The international community often calls for negotiations in civil wars. Yet little scholarly attention has been paid to which rebels enter into negotiations. Existing work suggests that the emergence of a new leader in a rebel group can provide an opportunity for conflict termination, but we argue that this is conditional on how leaders take power. Specifically, rebel leaders who come to power through elections provide information to the state about the leader’s propensity for compromise, degree of support for the leader, and the internal cohesion of the rebel group. These factors are key determinants of the viability of the rebel group as a bargaining partner in civil war negotiations. 

Using original data on rebel leaders in civil wars, we show that these types of leaders see negotiations more often than all other types of rebel leaders and that these negotiations are more likely to lead to war end.
As the Syrian civil war enters its fifth year, the international community continues to call for a negotiated settlement. The question of who will get to the table is a critical one. The opposition is incredibly fragmented and international actors have diverging preferences about who should participate in negotiations.\(^1\) Despite the critical role that getting to the table plays in the negotiated settlement of civil conflicts, limited scholarly attention has been paid to the question of which rebels get negotiated with in the first place, particularly in the extensive quantitative literature on civil war.\(^2\)

This is surprising in part because of the normative importance often placed on the process of negotiation, but also because which rebels sit at the table have substantial implications for post-conflict politics.\(^3\) Those at the table are poised to reap the benefits that emerge in post-war politics. Critically, the vast majority of negotiated settlements include provisions for political power sharing among former combatants: approximately 80% of settled civil wars from 1945 to 1998 included an explicit division of political authority (Hoodie and Hartzell 2005). Political power at the center is not

\(^1\) The United Nations has repeatedly called on the international community to aid negotiations. See “U.S. willing to negotiate with Syria's Assad, Kerry says” CBS News. 5/15/2015. The U.S. has supported the Syrian National Coalition’s participation in negotiations. Iran has espoused various positions, stating that only Syrians should be present, and then insisting upon their own involvement. “Syria’s western-backed opposition elects new president.” Reuters. 7/9/2014.

\(^2\) A notable exception is Walter (2002), which examines which civil wars involve negotiations. Nilsson (2008) also addresses this in the context of when states pursue “partial peace.”

\(^3\) Many states refuse to negotiate with groups using terrorism. Other governments refuse to negotiate with groups for a variety of stated reasons such as connections to external supporters (as with UNITA in Angola), the rebel occupation of territory (as with M23 in the Congo), or tactics such as the killing of civilians (as with ETA in Spain).
the only thing on the table. Post-war regimes also divide up positions in the security sector, as well as territorial autonomy – both of which are explicitly negotiated over at the war’s end. Determining which rebels get to the table then, has significant consequences for the nature of post-conflict society and governance.

Which rebel groups enter into negotiations? And what are the implications of this for war end? We argue that the composition of rebel groups, specifically the way that leaders come to power, influences incentives states have to invite rebels to the table. New opposition leaders (whether they replace the leader in an existing rebel group, or form their own group) can provide a critical opportunity for states that want to end insurgency (Stedman 1997; Urlacher 2013), but emerging rebel leaders are not all equivalent.

Empirically, new leaders can come to power in a variety of ways, including, for example, splintering off of existing rebel groups, electoral processes, and selection by actors outside the conflict. The way that new leaders come to power provides critical information to governments. Specifically, we argue that when leaders take power through some process of election by the people they purport to represent, two types of information are revealed to states: 1) information about that individual leader; and 2) information about the rebel group.

First, coming to power via election can provide information about the individual, specifically about their orientation toward contention and compromise. Leaders that take power through electoral processes demonstrate an ability to bring together a sufficient number of supporters and

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5 Negotiation is common. Nearly 75% of states in our study engage in negotiations at some point.
will be viewed by the state they face as better able to gain voluntary compliance for settlement within the rebel group than rebel leaders that achieve power in other ways.

