contributions, the dissertation as a whole also makes contributions to the literature. One of the major theoretical contributions of this dissertation is that it shows that actions in a civil war with several rebel groups do not happen in a vacuum, but influence each other, e.g., by shaping the perception of other actors about the distribution of power within the conflict system. Essay I, Essay III and Essay IV make contributions to the literature that moves beyond the conceptualization of civil war as a purely dyadic phenomenon. Looking at different actors and their interactions, these three essays provide evidence that all actors and actions in a conflict system are interlinked and influence each other. Essay I shows that groups make the decision of whether or not to join the conflict system as rebel groups depending on the number of other rebel groups in the population. Essay III suggests that violence between one rebel group and the government influences conflict dynamics between this rebel group and other groups in the conflict system. In a similar vein, Essay IV argues that peacekeepers will be seen as a conflict actor when entering during an active conflict and that they run the risk of being targeted. Together, the essays suggest that in a conflict system with several actors, actions by any actor can influence other actors and motivate them to behave in a certain way.

Essay II also shows that actors are interlinked. However, while Essay I, Essay III and Essay IV look at actors within a conflict system, Essay II opens

the black box of a rebel group and studies how internal structures influence a rebel group's actions. The essay argues that linkages between members of a rebel group help a rebel group stay united. More specifically, the stronger the horizontal and vertical ties (hierarchical and social) between members are, the less likely a rebel group is to experience splintering.

The dissertation also makes an empirical contribution to civil war research through introducing actors that are not often studied in the literature on civil conflicts. This is particularly the case in Essay I and Essay IV. In Essay I, to test why some conflicts witness the emergence of more rebel groups than others, I also include those rebel groups that have not reached 25 battle-related deaths to my analysis. This became possible by creating a much more comprehensive dataset of rebel groups in Northeast India including both small and large groups. I argue that all actors will influence the conflict system in some way and that it is, hence, also important to study smaller actors. In Essay IV, to study why rebel groups sometimes fight against peacekeepers, I include peacekeepers as a conflict actor. While peacekeepers are often studied in civil war research (Notable examples are: Doyle & Sambanis, 2000, 2006, Fortna, 2003, 2004, 2008; Hegre, Hultman, & Nygård, 2011; Sambanis & Doyle, 2007), these studies mostly focus on the effect that peacekeepers have on the outcome of a civil war. Few researchers, however, have studied how peacekeepers influence the dynamics of the conflict once boots are on the ground (for some recent exceptions, see: Dorussen & Gizelis, 2013; Fjelde et al., 2016; Ruggeri et al., 2012). Given that peacekeeping operations potentially have the means to alter conflict dynamics, it is important to see them as conflict actors.

Implications for future research

There are five implications for future research that arise from the dissertation: First, the conclusions in this dissertation highlight that it is important to move beyond civil wars as dyadic phenomena. Many civil wars have more than two actors that, in their own way, influence the conflict system, its dynamics and the outcome. Whether large or small rebel groups, peacekeepers or external interveners, all actors play a role. Future research should continue to disentangle the web of actors and their interactions in civil conflicts and identify the influence of different types of actors on conflict onset, dynamics, duration and outcome.

Second, a particular area of study that needs to be developed more is the question of why some conflicts see more rebel groups than others. We know that conflicts with several rebel groups last longer, are more deadly and are more difficult to resolve (D. Cunningham, 2006; Wood & Kathman, 2015). Therefore, it is of prime importance to look at the causes of multi-rebel conflicts. Essay I and Essay II address this question, but more remains to be done. Areas to be studied are, for example, the timing of the formation of new rebel

groups: How do battle ground dynamics influence when a new group forms? Do mediation and negotiation attempts influence this process? Another area of study is the influence of the availability of resources on the formation of new groups. We know that rebel groups rely heavily on their surroundings for their survival, but do they take this into account when forming? Further, are rebel groups more likely to form in areas with lootable resources? Finally, are certain types of conflicts or certain types of countries more likely to see several rebel groups? The more we know about when and how rebel groups are formed, the more effectively conflict management and resolution strategies can be formed.

Third, several essays in the dissertation highlight the role of negotiations in the conflict process. Essay II shows that when negotiations are ongoing, rebel groups are more likely to splinter. Essay III concludes that rebel groups are more likely to fight against other groups when they are involved in negotiations. In this way, these two essays show that negotiations play a powerful role in conflict processes. Future research should investigate more closely how negotiations influence the relationships between different types of conflict parties, provide more detailed theoretical accounts including theorizing about different causal mechanisms and performing rigorous empirical tests.

Fourth, all essays in the dissertation utilize quantitative methods, while testing causal arguments. Using these methods, I was not able to test the causal mechanism underlying the theories in the essays. Future research could complement the insights gained here by employing other methods, such as process-tracing, to explore whether the causal mechanisms I have proposed also hold up when conducting detailed case studies.

Fifth, future research should continue to utilize case-specific micro-level data to study civil wars with several actors. Essay I tests an argument about the formation of new rebel groups in a conflict system using data on actors that usually are not included in quantitative civil war research, because these actors do not pass a certain violence threshold. In Essay I, I show that these actors nonetheless matter, because their existence has an influence on how many new rebel groups form in a conflict system. By extension, this may also influence the conflict dynamics and outcome.

Policy Implications

Understanding the complexity of the intricate interlinkages between all actors in these multi-party conflicts is also highly policy relevant. Given that these multiparty conflicts are more difficult to solve, a better understanding of why these conflicts become multiparty in the first place and of their dynamics can help devise better conflict resolution strategies. The main policy implication of this dissertation is that there is an intricate web of relationships between actors that influences civil conflicts becoming multiparty, and the dynamics of these conflicts. These relationships matter when preparing for negotiations,

peacekeeping operations or other interventions. Policymakers need to be aware of all of the different relationships in a conflict and formulate strategies for how to influence these relationships in order to come to a resolution of the conflict. For example, understanding the fact that conflict actors will also use the actions by peacekeepers to update their knowledge about the conflict system (Essay IV) will help peacekeepers formulate strategies that both warrant the safety of blue helmets, and aids their effectiveness.

A more specific implication that derives from this study is the impact of negotiations on the dynamics of multiparty conflicts. While negotiations aim to bring peace to a conflict situation, their immediate effect is often more harmful. Several essays show that negotiations impact the dynamics of a civil war and can even contribute to enlarging the number of actors in a conflict. Essay II demonstrates that rebel groups are more likely to splinter during ongoing negotiations, leading to more actors in the conflict and more complicated relationships and dynamics. Furthermore, as shown in Essay III, rebel groups are also more likely to fight against each other when negotiations are ongoing, heightening insecurity in a country. Policymakers need to be aware of the consequences of negotiations to a conflict system and have strategies in place for dealing with the potential detrimental impact of negotiations on the conflict system. One step forward can mean two steps backwards.

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