Article

Rebel Rivalry and the Strategic Nature of Rebel Group Ideology and Demands

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Abstract

How does the presence of multiple combatants affect rebel groups' ideological and demand positioning? Although violent forms of inter-group conflict have been widely studied in the civil war literature, rebel groups' strategic use of ideology and demands has received scarce scholarly attention. We argue that the pressure of competition forces rebel groups to differentiate themselves ideologically and demand-wise from their rivals to maximize their chances of survival and success. Rebel groups strive to set themselves apart by offering unique products to their supporters and recruits. Thus, we contend that rebel groups are more likely to modify their ideologies and demands from the government in the face of competition from rival groups. We test this theory using novel data collected from rebel

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group manifestos and public statements. Our findings suggest that groups are more likely to shift their ideology and modify their demands as the number of rival groups increases.

Keywords
rebel group ideology, rebel rivalry, civil war, item response theory

How does the presence of multiple combatants affect rebel groups' ideological and demands-related positioning? Multi-actor civil wars present unique challenges to rebel groups as they compete over limited economic, political, and military resources. Previous literature on multi-actor civil wars exclusively focused on inter-group violence as a strategy rebel groups have used to eliminate competition. However, findings also suggest that inter-group violence is often an ineffective and costly way of eliminating rivals (Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour 2012; Fjelde and Nilsson 2012). An understudied topic in this strand of literature is the tactical moves rebel groups pursue to stand out among rival groups.

In this paper, we argue that rebel groups differentiate themselves ideologically and demand-wise from rivals to attract the support of the minority group they seek to represent, to mobilize potential recruits, and to communicate a distinct message to current and potential external supporters.[1] Rebel groups rely on their constituency and external supporters for military, political, and economic resources such as guns, funds, shelter, intelligence, and legitimacy. Groups that successfully survive in a multi-actor conflict are able to do so by guaranteeing access to the resources local population and external actors provide. Ideological differentiation, we argue, is a cost-effective strategy groups pursue to attract supporters. Groups purposefully carve out a distinguishable ideological niche for themselves in a competitive environment. The same goes for demands. Thus, unlike prior work, we do not see rebel group ideology or demands as exogenous or fixed. We instead claim that group ideology and demands are strategically set and reset in the face of rivalry.

The rivalry between Syrian rebel groups during the ongoing civil war is a case in point. Although the initial goals of the insurgency were focused on the overthrow of the Assad regime, rebel groups gradually differentiated themselves on ideological grounds. The lack of coordination within the Syrian resistance movement, although weakening the overall effort to overthrow the Assad regime, had clear benefits for individual rebel groups. Ideological differentiation also assisted Syrian rebel groups in attracting and maintaining international support, whether through state sponsorship or private donors (Baylouny and Mullins 2018). The Islamic State terrorist organization took advantage of this trend, gaining international notoriety and attracting thousands of foreign fighters by publicizing their extreme Islamist ideological demands, whereas the Sunni-dominated Free Syrian Army, which served as an umbrella resistance organization, fragmented into Islamist and secularist factions.

In contrast, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) adopted a distinctly secular ideology along with its ethno-national goals, distancing itself from even moderate Syrian Islamist groups. This assisted the YPG in securing American military support, which it used to effectively combat the Islamic State, secure Kurdish-majority territory, and achieve better outcomes in recent years than the declining Free Syrian Army.

We contend that rebel groups are more likely to modify their ideologies and demands from the government in the face of competition from rival groups. We test this theory using a novel dataset on armed group ideologies collected from manifestos, programs, and statements of 346 rebel groups between 1980 and 2008. Our study is one of the first in the literature to suggest that rebel groups' ideologies and demands are not set and that they are prone to strategic shifts in the face of rivalry. We also provide new data that quantitatively examine these shifts. We perceive demands to be sometimes an integral part of ideologies, but we do not rule out that similar ideologies can be matched with different demands or that demands can change without ideological shifts. Thus, we treat ideologies and demands as two separate goods in the arsenal of rebel group strategic positioning. We also emphasize the symbiotic relationship between a rebel group and its constituency. Competition with other groups is, in essence, competition for constituency support and the potential economic and military benefits that support will provide. Our analysis of rebel groups suggests that groups are more likely to shift their ideology and modify their demands from the government as the number of rival groups increases.

Consequences of Rebel Rivalry: Feeling the Strain

Competition between non-state armed actors is a line of research that has drawn significant attention. Many studies argue that rivalry intensifies the violence groups inflict not only on rival groups (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012; Lilja and Hultman 2011; Philips 2015) but also on civilians (Bloom 2005; Nemeth 2014; Wood and Kathman 2015; Stanton 2013). Numerous works suggest that violence is a strategic choice for armed groups (Kaplan 2014; Metelits 2009; Philips 2015; Akcinaroglu and Tokdemir 2018). Competing groups will be reliant on a shared limited pool of military, political, and economic resources to survive and pursue their goals and will, therefore, clash for access to territory and recruits (Philips 2015). They will strategically direct hostility on civilians to induce their forceful recruitment (Wood 2014) or ensure a wider audience through media coverage (Bloom 2005; Conrad and Greene 2015).

The literature pays particular attention to the concept of outbidding[2], where, in the presence of "multiple groups, violence is a technique to gain credibility and win the public relation competition" (Bloom 2005, 95). Outbidding is a potential threat to group survival (Young and Dugan 2014), which will force rebel groups to find ways to deal with this challenge, typically through increased civilian violence. As

groups face greater competition for media attention and access to resources, they increase the frequency (Boyle 2009; Nemeth 2014) or intensity of violence (Conrad and Greene 2015). Some works see violent outbidding as a natural extension of ideological extremism (Jaeger et al. 2015; Nemeth 2014). Groups will engage in extremism in order to publicly differentiate their "brand" (Conrad and Greene 2015, 546), thereby gaining greater access to ideologically motivated recruits, resources, and third-party support (Walter 2014; Polo and Gleditsch 2016). In these instances, violence will serve as a credible signal of a group's commitment to their cause. The decision by insurgent organizations to target civilians leads to a reduction in broad civilian support, and international disapproval (Findley and Young 2012a; Stanton 2013), which eventually leads to less successful conflict outcomes (Fortna 2015).

The need of an armed group to differentiate itself can be seen in Lichbach (1995) seminal work, "Rebel's Dilemma." It suggests that new dissidents may seek to differentiate themselves ideologically from older dissidents to capture local public goods and carve out a space for themselves in the conflict. Some groups are dependent on the support of the local population in maintaining access to a multitude of resources (Petersen 2001; Weinstein 2007). Under these conditions, some rival groups facing competition may choose to pursue non-violent strategies to draw the support of the population to their organization (Brathwaite 2013; Metelits 2009, 2016; Wood 2014). Representing a minority population in the legitimate political order can help groups harness the loyalty of this population. Studies that find a positive relationship between inter-group rivalry and the likelihood of negotiated settlements (Ogutcu 2015) and the likelihood of group participation in the electoral process (Brathwaite 2013) are supportive of this argument. Our work taps into this literature as shifts in ideology may be the means through which some groups strive for non-violence. Advocating a unique ideological point may bring supporters but if it is accompanied by downgrading demands, then the group may have a seat at the negotiation table. Thus moderation of demands is a strategic choice that some armed groups make to be suitable candidates for negotiation. While separatist demands leave little room for bargaining, demanding sociopolitical rights for an ethnic minority is an issue two parties can negotiate on. Furthermore, ideological moderation is also a conscious choice as a group gets closer to the prospect of becoming a legitimate party.