Second, when a leader assumes control of an existing group, the successful transition through an electoral process demonstrates group cohesion because competition over leader change is a natural point for splintering. The continued integrity of the group through an electoral selection process indicates that the group is likely to be resilient under pressure from the conflict and/or conflict resolution processes.\(^6\) All of these pieces of information – about the leader's propensity for compromise, the leader’s support within the group, and about rebel group cohesion – make the potential for conflict settlement less ambiguous for the state by clarifying how likely it is that the rebel group will be able to follow through on any peace deal. In short, the electoral selection of a rebel leader can decrease uncertainty about the likely success of a negotiated settlement.

Existing research concerning the role of leader selection in understanding conflict outcomes has typically been the prevue of work focused on state leaders (e.g. Horowitz et al. 2005, Croco 2011). The role of individual rebel leaders and how they come into positions of power has been largely ignored in quantitative studies of civil war.\(^7\) This has occurred to some extent because “rebels” or “rebel groups” have often been assumed to be unitary in large-n studies. Even when not assumed to be unitary, most of the recent emphasis has been on the degree to which rebels or nonstate actors are fragmented (e.g. Cunningham et al. 2012; Driscoll 2012; Findley and Rudolff 2012).

Yet, there are multiple paths to power within rebel groups. We argue that when leader selection involves a degree of democratic process, or selection by a collection of individuals, this

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signals information about the individual leader, their relationship to the rebel group, and overall group coherence, all of which have implications for conflict resolution. We hypothesize that states are more likely to negotiate with new rebel leaders that come to power through an electoral process as opposed to those that gain power in other ways because these leaders demonstrate the greatest potential as successful bargaining partners to the state.

In the next two sections, we review the literature on bargaining and conflict termination and develop our argument about the effects of leader selection. In the subsequent section, we present new information on rebel leaders, emphasizing the extent to which we can identify individuals at the head of rebel groups, how long they typically remain in power in a rebel group, and the means through which they achieve power within the rebel group. We then demonstrate empirically with a large-n analysis that rebel groups with new leaders emerging from electoral processes are more likely to be negotiated with than leaders who come to power through all other means. Finally, we consider the implications of our theory and findings on conflict negotiations for war end. We show that not only are rebel groups with elected leaders more likely to get to the negotiating table, but that these conflicts are more likely to end.

**Bargaining in civil war**

Negotiations to resolve civil wars are heavily favored by the international community but are not costless to states or international facilitators. When states negotiate with rebels, they publicly recognize that an opposition is making claims that need to be addressed, and in doing so, can legitimize these actors. As such, pursuing negotiations can make it harder for states to try to violently eliminate nonstate actors. Moreover, if negotiations fail, the government can look inept.⁸ Failed

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⁸ The 2014 presidential election in Colombia has been characterized as a “plebiscite on [President]
negotiations can provide an opening for criticism and potentially more substantial challenges to the government. Additionally, international mediators pay material costs for facilitating negotiations. They also risk their reputation as effective facilitators if negotiations fail (Beardsley 2011). Both states and international facilitators have incentives to work with bargaining partners they believe will be effective at moving the conflict toward resolution.

We present this largely as a question of which states the international community would support being at the table, with the assumption that rebels are open to negotiations. There are certainly instances in which rebels refuse to negotiate; however, we assume that, on average, rebels are open to negotiation for two reasons. First, rebels seeking support from the international community (material support or mediation) likely need to demonstrate a willingness to accept concessions if the state makes overtures. Second, rebels that make demands for political reform (particularly democratic reform) would undermine their claims if they refuse to participate in negotiations wholesale. While not uniformly true for all rebel groups, these constraints should make it more difficult for rebels to refuse to negotiate than for states to do so.

Santos’ strategy of negotiating … with Marxist guerrillas…” and the strength of the opposition candidate’s performance was attributed to the repeated failures of government negotiations in the past. “Colombia’s Zuluaga pushes Santos to presidential runoff vote.” Reuters 4/14/2014.

One context in which this assumption may not operate is when support comes from a state rival seeking predominantly to undermine the state challenged by rebels.

