

Executive Summary

Since the end of the Cold War, twenty-four civil wars have ended in rebel victory. New rebel governments face existential threats both internally and externally. With rebel victory, international actors may quickly resort to putting pressure on former non-state actors to prevent renewed conflict. In addition, the structural factors that influence rebel victory in armed conflict, such as weak institutions, economic and political grievances, and arms availability, condition the rivals' aspirations to change the status quo. In order to legitimize their rule, rebel victors must show control over the state. Rebel victors can manage domestic risk and consolidate state power by either repressing or co-opting challengers. While the repression strategy can be costly both domestically and internationally, a rebel government can co-opt new or existing insurgencies through a variety of strategies either unilaterally or consensually. In our analysis of rebel victors since the end of the Cold War, we found that peace agreements alone do not significantly impact the recurrence of conflict. However, peace agreements with constitutional reform provisions decrease the probability of conflict recurrence. To retain power, new rebel regimes must rebuild state-society relations, which starts with reforming the constitution — a legal pact between rulers and citizens. Following rebel victory, the international community should pressure rebel incumbents to negotiate with civil society and insurgent groups to find consensus toward new constitutions. Peace agreement negotiators should refrain from drawing accords that only delineate future power-sharing patterns; instead, they should engage with armed and non-armed opposition groups to reach consensus on constitutional changes.

Keywords:

- rebel victory
- conflict recurrence
- peace agreement
- constitutional reform
- sanctions
- Afghanistan

Rebel Victory and International Responses

The Taliban's unanticipated rebel victory in 2021 left international organizations and state actors scrambling for foreign policy strategies to prevent civil war recurrence and the proliferation of new terrorist organizations. Improving human rights for ethnic minorities, women, and children were also key aims. The immediate international policy toward Afghanistan was devising economic sanctions and the freezing of state funds abroad. In December 2021, recognizing the Taliban's threat to the peace, stability, and security of Afghanistan, the United Nations passed Resolution 2611, mandating all states to continue to freeze assets, ban travel, and prevent supply of arms to the Taliban and individuals associated with the Taliban.

Given this context, the international community might pressure the Taliban to build a government of national unity that includes ethnic leaders in an executive power-sharing pact, in hopes that such an arrangement would lead to more accountability from incumbents toward a larger portion of the Afghan population. It might also be tempting to keep sanctions in place, promoting dissent among the population, which could offer the possibility of a new regime with a better human rights record gaining power. Our research shows that, on the whole, sanctions and arms embargoes do not have a significant effect on civil war recurrence in the post-rebel victory phase, and power-sharing pacts actually increase

the chances of civil war recurrence. Promoting dissent among the population increases state repression, which in turn increases the chances of civil war, but without leading to regime change. Most rebel regimes formed after the end of the Cold War have been highly resilient, with only a few incumbents losing power without significant third-party interventions. Our analysis shows that one of the best strategies to avoid civil war recurrence is consensus-based peace processes that include negotiating constitutional reforms.

Effective Tools for Stopping Civil War Recurrence After Rebel Victory

To determine the causes of civil war recurrence following rebel victories, we analyzed all cases of new rebel governments after the end of the Cold War (1989-2015). We found that rebel regimes are resilient: insurgents usually do not manage to change the status quo. Out of twenty-four cases of rebel victory since the Cold War, only six rebel regimes lost power in the face of either domestic challenges or international interventions. These include rebel regimes in the Comoros (1989-1998), Paraguay (1989-2008), Somalia (1991-2000), Haiti (1991-1994), Afghanistan (1992-1995), and again Afghanistan (1996-2001). All six rebel regimes lost power within the first ten years of incumbency. In the majority of cases, the rebel regime managed to hold onto power.

Following rebel victory, institutional weakness and economic instability create incentives for insurgencies to attempt to change the new status quo. How rebel incumbents respond to domestic challengers determines whether the country experiences peace or renewed civil war. Faced with new rebellions, rebel regimes either repressed or tried to co-opt rivals to consolidate their newly gained political power. Four co-option strategies are available, depending on the extent to which they are willing to include rival input and diversify their ruling coalition and guiding ideology. The four strategies are: (1) unilaterally adopting a new constitution, (2) sharing executive power with insurgents, (3) signing peace accords with insurgents, and (4) negotiating constitutional reform through a peace process. These strategies lie on a consensus scale: the first includes the least amount of input from the dissenting population or groups, while the last can incorporate dissenting views.

The second part of our argument examines the impact of repressive or co-optive strategies on renewed conflict. We believe that co-opting rival insurgent groups through consensus-based strategies reduces chances of engaging in conflict, while opting for repression increases the likelihood of renewed civil conflict. Studying the universe of rebel victory cases since the end of the Cold War, we found that a repression strategy by rebel governments increases the risk of civil war. Thus, rebel regimes that opt for repression are more likely to see renewed civil conflict. Among the four co-option strategies with varying degrees of consensus, we find negotiated constitutional reform to be consistently negatively related to chances of renewed civil war. Power-sharing agreements and unilateral constitutional reform do not increase or decrease chances of civil war recurrence.

To summarize, among the four co-option strategies, only constitutional reform in a peace agreement is significantly associated with a lower chance of new civil war. Thus, incorporating input from political opposition is consequential for institutional reforms in post-war states.

Power-sharing by incorporating minorities incentivizes other groups to use violence to increase their chances of being included in future power-sharing pacts. Thus, power-sharing pacts increase the chances of a new civil war. In our analysis, international pressure in the form of sanctions or arms embargoes does not have an impact in lowering the prospects of renewed conflict. Rather, promoting dissent among the population increases state repression, which in turn increases chances of civil war but does not lead to regime change.

Policy Recommendations

Most rebel regimes formed after the end of the Cold War have been very resilient and only a few incumbents have lost power, mostly because of third-party interventions. Our analysis shows that the only factor associated with lesser chances of civil war recurrence is co-option of rivals through consensus-based peace processes, including negotiated constitutional reform. Based on the results of our analysis, we recommend the following policy points:

1. International efforts to promote regime change following rebel victories through sanctions and arms embargoes have not worked and have only led to more bloodshed, based on our findings. International efforts should instead follow a strategy of political engagement for inclusive peace processes. Sanctions lead to greater levels of state repressive behavior and worse human rights conditions.
2. The international community should pressure rebel governments to negotiate with civil society and insurgent groups on a new or reformed constitution for the country.
3. Negotiators should refrain from drawing accords that only mete out power-sharing deals, which lead other groups to challenge the new power-sharing government; instead, a much broader constitution-making process is needed.

Authors:

Sally Sharif is a Post-doctoral Research Associate at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

Madhav Joshi is a Research Professor and Associate Director of the Peace Accords Matrix (PAM) at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame

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Edited by **Josefina Echavarría Alvarez**, Director of PAM and Associate Professor of the Practice, and **Sally Sharif**, Postdoctoral Research Associate with PAM, this second

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