Strategic action by armed groups to survive and thrive in a multi-party civil war environment is well-documented (Christia 2012; Ogutcu 2015; Wood and Kathman 2015; Staniland 2012). Inter-group fighting, side-switching are strategies regularly pursued in such environments. And so are alliances, specifically between less organized and institutionalized groups (Christia 2012) which can help with competition by reducing the number of groups in the market. Our paper takes this literature forward by emphasizing alternative strategies such as branding and carving out niches through ideology and demand differentiation and polarization. While some other works recognize the diversity of ideology (Jaeger et al. 2015; Nemeth 2014) and demands (Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour 2012) among competing groups,

they are generally assumed to be fixed. Using a dynamic and novel ideology and demands data, we demonstrate that competition forces some groups to outbid others by adopting different ideologies and demands. This way, we challenge the notion that ideology is set and static. Indeed, our aim in this paper is to show that ideology is endogenous to conflict dynamics.

Outbidding by Competing Rebels: Branding by Ideology and Demands

Civil wars are, at their core, challenges posed by non-state armed actors to change the status quo. To do this, rebels appeal to their constituencies to generate the resources necessary to either defeat the government or force it to make concessions. Competition among rebel organizations who seek to gain political leverage implies, at best, shared resources. Where multiple rebel groups are competing over a single constituency, the question becomes "who has the right to speak on behalf of that constituency?" This competition will imply, at best, the sharing of the limited material and non-material resources that their community has to offer (Bloom 2004). In most cases, the competition will result in a continuous fight to be the sole political voice of the community they seek to represent (Pearlman 2009). For rebel groups, a multi-party conflict will likely become a battle to outdo the organization's rival and permanently gain the loyalty of supporters. To do this, rebel groups offer two goods, an ideology and demands. An ideology is "a set of more or less systematic ideas that identify a constituency, the objectives pursued on behalf of that group, and a program of action" (Sanin and Wood 2014, 213). That is, prescribing to a distinct ideology encapsulates the group's constituency, strategies, tactics, and, most importantly, their objectives in conflict. From this perspective, we follow Ugarriza and Craig (2013, 450) emphasis on how ideology "shapes relations between members of a group and outsiders, and among members themselves." Ideology serves as a shortcut, communicating the group's *raison d' être* to all audiences they seek to reach, including supporters, allies, and enemies. We treat demands—a set of economic, social and political claims from the state or international systems that are meant to serve the needs and wants of the constituency—as a separate good other than ideology. Though in most cases ideologies may serve as an overarching roof under which the house of demands may be built, there can be many different demands serving the same ideology, and in some cases, similar demands may serve different ideologies. That is, these are neither mutually exclusive nor are they mutually inclusive. What matters for our purposes is that rebel groups have both tools in their arsenal to render themselves unique.

When Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) emerged to fight for Eritrean independence, challenging the monopoly of the pre-existing Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), this instigated a fierce competition between the two organizations to secure the loyalty of the Eritrean people. What made this rivalry especially acute was the initial indistinguishability of their demands and ideology. Both organizations

sought independence from Ethiopia within a Marxist-Leninist framework, an ideology that appealed to many Eritreans, especially the working class. Although the two groups eventually employed inter-group violence in an effort to eliminate their competition, this was not the only strategy adopted by the groups to gain a competitive edge in the conflict. The EPLF aggressively pursued an ideological and demand differentiation from the ELF.

Ideological Differentiation

Rebel groups have a rational incentive to substitute for or complement inter-group violence with ideological product differentiation, demonstrating that they are distinct from their competitors in features such as goals, demands, and tactics.[3] Product differentiation in economics is defined as distinguishing the goods or services of one seller from those of another such that the seller achieves reduced sensitivity or in other words, cross-price elasticity with regard to rival brands (Ekelund 1970; Sharp and Dawes 2001). This helps firms outrival other brands, gain customer loyalty and also reduces consumer sensitivity to price shocks in the market (Hastings and Shapiro 2013; Hatch and Schultz 2003). Product differentiation thus can be a tool of competitive advantage when satisfying consumer needs (Spulber 1979; Katz 1984).

Civil war markets operate less perfectly compared to business markets as there is certainly more informational noise amid war. However, rebels often publish manifestos, constitutions, and are willing to do interviews on their ideologies and demands in formal and informal channels to reach audiences, rivals and governments. That is, rebels have information on where other violent groups and their supporters stand with the government and vis a vis their own place in the market. And it is the rivalry that pushes rebel groups to strategize in a crowded market.

Like business firms that seek to maximize profits by offering differentiated products in competitive environments, rebel groups can maximize non-material and material resources by appealing to prospective supporters and recruits. They can differentiate their ideology, even sometimes in subtle ways, to secure the allegiance of their constituency in pursuit of outbidding their rivals. By developing these alternatives, new dissidents can break older group's monopolized access to a particular constituency and the resources it provides (Lichbach 1995). In a similar manner, existing dissidents can shift positions and demands in response to the emergence of new groups, selectively catering to the specific interests of a population. Differentiation will also increase brand loyalty, as supporters will feel a stronger affiliation with the group that is closest to their ideal point. Support will, therefore, become more resilient (inelastic), making it less likely the supporters will switch to alternatives during setbacks (Conrad and Greene 2015; Pinson and Brosdahl 2014). Since these outcomes will help rebel groups achieve their objectives, product differentiation becomes an optimal strategy in multi-party civil conflicts.

But can ideologies change? Whether rebel groups employ ideology instrumentally, in order to maintain internal cohesion and morale, or employ ideology normatively, in order to resonate with the emotional commitments of the constituency, many scholars agree that ideology is "sticky," resulting in "repertoires of contention, specific institutions, and more generally, political connotations" that may be path dependent (Sanin and Wood 2014, 222). We argue that ideologies, even normatively constructed ones, can change or evolve in time. We pose three reasons. First, ideologies are heavily embedded in the context and complexities of conflict which evolve in time and space. Ideologies are forced to change when they no longer serve the needs of their constituency. Take the end of the Cold War, which has rendered many hardcore leftist ideologies inadequate and outdated. Many Marxist and Maoist groups had to adapt to the changing circumstances by softening their ideology and demands. And in this paper, we specifically argue that a crowded market, a market where another rival group promises like you, speaks like you, fights like you is another contextual change in conflict that can push rebel groups to respond.