The assumption that rebels are open to negotiations does not imply that rebels always pursue negotiations with the intent of conflict resolution. Rebels, as well as states, may pursue negotiations with the intent of buying time to rest and rearm, which is why we explicitly examine the role of rebel leader change on both negotiations and war end. See Ikle (1964) and Ghosn (2010) for this logic.
Existing literatures suggest several factors that make bargaining success more or less likely in conflict situations. One approach suggests that an inability to bargain effectively is a major limitation to the resolution of civil war.\(^{11}\) Scholars from this approach see the continuance of civil war as an inability to overcome bargaining problems,\(^ {12}\) and assume that actors will only continue to fight if they think they can get a better outcome by fighting rather than negotiating a compromise deal. Because fighting is costly, war should be resolvable if the issues under dispute are divisible, and if each side can identify and commit credibly to abide by a settlement into the future.

The challenge to making a dispute resolving agreement is that neither states nor rebel groups know with certainty the capabilities and resolve of their opponent, and there are incentives to misrepresent this information to get a better negotiated outcome. Even if both sides are able to overcome information problems and see a deal they could agree to, concerns about credible commitments by the state or rebels not to renege on that deal can prevent a bargained settlement. Either side, the government or the rebels, may lack credibility because of the time inconsistency problem – that is, what is in the actors’ interest today may not be so in the future. Even with a viable peace deal on the table, both sides may fear that their opponent will have incentives to challenge

\(^{11}\) See Fearon (1995) and Powell (1996) for a general approach to war as a bargaining problem, and Walter (2002) and Cunningham (2011) on settlement and duration, respectively. Additional literatures highlight the importance of other factors in impeding war end, such as emotions (Peterson 2002), issue indivisibility (Toft 2006), or rebel tactics (Fortna 2015).

them again in the future when the balance of power between them has shifted. Conflict, then, continues because attempts to resolve a disagreement through bargaining fail.\textsuperscript{13}

A second, related approach to conflict resolution emphasizes the role of splintering and spoiling.\textsuperscript{14} Actors can emerge at the point of potential settlement to shift the balance of power among them, or to earnestly oppose the settlement process (or the perceived outcome of that process). In the context of the bargaining approach, this literature highlights conditions under which the fracturing of an actor can undermine their ability to make credible commitments that lead to settlement. It also emphasizes how additional actors can work to undermine the support that negotiating parties have for pursuing the settlement.

A key factor that emerges from the bargaining approach generally, and the work on spoilers and fragmentation more directly, is the importance of all actors’ abilities to commit to some future behavior (whether that be a particular political arrangement or just not to engage in violence). Rebel groups are not equally capable of making (or keeping) such commitments. The argument developed in this article addresses this link – emphasizing how the differential emergence of leaders in rebellion influences the credibility of commitments made by the group to the state during conflict bargaining.

\textbf{Rebel leader selection}

Rebel leaders come to power in a variety of ways, which we elaborate in the next section. We focus theoretically on when leaders come to power through elections of some type. We begin by

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\textsuperscript{13} Powell (2006) shows that uncertainty over the distribution of power and the probability of rapid, power shifts diminishes the likelihood of a successful bargaining outcome.

\textsuperscript{14} While these literatures address some similar dynamic, splintering and spoiling have often been examined as separate phenomena (c.f. Stedman 1997, Bloom 2004, Pearlman 2009, Driscoll 2012).
stating explicitly our assumptions about what the government wants in civil war negotiations, then elaborate on the information that rebel leader election provides to governments about the individual leader (capacity to compromise and degree of internal support from the rebel group) and information about the rebel group more generally (chance of splintering).

The government’s perspective

Following much of the bargaining and conflict literature, we assume that the government is willing to pursue a bargained settlement to conflict, but must overcome challenges to do so. A key barrier identified in the conflict literature is rebels’ difficulty in making credible promises (e.g., Svensson 2007; Walter 2009; Cunningham 2013). As noted above, rebels’ lack of credibility can stem from the time-inconsistency problem, wherein rebels renege later because it is in their interests to do so. Yet in many cases, settlement means the end of the rebel organization, either through dispersion or transformation into another type of actor (such as a political party).