Second, the preferences of neither combatants nor the constituencies they represent are fixed. Not only macro-level changes, such as the changes in the national and international context but also micro-level factors such as framing and reframing by leaders and individual learning can change preferences (Sanin and Wood 2014). That is, ideologies may change because of an endogenous shift in preferences. Third and last, just like in the political sphere, supporters' alignment with the rebel group's ideology is rarely perfect. Yet, as long as the rebel group offers an ideology that is closer to the preferences of its supporters compared to its competitors, it has the luxury to make ideological changes that will not result in the loss of present support. More importantly, even if rebel groups' ideological shifting may lead to some loss, it might be picked by new supporters who now find the new ideological position best fits their interests. In short, though instrumental ideologies are certainly more elastic to changing circumstances and preferences, even normatively constructed ideologies can go through changes, as they might be necessary, without necessarily incurring heavy repercussions. For example, EPLF, which has emphasized a normatively constructed ideology, has shifted its commitments geared toward the Eritrean constituency by deliberately challenging the pro-Muslim stance of the ELF and adopting an ideology which became more inclusive and secular. Since moderate Muslim or non-Muslim Eritreans felt alienated by the ELF's ideology, they were compelled to defect to the more appealing EPLF. In the end, picking up of a new ideology uniquely different than its rival did not cost EPLF its support base, it bolstered it.

To understand the necessity and utility of endogenous ideological shifts, we need to delve deeper into the benefits of choosing a distinct ideological position. In addition to coordinating internal cohesion and discipline, a unique ideology enables rebel groups to carve a niche for themselves in a crowded environment, similar to the partisan polarization of political parties in competitive markets (Coffey 2011; Downs 1957). In the context of civil wars, we define polarization as the presence of wide divergences in ideology and demands between the rebel groups active in the

conflict. This is a more extreme outcome than mere ideological differentiation, which is any divergence in the demands of rebel groups, although polarization may result from an extended period of competition between groups.

In less polarized environments, potential supporters of rebel groups will face uncertainty about whom to give their support, as the stated policy demands of each group will closely resemble the others. In such cases, rebel groups are easily substitutable. This is not ideal for rebel groups, as they will be forced to compete with other groups for access to information, financial resources, and recruitment opportunities provided by like-minded constituencies. Constituents can easily switch loyalties among ideologically similar groups based on which group is more competent in securing demands (Staniland 2012; Hafez 2020). By adopting distinct ideological positions, groups will polarize the ideological market of the civil war, which will in turn secure lack of substitutability and maximize their possible pool of supporters.

Polarization of the civil war market, a result of distinct ideological positioning, will match supporters with a rebel group that is best equipped to provide them with the services and goods attuned to their preferences. Thus, ideological uniqueness will assist the rebel group in external coordination, that is, matching interests and demands with supporters. Groups will gain access to the financial, informational resources, and recruitment opportunities provided by constituencies whose preferences align most with the ideology of the rebel group vis a vis its competitors.

Adhering to a specific ideology also helps rebel groups signal their resolve. Rebels and their constituency are in a codependent relationship once a civil conflict starts. In return for their backing, potential supporters expect compensation: protection, a range of public goods, and eventually, a change in the status quo (Arjona 2016; Mampilly 2011). In addition to the inherent dangers of being associated with an armed uprising against the government, prospective rebel supporters face asymmetric information problems. Civilians are fundamentally uncertain about the level of effort that insurgents will exert to accomplish their set goals (Kydd and Walter 2002a). They face the risk of allying with an opportunistic group, one that extracts resources from the population without producing any change in the status quo (Weinstein 2007). Given this risk, civilians prefer to ally themselves with groups that are capable of providing both immediate benefits and a credible commitment to transform the status quo, shunning groups that are unable or unwilling to provide them. As the number of rebel groups operating in a region increases, alternative options become increasingly available to prospective supporters. Consequently, competing groups will be forced to signal their commitment, resolve, and their ability to deliver to prospective supporters.

Ideologies are a shortcut to overcome these informational problems. Different rebel groups will consider specific issues more or less salient than their counterparts, which, in turn, will signal the policy priorities their intended new order will pursue. In this sense, insurgent groups have incentives to emphasize their ideological differences by moving toward a distinct ideological space, whether moderate or

extreme. Rebel organizations will, therefore, publicly demonstrate their ideology and criticize others, signaling their resolve and righteousness in achieving specific objectives.

But how do groups pick their ideological point? For example, an extreme ideology may be a potential tool that increases public awareness, public support, and prestige in a crowded market, a so-called market share. It can also signal the group's dedication to their cause, allowing them to attract committed fighters to their movement. For example, religious groups will advocate an extremist agenda to overcome organizational challenges other groups face, such as collective action problems (rewards in the afterlife) or the adverse selection problem in recruitment (religious screening) (Weinstein 2007). Groups with extremist ideologies are more likely to test their recruits with costly inductions. These include heavy indoctrination, attending religious seminaries, fighting without weapons, social alienation, and entrapment, such as renouncing family and friends who do not espouse the same ideology (Walter 2014). The result is committed, loyal soldiers that can signal resolve to local populations. This indoctrination also leads to greater lethality (Berman and Laitin 2009) which may force the government's hand in conceding to the group (Thomas 2014). Ideological shifts toward extremism such as indiscriminate attacks against non-combatants may provoke the government toward forceful responses that disproportionately harm civilians from the rebel group's constituency and generate support for the violent group (Kydd and Walter 2002b; Carter 2016). Thus violence may invoke a cycle of violence between warring parties, which helps the rebel group (Lake 2002). This may even attract moderates to support the group.

Not all of the ideological shifts are violent, though. On the contrary, we say that some ideological shifts save resources because they provide easy branding without necessitating violence, specifically toward non-combatants. Ideological shifts toward moderation which may bring moderation of tactics may be bereft of such advantages that indiscriminate violence brings, but those groups will then be aligned with the preferences of the individuals who prefer non-violence. There is evidence to show that violence toward the non-constituency have, from time to time, caused a backlash in their constituencies and alienated supporters (Nemeth 2014). Indeed, many groups suffered from the adverse reaction of their constituencies when they inflicted extreme levels of violence. Both ETA and IRA are known to have switched to selective killings in response to the moderate preferences of their supporters (Sanchez-Cuenca 2007). Thus, moderation in ideology also has the potential to sway like-minded supporters from rival extremist groups. In this sense, both the shifts to or from violence may have their unique advantages.