Rebels’ lack of credibility more often derives from an inability of the rebel leaders to gain sufficient compliance among rebel members or supporters for the implementation of a peace deal. This can be caused by the outright rejection of a peace agreement by the rank and file rebels (as happened in the Mizo Liberation Front in 1976).¹⁵ In addition to outright rejection, rebel groups often splinter in ways that undermine their ability to follow through on promises to the state. Splintering plagues a number of rebel groups, and can be directly engendered by the settlement process. Splintering can lead to partial peace, wherein some, but not all, of the rebel movement agree to terminate the conflict (Nilsson 2008). However, disputes within fracturing rebel groups can also lead to persistent conflict if splinter factions continue to fight or prevent implementation the peace

¹⁵ MNF’s leader signed an agreement to which he could not get fighters to comply (Bhaumik 1996).
agreement other actors agreed to. Failed settlement attempts that result in more rebel groups lead to even longer disputes. ¹⁶ Given these challenges, governments have incentives to negotiate with rebel groups they see as relatively credible (even if total credibility cannot be achieved).

**Emergent rebel leaders**

New leaders in rebel groups (whether they emerge as the group forms or through replacing a previous leader) can provide an opportunity for governments seeking a negotiated end to the conflict, but not all new leaders will necessarily do so. Governments often have limited information about both the individuals that rise to power and these individuals’ relationship to the larger opposition movement. The means through which leaders take power can signal information to the government about the new leader and the rebel group that have baring on the rebel group’s ability to bargain with the state.

Leaders take power through a variety of means. Many rebel groups are founded by a leader that retains power over time (for example, Pol Pot, Cambodia’s infamous and long standing leader of Khmer Rouge). Some leaders inherit the position when an incumbent leader exits (such as Afonso Dhlakama, who assumed leadership of Renamo in 1979 following the death of the previous leader, and Pau Yuchang who rose to power in the United Wa State Army after the former leader, Chao Ngii Lai, suffered a stroke). ¹⁷ Others are installed by actors outside the conflict. For example,

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¹⁶ States may seek to splinter rebels through negotiations, although it is not clear when or why this strategy would be preferred to working with a coherent bargaining partner.

¹⁷ Uppsala Conflict Data Program Conflict (UCDP) and Mackerras 2003, p. 186.
Sekou Conneh was appointed chairman of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy in 2000, mainly because of his high-level contacts within the Guinean government.¹⁸

New leaders also come to power though a selection process that involved elections. Electoral selection is any process through which a set of individuals openly selects the rebel leader through voting. For example, Upendra Nath Brahma was elected to head the All Bodo Student Union, which challenged India in 1986 (Sinha 2007). Emile Ilunga was selected to replace Ernest Wamba dia Wamba through voting at the Congolese Democratic Coalition general meeting in 1999 (Seybolt 1999). Electoral selection can occur at the time of a rebel group’s founding, but it more commonly occurs when there is leadership change.¹⁹

Although election of rebel leaders does not convert rebel groups into democratic actors, even if free and fair,²⁰ these elections are unlikely to meet our definition of contestation as ex-ante uncertain, ex-post irreversible, and repeatable (Przeworski et al. 2000), this process is not meaningless: some elections appear competitive, with multiple viable candidates, allowing for accountability and competitive.²¹ Election of a rebel leader provides information to the government about both the new leader as an individual and about the group, particularly in comparison to

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¹⁸ Conneh was the son-in-law of Guinea’s President (Call 2012, p. 77).

¹⁹ Among elected leaders, the majority are replacement leaders (about 57%).

²⁰ While rebel elections entail a collective decision-making process, we recognize that this electoral process may not necessarily generate accountability because of a lack of regularized and competitive selection. There may be no opportunity to generate accountability for the leader through removing him or her in a subsequent election.

²¹ For example, Ahmad Muhammed Silanyo was elected in the fourth Somali National Movement congress in August 1984 after being challenged publically by Abd al-Qadir Kosar.
groups where leaders come to power through alternative means, for example, the death or killing of the previous leader. Elections literatures have shown that the electoral process can reveal information even in a non-democratic context (e.g., Brownlee 2007).

Signaling information about the leader

The election of a leader operates a costly signal for new leaders. Regardless of the impetus for the group to use electoral process, these elections have risks for leaders. If the election is competitive and there are multiple viable challengers, leaders run the risk of losing influence, or at the extreme, losing their life. In institutionalized democratic settings, losing an election often means waiting for another opportunity to run for office. In rebel groups, an election of a new leader will not necessarily be repeated and there are not regularized intervals for leadership change. An unsuccessful leadership candidate may find a lesser position in the group; however, he or she may also need to leave altogether. Failing to gain the support of the group, or the population it represents in some instances, can eliminate an individual’s chance of ever leading the group.

Successfully taking power through elections signals two things about the leader: first, it can signal that the leader is personally amenable to politics through negotiation, as opposed to a leader that achieves power primarily through coercion or even charisma. Research in political psychology suggests that democratic process and norms are associated with leaders more amenable to negotiation (c.f. Hermann and Kegley 1995, Wright 1942). Moreover, groups may work to replace leaders with a more negotiation oriented individual in cases where the leader, rather than the group

22 See also Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) on the effects of elections in non-democratic states.

23 These are not mutually exclusive, elected leaders also use force, but do not do so exclusively.
members, could be characterized as *total spoilers* (e.g., individuals that “pursue total power and exclusive recognition of authors and hold immutable preference (Stedman 1997, p. 10)).

Second, gaining power through an election signals information about the relationship between the leader and the opposition movement more generally. Assuming that winning an electoral contest requires a minimum winning coalition of sorts, an individual that can achieve this is much more likely than other, non-elected leaders, to be able to deliver on promises made on behalf of the group. The composition of a minimum winning coalition will depend on the number of electors and the distribution of power among them. Regardless of its composition, leaders that can command this support will appear better able to make commitments on behalf of the group from the government’s perspective.25

*Signaling information about the group*

Leader change through elections also poses risks for the group because it can engender splintering in existing groups. By introducing open competition into the succession process, an election can bring underlying divisions in a rebel group into the open, forcing individuals to declare allegiances, and potentially facilitating a split in the organization. Splintering is a significant risk for rebel groups because it both reduces their forces and often creates a rivalry that can generate significant costs for the group.26

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24 See also Horowitz (1985) on why leaders of ethnic groups may not prefer or seek accommodation.

25 For signals to influence bargaining, governments must know that the rebel leader was elected. We find substantial evidence suggesting that leader changes are public knowledge.

26 The split between the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement/Army led to substantial internecine fighting (Jok and Hutchinson 1999). Splintering can also produce diverging beliefs about capabilities
For example, the case of the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) in Democratic Republic of the Congo highlights the risks of splintering and exile associated with rebel elections. The group had historically received support from external actors with divergent preferences; Rwanda, who advocated the use of force alone, and Uganda, which emphasized the need for diplomacy. In 1999, the RCD held a conference in Goma to try to unify the disparate perspectives, and Ernest Wamba dia Wamba was replaced as the RDC leader through the election of Emile Ilunga. Wamba dia Wamba fled to Uganda, and effectively split the group (forming a splinter called RCD-ML). This split led to conflict between the rebels themselves, with alternating sides being banned from or boycotting negotiations.\(^{27}\) Deciding rebel leadership through an electoral process creates a real potential for exacerbating underlying divisions that can undermine the group’s cohesion.

If the election of a new leader does not split the group, the successful leadership transition signals to the government that a period of high risk for splintering has occurred and passed. As such, it reveals information to the government about the cohesiveness of the group. If the group were going to splinter, the open competition provided by an electoral selection created a window of opportunity for doing so.\(^{28}\) Internal cohesion is important for getting to the table because governments seeking war end want to negotiate with rebel actors that can “deliver” the support of their soldiers and their constituent population when a settlement is reached.

The emergence of a new rebel leader can provide an opportunity for governments, but this affect is conditional on how leaders take power. The election of a new leader provides critical information to the government about the leader’s propensity for compromise, degree of support that can lengthen conflict (Findley and Rudloff 2012).