Moderate ideologies also promise followers a more legitimate and reconciliatory new order or incorporation into the existing legitimate order (Jones and Libicki 2008). Moderate groups are more likely to engender international sympathy and support, which can bring external patrons, support from diasporas, and donations to the group's cause. Moderate groups are also less likely to be perceived as a global threat that requires international condemnation. While both ISIS and Al-Qaida have

a stated agenda of establishing a global caliphate, competition caused the groups to diverge in visible ways after 2014. To the ISIS threat, Al-Qaida responded by criticizing its competitor for its brutal sectarian practices in Iraq and Syria, and began a conscious effort to differentiate itself from ISIS by emphasizing slower steps, local insurgency and dawa (Lister 2017). For example, AQIM leader Abu Musab Abdul Wadud's order to his forces in Mali was:

> . . . the current baby is in its first days, crawling on its knees, and it has not yet stood on its two legs. If we really want it to stand on its own two feet in the world full of enemies waiting to pounce, we must ease its burden, take it by the hand, help it, support it until it stands . . . . One of the wrong policies that we think you carried out is the extreme speed with which you applied Shariah . . . Our previous experience that applying Shariah this way . . . will lead people rejecting the religion and engender hatred towards the mujahideen. (Callimachi 2013, 2)

ISIS' aggressive model initially attracted a global pool of committed jihadists who found Al-Qaida's theological debates over issues and traditionalism unattractive. However, Al-Qaida's growing sensitivity to local dynamics provided it with a shield against external threats that ISIS lacked, contributing to ISIS' strategic and territorial setbacks in Iraq and Syria (Lister 2017). Interestingly, the competition between the two groups has also contributed to the distancing of Al-Qaida affiliate Jabhat Al-Nusra from its parent organization (Roberts 2016). The affiliate explained its efforts to delink itself from Al-Qaida as a way to clean its reputation from past brutality and gain sympathy from domestic and international audiences. As this example clearly demonstrates, rebel groups have similar branding incentives as traditional entrepreneurs, continuously maneuvering to secure the loyalty of audiences and make gains at the expense of their competitors.

Demand Differentiation

Ideological differentiation is an important, but not an exclusive tool, utilized by rebel groups in the strategy of branding. Perhaps the most distinct component of distinguishing a rebel group from others is their political demands. The types of demands from the government dictate the kind of relationship a group has with the government. But demands also constitute the relationship a group has with its constituency. These demands represent not only the ultimate goal of the rebel group but also reflect the core of what attracts potential supporters to the group in the first place. While some ethnic-nationalist groups demand policy changes, such as increased democratization or federalism, others advocate for complete territorial independence. Though it makes sense for demand changes to follow ideological changes, it is not always the case. We also agree that a certain kind of ideology, e.g. an Islamist one, can accompany different variations of demands. For instance, two similar Islamist groups, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group) from Egypt and

Islamic Salvation Front (AIS) from Algeria, varied in their adoption of demands. While the Islamic Group consistently demanded Islamist regime change from Egypt, AIS pursued an Islamist regime in Algeria as well as global Islam, and specific policy concessions. We explain the difference between these two groups by the fact that AIS faced multiple rivals in the 1990s whereas the Islamic Group remained unchallenged.

In some cases, where the normative constraints against changing ideology are greater, rebel groups may choose to make only subtle changes in demands to maintain their unique identities. In other words, rivalry may force groups to adapt their demands as another means of product differentiation, to maximize current and future resources. For example, the Revolutionary People's Army (ERP) in El Salvador declared as their main objective the establishment of a communist regime, which would create a national system to promote an agrarian economy (ERP, 1980, March 14). While they maintained their Maoist heritage, the ERP quickly modified their economic demands to include an expansion of the liberal democratic process within a free market economy. It was only toward the end of the conflict that the ERP, responding to fundamental changes in Salvadorian reality, moderated their Maoist ideology (Villalobos 1989).

But why would rebel groups wish to modify their demands in multi-actor settings? One explanation comes from an examination of governmental incentives and behaviors in conflicts with multiple rebel groups. Negotiating with a group that utilizes various forms of violence is not preferable, as it signals the government's reputation as weak and sets a precedent for future challengers to turn to violence (Walter 2006). However, fighting with several rebel groups will force governments to make otherwise unappetizing strategic decisions. Governments can use selective co-optation of rebel groups to sow fragmentation. Staniland (2012) shows that fratricidal flipping is a common survival strategy among competing identity groups. For instance, thousands of rehabilitated Chechen fighters were used in counterinsurgency operations in Russia (Lyall 2010). Accommodation allows governments to oppose other rebel groups with former allies, who may be more experienced and informed about the way their new foes operate. Selective accommodation also weakens the overall insurgency, reducing the number of groups the government has to fight and allowing governments to allocate their resources more effectively. Finally, it means that regime concessions only have to be distributed to a segment of the insurgent population. But what are the implications of this for rebel groups?

In a competitive environment where the government faces incentives to make concessions strategically to a few groups, it becomes imperative for groups to signal their acceptability as a credible bargaining partner. Moderating demands serves such a purpose. Not only are moderate demands more likely to fall within the range of what is acceptable to the government, but moderation will enable groups to reveal information about their broader characteristics. Some groups that initially pursued independence may shift to demanding federalism, whereas groups that pursued a federal state might newly advocate lesser political or socioeconomic demands. The

prospect of gaining international and domestic legitimacy by entering the political order is an attractive offer. Rebel groups will be aware that they might gain political concessions from the government simply because their ideology and demands are more acceptable than their competitors. In return, moderate constituents are likely to support a group that promises them political representation not only during the conflict but during peacetime as well. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) improved its bargaining capabilities by softening its stance and rhetoric compared to its rivals, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group. Indeed the group modified its demands toward regional autonomy (Abuza 2003). Through this differentiation, MNLF successfully outbid its rivals and was able to enter negotiations with the government.

However, moderation is not the only available strategy in such competitive settings. Although certain tactics, discourses, and demands will automatically disqualify groups from negotiations, an increase in the number and intensity of demands can provide other benefits. Such a shift will enable groups to negatively brand rivals with fewer or weaker demands, labeling them as sellouts to their shared constituencies (Kydd and Walter 2002a). These rebels will stress their ideological hardening and violence as necessary for eventual success, spoiling peace negotiations, discrediting moderates, and demonstrating to their constituents that only they can credibly deliver victory. The willingness to refuse compromise, continue violence, and an acceptance to be excluded from eventual negotiations will signal a deeper level of commitment at a time when the group's rivals may be willing to settle for cheap concessions. This visible commitment to the cause will alleviate informational problems between rebels and their constituencies (Conrad and Greene 2015), matching the hard-core believers with the appropriate group.

In summary, as the number of groups increase and each group seeks to carve out a space to maximize its support, we should see changes to the ideologies and demands of rebel groups. Moreover, the incentive to differentiate oneself from its rivals will also incentivize them to occupy a distinct and differentiable space from the group's rivals, ultimately leading to ideological and hence market polarization. The ideological distance between groups will inevitably grow as groups distance themselves from one another in their quest for differentiation. In light of these expectations, our hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1: An increase in the number of rival groups in the conflict increases the likelihood of ideology modification by any rebel group in civil wars.
Hypothesis 2: An increase in the number of rival groups in the conflict increases the likelihood of demand modification by any rebel group in civil wars.
Hypothesis 3: An increase in the number of rival groups in the conflict increases the polarization of rebel group ideologies in civil wars.
Hypothesis 4: An increase in the number of rival groups in the conflict increases the polarization of rebel group demands in civil wars.