\(^{27}\) Despite the Lusaka Peace Accord in 1999, the conflict continued on until 2004 (UCDP).

\(^{28}\) Election at group founding may play a similar role, but would likely lead to multiple groups.
within the group, and the internal cohesion of the rebel group. Assuming power through electoral process poses risk for both leaders and the group, and the successful transition to new leadership signals to the government that the leader can be a good negotiating partner, one that is open to compromise, can deliver their supporters, and that leads a rebel group unlikely to fracture under the stress of the conflict resolution process.

Our theory suggests that elected leaders will not only be more likely to participate in negotiations, but that these events provide critical information that governments will act on. The expectation of response by governments highlights the temporal dimension of conflict bargaining. Rebel leaders are elected at specific points in time and the signal that election provides about the leaders potential as a bargaining partner is essentially current information. Although these characteristics may persevere, the government receives information about the current status quo. As such, our hypothesis that elected leaders are more likely to be negotiated with is framed with respect to time.

\[ H1: \text{Rebel leaders coming to power through elections will be negotiated with sooner than leaders achieving power in other ways.} \]

In the next section, we test this empirically with new data on rebel leaders and how they achieve power, and demonstrate strong support for the hypothesis. Following that, we turn to the question of how the electoral selection of leaders in rebellion influences war end.

**Are elected leaders more likely to see negotiations?**

Between 1989 and 2011, there were 133 civil wars around the globe. Including multi-party and two-party civil wars, 287 rebel groups have fought their state. Among these rebel groups, we
have identified the leader of the group about 95% of the time.  

Rebel leaders

This new rebel leader dataset builds on the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP) dataset of internal conflicts that reach a yearly 25 battle-death threshold. The dataset covers UCDP rebel groups in conflicts active between 1989 and 2011. We include dyad years prior to 1989 if the war was active in our study period. For each group, we collected data on the history of the leadership of the group over the duration of its existence as a warring party in the UCDP data. We leveraged a variety of sources, including secondary academic sources and news sources found in LexisNexis Academic and Keesing’s Record of World Events. The process was conducted chronologically from the founding year of the group forward, so that the founding leader was identified and the year of their subsequent exit from power was noted. Information on the newly ascendant leader was recorded, including the date and the method of ascension.

In 215 rebel groups, a single leader led the group for the duration of the conflict. When rebel leaders changed, 31 groups had 2 leaders, and 29 groups had more than 2 leaders. The average leadership tenure is approximately 14 years. Based on the case histories of the leadership in these groups, we then categorized leader ascension into seven mutually exclusive types. For the 373

29 For 83 of 1652 dyad-years, we were unable to identify leadership. These were primarily in rebel groups in Asia. See the appendix for details as to which cases had unidentified leaders.

30 We repeated all analyses below restricting the sample to only disputes that generated 1,000 battle-deaths total, and the findings on the effect of elected leaders are similar to the presented models.

31 For the distribution of rebel leadership tenure, see Appendix Figure 1.
leaders we have identified in our study, each is classified in one category in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the distribution of these types of ascension.

Table 1 About Here

Figure 1 About Here

*Elected leaders*

There are 44 leaders in the dataset that were elected in some fashion. In more than half of these, we find some indications about the size of the selectorate or whether we might consider the election “popular” (i.e., the selectorate was a large proportion of the population the group claimed to represent, rather than just the rebel group members). In about 29% of these cases, we find a selectorate between 88 to 200 group members. The largest selectorate we had clear information on was 700,000 for Meles Zenawi in the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front in 1989. In other instances, we found information about the percentage of votes received by rebel leaders, such as Eduard Kokoity’s election to lead the breakaway South Ossetia territory in 2001 where he won with 53% of the vote (Illarianov 2009). In all cases (regardless of whether a selectorate size was identified), there had to be clear reports of an electoral selection process to be coded as an elected leader. Note that we explicitly distinguish the process of electoral ascension from leaders who are chosen by a group of rebel elites, which may be less representative of the rebel group’s interests as a

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32 There are 370 unique leaders in the dataset, but for our purposes we are interested in the process of selection in each rebel group. Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, Idriss Deby and Yasser Arafat each led two distinct rebel groups. Wamba dia Wamba led the RCD and RCD-ML after its split from RCD. Deby led the MPS and the Revolutionary Forces of April 1st; Arafat led Fatah and the PNA.
whole (e.g., leaders chosen by a rebel council or rebel “politiburo” in communist groups); these cases are coded as selected by a rebel cadre. Rebel elections occur in all regions; see Appendix Table 4 for geographic distribution.