Research Design

Existing work attempting to measure time-variant rebel ideology and demands is scant, though we acknowledge the initiative and progress made by San-Akca (2016). For our project, we have assembled our own dataset of group demands while undertaking a more comprehensive coding of ideologies, composed of 19 components. Our coding draws its main inspiration from the well-known Comparative Manifesto Project Database (Volkens et al. 2018), which is usually referred to in comparative politics literature as CMP. When coding the CMP, a team of coders analyzed party manifestos at each election event and coded the percentage of the manifesto devoted to a specific issue (e.g., environmental issues—positive mentions, or military—negative mentions).[4] Unfortunately, this coding approach cannot be directly applied to rebel groups since there are no separating events such as elections that we could have used in tracking rebel group manifestos and changes in them. Unlike the democratic process that is regulated by formal rules, civil wars are typically quite messy and characterized by an atmosphere of "lawlessness." This implies that changes in rebel groups' ideologies follow a more random pattern than changes in parties' ideologies.

We approached this issue by using formal coding procedures: we searched all publicly available information including, but not limited to, official manifestos, constitutions, group congress reports, declarations, interviews with and statements of rebel groups and their leader cadres. If we could not find any, we relied on Lexis-Nexis and secondary sources (e.g., academic papers and books) in coding ideologies and demands of rebel groups.[5] We recognize that this coding approach is prone to omission of information (situation when the group did change its demands or ideology, but we failed to find information that reflects these shifts), but without separating events, such as elections in the CMP project, our approach is likely the most appropriate one.

Our dataset has a total of nineteen ideological components.[6] For simplicity, we used dichotomous coding for the ideologies of rebel groups: 1 if the issue was mentioned in the group program, which was declared in a manifesto, or an official statement, and 0 if the issue was not mentioned. The reason for choosing dichotomous instead of percentage coding as in the case of CMP was data availability: for many groups, we could not locate written manifestos and had to resort to secondary sources which made CMP coding scheme infeasible to implement. To code the demand variable, we sorted the rebel groups into five categories: a) groups that demand policy concessions from governments, such as better provision of human rights, political incorporation etc. or simply want return of the status quo before the event that initiated the conflict, b) groups that demand territorial autonomy, but NOT sovereignty, c) groups that demand territorial independence (sovereignty), d) groups that demand regime change, e) groups that demand global regime modifications. We treat this variable as ordinal as the breadth of demands increases in each category in an ascending order.

Finally, we need to address the issue of inter-coder reliability. We circulated the same coding to different coders three times. We obtained a high correlation in coding among them. We believe that the reason for high inter-coder reliability is the coding procedure: there is very little ambiguity in dichotomous indicators of ideological components, as well as very little "space to maneuver" in coding demands.

We include all 346 insurgent groups listed in the UCDP dataset from 1980 to 2008 (Gleditch 2012). Our starting year is determined by the scarcity of information on group ideologies and demands before 1980. Since we are interested in the changes in the market based on competition, we structure the data in a country-year format.

Dependent Variables

Coding rebel group ideology is not straightforward. The reason is that political scientists typically use the term "ideology" to describe one or at most two to three major dimensions at which candidates' or parties' positions are located. Typically, one generic "left-right" ideological dimension is used. The problem here is that datasets like the CMP include plenty of different ideological indicators, which presumably are all influenced by the aggregate "left-right" ideological position of a political actor. In this paper, we aggregate our 19 ideological measurements into two generic dimensions using a restricted Bayesian measurement model similar to the one used in Bakker (2009) and Bakker, Hill, and Moore (2016). Our two dimensions are "left-right" and "religious-secular." Here, we describe our approach in more general terms while a detailed model specification is relegated to the online appendix. We start with a dataset that consists of J ideological indicators (columns) and I observations (rows)[7], with small j and i letters standing for specific ideological indicator and specific observation. We assume that our 19 indicators of rebel ideology follow Bernoulli distribution with parameter p:

$$y_{ij} \sim \text{Bern}(p_{ij})$$

where p_{ij} is modeled using logistic link function as:

$$p_{ij} = [1 + exp(-(\beta_{j1}x_i + \beta_{j2}s_i - \beta_{j3}))]^{-1}$$

where x_i and s_i stand for left-right and religious ideology for observation i (rebel group in a specific year). The model was estimated in Bayes using Gibbs Sampler.[8] The prior distributions for β s are all uniform distributions, but with different support since the model is restricted and some β s are assumed to be only positive (or negative) for specific ideological indicators. We ran 50,000 iterations of three chains with the first 40,000 iterations discarded. To evaluate the convergence of chains we employed Gelman-Rubin diagnostics (Gelman and Rubin 1992), a fairly standard tool in Bayesian statistics. For each parameter, the upper confidence interval of

diagnostics did not exceed the value of 1.1, indicating the convergence of chains. We provide other model-related information such as item characteristic surfaces and detailed distributions of left-right and religious-secular ideology for each rebel group in the online appendix. Once we obtained the estimates of ideologies on the left-right and religious-secular dimensions, we calculated the ideological score for each group as

$$Ideology = \sqrt{(left\_right)^2 + (religious\_secular)^2}$$

akin to the way directional theory treats voters' preferences (e.g., Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989).

Our hypotheses employ four dependent variables; two of these variables are constructed using the same primary variable, rebel group ideology, while the other two are constructed using the variable rebel group demands. For Hypothesis 1, we calculated the change in the market with respect to rebel ideologies. If any of the *incumbent*[9] rebel groups in a specific country-year changed its ideology compared to the previous year, we coded this as 1. We have 126 out of 717 observations where there is some ideological change by any group. For Hypothesis 3, we calculated ideological polarization in the market for that year. To measure polarization, we used the mean absolute deviation in rebel ideologies in each country-year since ideology is a continuous variable. For Hypothesis 2, we calculated the change in the market with respect to demands. If there was any change in any of the *incumbent* rebel groups' demands in that specific country-year, we coded this as 1. We have 48 out of 717 observations where we observed demand changes. Finally, for Hypothesis 4, we calculated the polarization of rebel group demands in the market for that country-year. To measure polarization of demands, we calculated the mean absolute deviation of demand variable in each country-year.

Independent Variable and Control Variables

Our main independent variable is the number of rival rebel groups. We follow the approach that perceives all rebel groups in a country fighting against a common government as competitors (Findley and Young 2012b; Metelits 2009). To generate the independent variable we calculated the number of these groups in each country-year, as this is the unit of analysis.[10]

We use several control variables that are typically encountered in civil conflict literature. First, we control for aggregate rebel group size; data on rebel size estimates are taken from the Non-State Actor (NSA) Dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013). We can expect to see more changes in the market when higher rebel strength forces the government's hand in accommodation (Akcinaroglu 2012). This will induce some groups to make moderations in ideology and demands. Second, we control for ethnolinguistic fractionalization. With respect to polarization, ethnolinguistic fractionalization index (ELF) provides a baseline "space for

Table 1. Summary Statistics.