Negotiations

We use the UCDP conflict profiles to identify when and with whom negotiations occurred during these civil wars.\(^3^3\) The measure is dyadic, meaning we identified cases of negotiations occurring between the rebel group and the state involved in the conflict.\(^3^4\) The criterion for negotiations is that the subject of the talks must concern an issue related to the conflict, for example, the type of incompatibility, ceasefires, or exchange of prisoners. Thus to be included in our negotiations measure, the nature of the talks had to concern an issue related to the conflict and exclude negotiations that were purely about the process, such as initial talks to outline parameters for negotiations to occur. Negotiations occurred between the government and rebel group in about 20% of all dispute dyad-years. Less than half of all rebel groups (46%) enter into negotiations with the government at some point in the group’s tenure in the dispute.

Control variables

We specify our models to include covariates that are likely to influence both the likelihood of negotiations and termination and our main independent variable of theoretical interest: whether a

\(^{33}\) Negotiations were coded from the field: “Negotiations in dyad” in the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia. Accessed: 09/01/01 - 14/11/07.

\(^{34}\) This does not exclude negotiations in which third-parties were involved in the negotiation process. Some negotiations were multiparty in that other rebel groups or external actors were included.
rebel leader comes to power through an electoral process. While there are few quantitative studies of negotiations as an outcome, particularly in the civil conflict literature,\(^{35}\) we can reasonably assume that some of the factors identified as influencing war end may also influence negotiations occurrence. We include a measure of armed strength (measured as the size of the state and rebel troops log transformed) from UCDP. Existing research suggests that balanced forces make conflict termination less likely, and others have demonstrated that civil wars with relatively strong rebels are shorter in duration (Cunningham et al., 2009).\(^{36}\)

The literature on intervention and external support suggests several key factors with respect to conflict duration that we incorporate into our models. Regan (2002) and Cunningham (2010) show that intervention can increase conflict duration, particularly when the intervening party has its own agenda. We add a dichotomous measure of intervention to our models.\(^{37}\) Other types of external support have also been linked to a decreased chance of war end and may change the incentives of states to engage in bargaining.\(^{38}\) Two dichotomous measures of external support (to rebels and to the state) are included from the UCDP External Support Dataset.\(^{39}\)

\(^{35}\) Ghosn (2010) addresses this for international conflict negotiations.

\(^{36}\) We also substitute the natural log of the ratio of rebel to state troops (see Appendix Table 12).

\(^{37}\) Data on direct military intervention in civil conflict comes from Cunningham (2010).

\(^{38}\) Sawyer et al. (2015) argue that rebels receiving external support have greater commitment problems.

\(^{39}\) See Pettersson, Therése, (2011). This measure includes the types: financial, troop, weapons, material/logistic, military/intelligence, material, training/expertise, and/or access to territory.
We also control for a number of factors that are commonly included in civil conflict studies such as battle deaths (natural log transformed),\textsuperscript{40} a measure of ethnic fractionalization,\textsuperscript{41} the size of the state’s population (natural log transformed),\textsuperscript{42} whether the group has a legal political wing,\textsuperscript{43} whether or not the group has territorial control,\textsuperscript{44} and whether or not the state is democratic.\textsuperscript{45} As the literature predicting negotiations is sparse relative to the termination literature, several of these measures have been added as alternative, exploratory predictors of negotiations as supported by the data (see discussion below on how covariates were specifically added to the models).

The effect of elected rebel leaders

Given that our key mechanisms entail the signaling for information to the state about the rebel leader and group, we frame our hypothesis with respect to duration. We expect that leaders that come to power through election will be in negotiations with the state sooner than leaders that come to power in other ways.