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Ideology Change	.18	.38	0	1
Demand Change	.07	.26	0	1
Ideological Polarization	.19	.11	0	.36
Demand Polarization	.54	.46	0	1.5
# of Rival Groups	1.86	1.29	1	10
ELF	.53	.27	.005	.9
Log(GDP per Capita)	7.97	1.02	5.03	10.67
Polity	.15	6.19	−9	10
Polity^2	35.29	33.3	0	100
Maximum Conflict Intensity	1.28	.45	1	2
War Duration	8.93	7.42	1	29
Total Rebel Size	47.19	110	0	1110

maneuver." Countries with a high ELF index are more likely to have polarized rebel groups since they need to appeal to different constituencies. We also expect a high ELF index to decrease the probability of changes in ideology and demands. This variable comes from Fearon (2003).[11] Other control variables that we use are maximum conflict intensity in a country-year from UCDP Dyadic Dataset where we capture the number of battle-related deaths (Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen 2008) and conflict duration from NSA Dataset, as longer and more intense conflicts are more likely to force groups to create and recreate branding to stay afloat in the face of competition. We also use the Polity score and the Polity score squared from Polity IV project[12] (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2017) to capture regime type, as some studies argue that the prevalence of political competition in democracies leads to an increase in the number of groups with diverse ideologies (Chenoweth 2010). We also use logged GDP per capita in constant 1963 dollars as a control variable (Gleditch 2012). Both democracies and richer countries have various tools of accommodation which can in turn influence group strategies and ideology (Pape 2005).

Analyses and Results

In Table 1 we provide the summary statistics for all our variables. The total number of rows in our dataset is 813.[13] The actual number of observations for each model varies due to availability of the data for control variables.

Since the nature of our dependent variables is different, we used different estimation methods for each. For Hypotheses 1 and 2 (Tables 2 and 3), where our dependent variable is dichotomous, we estimated logistic regressions with robust standard errors. For Hypotheses 3 and 4 (Tables 4 and 5) we estimated OLS models with robust standard errors, as our polarization measures are continuous. We also employed 5 different model specifications in order to check whether our results

Table 2. Logistic Models—Effect of Rivalry on Political Ideology Change.

	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
# of Rival Groups	0.223**	0.236**	0.210*	0.223***	0.205**
	(0.086)	(0.084)	(0.082)	(0.067)	(0.074)
Ethnolinguistic	−0.217	−0.216		−0.191	
Fractionalization	(0.401)	(0.393)		(0.392)	
Log(GDP per Capita)	−0.042	−0.038	−0.025	−0.046	−0.037
	(0.124)	(0.106)	(0.121)	(0.119)	(0.101)
Polity	−0.015		−0.014	−0.018	
	(0.018)		(0.018)	(0.017)	
Polity^2	0.001		0.001	0.001	
	(0.004)		(0.004)	(0.004)	
Maximum Conflict	0.432	0.471*	0.428		
Intensity	(0.226)	(0.220)	(0.225)		
War Duration	0.008	0.001	0.007		
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.015)		
Total Rebel Size	−0.000	−0.000	−0.000		0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)		(0.001)
Constant	−2.213*	−2.214*	−2.436*	−1.552	−1.672*
	(1.033)	(0.951)	(0.974)	(0.981)	(0.824)
Observations	717	736	717	717	738
Pseudo R^2	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Log likelihood	−325.383	−336.396	−325.524	−327.254	−339.101

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

remain robust with the inclusion/exclusion of certain control variables. In the forthcoming discussion we will refer to the results presented in Tables 2 to 5 as *main models* or *main results*. We find strong robust support for Hypothesis 1 and 2: the number of rivals appears to increase the probability of change in the market with respect to rebel demands and ideology. Ideological and demand modification therefore are the means through which groups alleviate the pressure from rivalry and carve a niche market for themselves. Thus, neither is static in the face of pressure from other groups who are seeking to maximize their share of support and resources. In the online appendix, we also provide results separately for each dimension and once again find robust support for our expectations. In Tables 4 and 5 we present our results regarding the effect of competition on ideological and demand polarization. Here, the results are even stronger than for the first two hypotheses and once again do not depend on the set of control variables used in estimation. This means that competition polarizes the left-right and religious-secular ideological spectrum. It also polarizes the market on demands. This is in conformity with our expectations, not only do groups change their ideology and demands to distinguish themselves from their look alikes, but the changes are substantial enough to polarize the system.

Table 3. Logistic Models—Effect of Rivalry on Demands Change.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
# of Rival Groups	0.273*	0.275**	0.219*	0.212*	0.181*
	(0.107)	(0.100)	(0.095)	(0.087)	(0.074)
Ethnolinguistic	−0.913	−0.959		−0.833	
Fractionalization	(0.556)	(0.542)		(0.549)	
Log(GDP per Capita)	0.142	0.041	0.202	0.175	0.090
	(0.182)	(0.152)	(0.184)	(0.177)	(0.146)
Polity	−0.033		−0.027	−0.029	
	(0.032)		(0.031)	(0.028)	
Polity^2	−0.006		−0.006	−0.007	
	(0.006)		(0.006)	(0.005)	
Maximum Conflict	0.418	0.580	0.400		
Intensity	(0.338)	(0.324)	(0.335)		
War Duration	0.008	−0.008	0.005		
	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.023)		
Total Rebel Size	−0.002	−0.001	−0.001		−0.000
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)		(0.001)
Constant	−4.156**	−3.592**	−4.992**	−3.755*	−3.651**
	(1.532)	(1.337)	(1.557)	(1.489)	(1.201)
Observations	717	736	717	717	738
Pseudo R^2	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01
Log likelihood	−172.136	−183.165	−173.260	−173.123	−186.315

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

In order to provide more substantive interpretation for our findings, we used Model 1 specifications to generate 4 graphs, which are presented in Figure 1. We calculated predicted probabilities using CLARIFY simulation algorithm (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000). Graphs for polarization illustrate linear predictions. In all 4 graphs we set all variables except for the number of rival groups to their mean values. The dotted line in each graph shows that the overall effect is significant (if this dotted line is inside dashed confidence intervals, the effect is not significant). The graphs show that the increase in the number of rival groups operating in a specific country-year leads to higher probabilities of ideology and demand modification, on the one hand, and to greater ideological and demand polarization, on the other hand.[14]

Robustness Checks

While the presented results appear to support our hypotheses, there are number of potential concerns that we would like to address. First, our polarization variables (Hypotheses 3 and 4) take into account both emerging and incumbent groups,

Table 4. OLS Models—Effect of Rivalry on Political Polarization.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
# of Rival Groups	0.026***	0.026***	0.026***	0.036***	0.032***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Ethnolinguistic	−0.007	−0.006		−0.007	
Fractionalization	(0.015)	(0.014)		(0.015)	
Log(GDP per Capita)	0.006	0.001	0.007	0.006	0.003
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Polity	−0.002*		−0.002*	−0.001	
	(0.001)		(0.001)	(0.001)	
Polity^2	−0.000		−0.000	−0.000	
	(0.000)		(0.000)	(0.000)	
Maximum Conflict	−0.004	0.001	−0.004		
Intensity	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)		
War Duration	0.004***	0.003***	0.004***		
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)		
Total Rebel Size	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*		0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)		(0.000)
Constant	0.069	0.104**	0.060	0.079*	0.101***
	(0.041)	(0.038)	(0.035)	(0.038)	(0.030)
Observations	785	805	786	785	809
R^2	0.212	0.199	0.212	0.159	0.160

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

creating the possibility for the mechanical effect: changes in polarization scores that we observe are simply due to new groups entering the conflict. This effect can present itself in two alternative ways. The first is that all incumbent groups maintain their ideological positions, but a new group presents a radically different ideological offering, altering the aggregate polarization score. The second is that incumbent groups alter their ideological stances in response to the emergence of a new rival, but the new group's ideological position balances out these changes, resulting in the polarization score appearing very similar to the previous year. We take account of these two potentially problematic options by calculating polarization scores for incumbent groups only and re-running all models.

Second, causal interpretation of our regression results can be misleading since shifts in population views can cause changes in the number of rivals and in ideology/demands. As an illustration, one can think about an event (e.g., economic shock such as the drought) that leads to a greater ideological fragmentation of the country's population. This greater ideological fragmentation, in turn, increases both the number of rebel organizations and their observed ideological polarization. We employ instrumental variable (IV) approach in order to address this possibility. We chose to

Table 5. OLS Models—Effect of Rivalry on Demand Polarization.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
# of Rival Groups	0.036*	0.038*	0.024	0.033**	0.047**
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.016)
Ethnolinguistic	−0.232***	−0.253***		−0.197**	
Fractionalization	(0.067)	(0.066)		(0.068)	
Log(GDP per Capita)	−0.052**	−0.092***	−0.035	−0.032	−0.063***
	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.016)
Polity	−0.002		−0.001	0.002	
	(0.003)		(0.003)	(0.003)	
Polity^2	−0.003***		−0.003***	−0.003***	
	(0.001)		(0.001)	(0.001)	
Maximum Conflict	0.118***	0.124***	0.114**		
Intensity	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.036)		
War Duration	0.016***	0.015***	0.016***		
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)		
Total Rebel Size	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001**		−0.001**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)		(0.000)
Constant	0.854***	1.086***	0.611***	0.962***	0.984***
	(0.165)	(0.162)	(0.148)	(0.161)	(0.132)
Observations	785	805	786	785	809
R^2	0.138	0.104	0.122	0.058	0.028

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

use the natural logarithm of mountainous terrain % in a country (Fearon and Laitin 2003) as an instrument for the number of rival groups. On the one hand, rough terrain facilitates the emergence of rebel groups and, therefore, leads to more competitive conflict environments. On the other hand, rebel rivalry is likely the only channel through which rough terrain can affect ideological positioning of rebel groups. We estimated IV models using two-stage least squares approach for both versions of our polarization variables, one with both new and incumbent groups included in the calculation of polarization scores and the other with only incumbent groups included.

Third, in our first two hypotheses we posited that a change (an increase) in the number of rivals should lead to a change in ideology and demands. Yet our principal independent variable does not explicitly code the change in the number of rival groups. To address this concern, we ran a dynamic version of our main models where the principal independent variable equals to 1 if the number of rival groups increased from the period $t − 1$ to the period t, and 0 otherwise.

We present results of all these robustness checks in Table 6; all coefficients represent rebel rivalry.[15] The first two rows report the results of OLS models
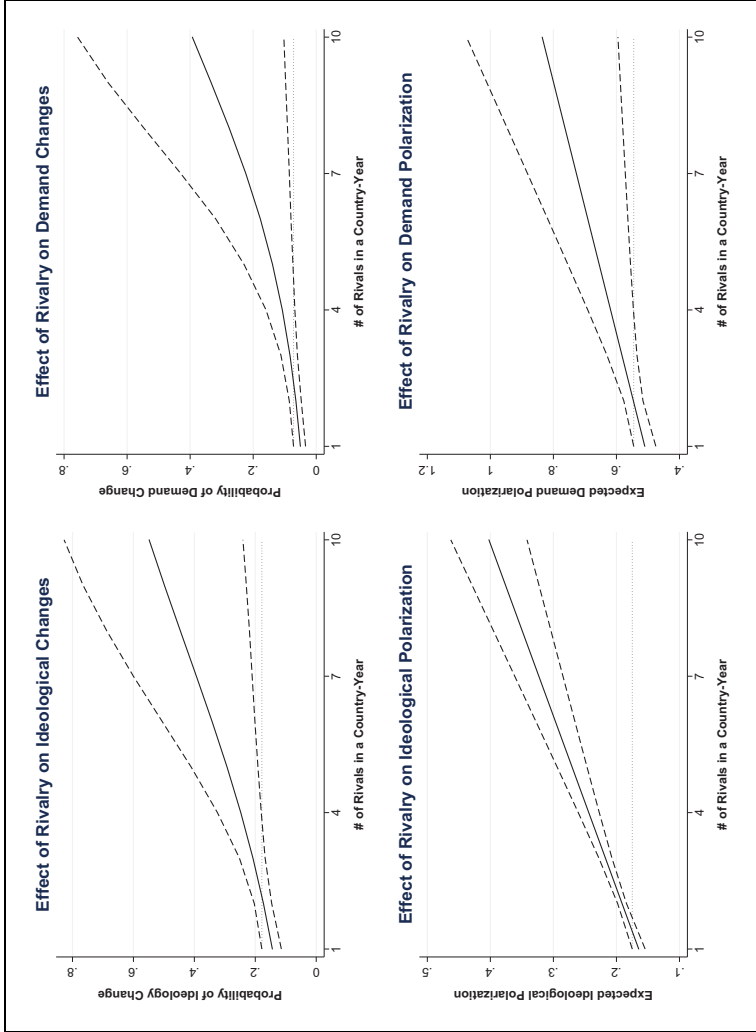
Figure 1. Interpreting effects of rebel rivalry.

Table 6. Robustness Checks.

Model Type	Dependent Variable	New Groups Included?	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
OLS	Ideological Polarization	No	0.026*** (0.004)	0.026*** (0.004)	0.025*** (0.004)	0.034*** (0.003)	0.030*** (0.004)
OLS	Demand Polarization	No	0.037* (0.015)	0.036* (0.016)	0.023 (0.015)	0.031* (0.012)	0.039* (0.016)
IV, 2SLS	Ideological Polarization	Yes	0.099* (0.042)	0.150* (0.070)	0.114* (0.051)	0.068*** (0.014)	0.164** (0.062)
IV, 2SLS	Demand Polarization	Yes	0.715** (0.241)	0.808* (0.376)	0.888** (0.330)	0.271*** (0.065)	0.916** (0.349)
IV, 2SLS	Ideological Polarization	No	0.099* (0.044)	0.158* (0.079)	0.112* (0.052)	0.066*** (0.015)	0.162* (0.065)
IV, 2SLS	Demand Polarization	No	0.688** (0.246)	0.839* (0.426)	0.825** (0.319)	0.257*** (0.068)	0.892* (0.363)
Logit, Δ Rivals	Change in Ideology	No	0.908*** (0.269)	1.003*** (0.259)	0.902*** (0.267)	0.960*** (0.267)	1.002*** (0.256)
Logit, Δ Rivals	Change in Demands	No	0.895* (0.392)	1.121** (0.354)	0.843* (0.387)	0.904* (0.384)	1.072** (0.348)

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

estimated with incumbent groups-only polarization scores. Our results are substantively similar to the ones from the main models, both in terms of the statistical significance and the effect size. The next two rows report results of IV models with polarization scores computed for all rebel groups. The results that we receive support our hypotheses, although the effect size is greater than in main models. In the case of demand polarization, the IV model results are even stronger than the ones from the main analyses. Rows 5 and 6 also report results from IV regressions, but for polarization scores calculated for incumbent groups only. These results are very similar to the ones presented in rows 3 and 4. Two final rows demonstrate the results from logit regressions estimated with the binary indicator of increased rivalry as the principal independent variable. The coefficients are not qualitatively different from the main models both in terms of statistical significance and the effect's direction, lending further support to our arguments. Overall, in both our main models and the robustness checks, we found strong empirical evidence in favor of our theoretical ideas.

Conclusion

The scope of civil wars changes with the presence of multiple groups battling one another and the state simultaneously. Recent research has answered important questions about war outcomes, duration, and group fragmentation, yet we still do not know much about how this context affects the strategies of insurgent groups to be the solo represender of a minority group. Prior literature on competition in both the

literatures on terrorism studies and civil war studies focus extensively on inter-group violence as a means to end competition. But increased violence is not the only means through which groups contest one another.

In this work, we covered how rebel rivalry affected group strategies, especially focusing on group ideology and demands. We showed that groups adapt to increasing pressure from other groups by moving in the ideological and demand space to make a brand for themselves. Substantial changes eventually end up polarizing the civil war context with some groups moderating themselves and others moving to extreme demands and ideologies. Just like business firms, product differentiation is the key to carving a niche market and securing the loyalty of the constituency that will donate resources and recruits for the sustenance and success of the insurgent group.

Using an original dataset on group ideologies and demands, we were able to find confirmation for most of our expectations. While the existence of multiple insurgent groups causes a strain on the resources of the state which has to fight on multiple grounds, it also offers certain opportunities. Inter-group rivalries pressure insurgents in ways that could offer unique moments to end conflict. While the pressure may push some insurgents to extreme ideologies and demands, it pushes others to moderation. Indeed, governments have often found it useful to accommodate groups after they have moved in ideological and demand space, a need that manifests itself because groups seek product differentiation. This is one of the first studies to examine the endogenous formation of group ideology and demands as a form of outbidding. Building upon our findings, future studies can delve into other related topics such as credibility of ideological changes as well as reputational costs of and distinct rewards from making such changes.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. In this paper, we adopt the definition of rebel group used by the Non-State Actors in Armed Conflict (NSA) Dataset and its parent UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. These datasets define a rebel group as a formally organized, non-governmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force to influence the outcome of a governmental or territorial incompatibility (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013).

2. We draw from both literatures on terrorism and civil wars to discuss the logic of outbidding by violent non-state actors. Yet, previous literature treats terrorism and civil wars as distinct forms of political violence with important differences between them (Merari 1993; Sambanis 2008). Fortna (2015) explores rebel groups using terror tactics and those that do not in civil wars to show that terrorism has a different logic and outcome. Outbidding rivals by violence for example may resonate better with violent groups using terrorist tactics as it helps cloak group weakness while pronouncing resolve, the two signals Fortna associates with terrorism. We accept these distinctions but we argue that outbidding exists in one form or another in most of civil wars though the level of its use may vary among groups.

3. Though rivalry is expected to be acute when groups represent the same constituency, other rebel groups involved in different conflicts in the same country-year may be equally important for incentivizing ideological differentiation. This is because rebel groups will benefit from both maximizing constituency support and increasing non-constituency support (Fortna 2015; Akcinaroglu and Tokdemir 2020). The more distinct a rebel group is in the spectrum of all conflicts in that country-year, the more it is likely to stand out for all audiences, domestic and international. For example, Post, Sprinzak, and Denny (2003) study on 35 incarcerated Middle Eastern terrorists indicates that secularist individuals are as likely to join religious terrorist organizations as they are likely to join secular ones. Similarly, O'Connor (2014) study on PKK supporters in Turkey shows that the rebel organization has an ethnically diverse membership beyond its Kurdish constituency. As an example, a leftist non-Kurdish activist interviewed in this study abandoned the leftist Dev-Sol organization to join the PKK, a predominantly Kurdish-based organization with some left leanings. These studies demonstrate that rebel groups can attract supporters from the constituencies of rebel groups operating in different conflicts.

4. To be precise, CMP coders first classified quasi-sentences in each document in accordance with 56 pre-defined categories; percentages are just proportions of categories in a given manifesto.

5. For further information regarding the coding sources and procedures, please refer to the online appendix.

6. List of all ideological components: Nationalism, Ethnonationalism, Regional Nationalism, Communism, Socialism, Left-leaning, Anti-communism, Marxism, Maoism, Cuban Communism, Other-type Communism, Secular, Religious and if religious then Sharia, Shia Extremism, Christian Extremism, Other-type Religious. Also, we coded Revolutionary Democracy and Social Democracy.

7. Substantively, the observation in this dataset is a rebel group-year.

8. We provide JAGS (Plummer 2017) code in the online appendix.

9. By incumbent we mean a rebel group that functions for at least two years. We do not code emergence of a new rebel group as change in ideology/demands.

10. As a robustness check, we ran our analyses with the inverse of Herfindahl-Hirschman Index as a measure of competition, akin to the approach of Nemeth (2014). The index was calculated from the rebel size estimates from NSA Dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013). A reader can access these results with detailed commentary in the online appendix, part A.5.3.

11. We replicated our main models with an alternative Historical Index of Ethnic Fractionalization (Drazanova 2020) and found mostly the same results. A reader can find the details in the online appendix, part A.5.4.

12. Polity score may not be the most appropriate control variable for our purposes because it references civil war in its coding rules. To address this concern, we replicated our analyses with xpolity variable (Vreeland 2008, data was accessed through https://github.com/n-klotz/X-Polity-Index) and found no substantial change in results. These additional models can be found in the online appendix, part A.5.5.

13. Our sample includes country-years that correspond to intra-state conflict events.

14. While the effect is overall statistically significant in all graphs, 3 out of 4 graphs hint at the importance of highly contentious conflict environments (number of rivals exceeding 5) for our findings. In other words, results may be driven by a few outliers in the data, especially considering that the mean number of rival groups is 1.86 (see the Table 1). To address this possibility, we first excluded "extreme cases" from analysis, where the number of rivals exceeds 5. After that, we went even further and excluded all cases where the number of rivals exceeds 3. Results (presented in the online appendix, part A.5.6, Table A.5.19-26) for these restricted datasets are even stronger, lending further support to our argument.

15. For detailed tables with control variables, see the online appendix.

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