To evaluate this hypothesis, we use the Cox (1972) semi-parametric, proportional hazards model to assess the time to “failure,” in this case, negotiations. The Cox semi-parametric model offers an improvement over other duration models, as it does not assume a specific probability

\textsuperscript{40} Data from UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia (Accessed: 09/01/01 - 14/11/07).
\textsuperscript{41} Data from Fearon (2003).
\textsuperscript{42} Data from World Bank. World Development Indicators.
\textsuperscript{43} Data from Expanded Armed Conflict Data (EACD) v2.3.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} The variable for democracy comes from the Gleditsch’s revised version of the Polity IV.
distribution in the time it takes for the event to occur, which can have large effects on the substantive interpretations of the results.\textsuperscript{46}

Table 2 reports the hazard ratios from a multivariate survival analyses that take into account the selection process of leaders, as well as other factors. We use tests of equality to help guide which variables are included in each model: the log-rank test of equality across strata (non-parametric) for categorical variables, and Cox proportional hazard regression for continuous variables. A hazard ratio of one suggests that the time to event, in this case negotiations, is no different between groups with elected leaders and groups without this type of leader. A hazard ratio greater than one suggests that elected leaders “fail” or enter into negotiations more rapidly than groups without such leaders. A hazard ratio less than one would suggest that the time to failure is longer for groups with elected selected leaders than for those without.

***Table 2 About Here***

The results reported in Table 2 demonstrate substantial support for our hypothesis. The coefficients on electoral selection are greater than one and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The emergence of a new rebel leader who assumes control through electoral selection significantly decreases the time to negotiations with the state.

\textsuperscript{46}We employ several tests to detect possible violations of the proportional hazards assumption, i.e., graphical methods and univariate tests (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). For categorical variables, the log-rank test of equality across strata is assessed, and for the continuous variables, the use of a univariate Cox proportional hazard regression where predictors are eliminated if their corresponding p-value is greater than 0.25.
Several other factors also influence time to negotiations. Democratic governments enter into negotiations more readily than non-democracies, as do more governments in more ethnically diverse states. The finding on democracies is consistent with much of the work on norms that suggests such governments are likely to pursue conflict resolution through negotiation. Ethnically diverse states may be more prone to negotiations if governance requires compromise across groups in general.

The results on troop size offer a contrast: more powerful states with larger armies do not enter into negotiations as swiftly as states with smaller forces, while increasing the size of the rebels’ troops decreases the time to negotiations overall. Wealthier and more populous states enter into negotiations less readily as well. This suggests that stronger and undemocratic states are slower to negotiate. Moreover, as conflict severity increases, the time to negotiations decreases, suggesting that groups are more likely to seek a negotiated resolution to fighting (or at least a temporary reprieve at the bargaining table) when the costs of conflict become too high. Neither intervention nor the existence of a legal political wing has a significant effect on time to negotiations. 47

Our analysis in Table 2 is driven by our theoretical argument concerning the role that the election of rebel leaders plays with respect to conflict processes. In additional analyses in the appendix, we examine the effect of each of the other ascension types with elected ascension as the base category. We find that no other ascension type had a statistically significant effect on time to negotiations (Appendix Table 5). Moreover, rebel leader change alone (irrespective of the type) does not have a statistically significant effect on negotiations (Appendix Table 6). As an additional robustness check, we also controlled for state leader change. The effect of election of rebel leaders on time to negotiations is robust to this inclusion (Appendix Table 7).

47 Elected leaders are not tightly linked to having a legal political wing, which we might expect. Only 11% of rebel leaders are elected from groups with a legal political wing.
In sum, we find robust support for our claim that not all rebel leaders are equal, and that the election of a rebel leader leads to negotiations with the state more rapidly. This supports our argument that the process of electing a rebel leader provides unique and valuable information to the government about the leader’s orientation toward compromise, the leader’s connection to rebel followers, and the internal cohesion of the group, all of which determine if the leader is likely to be a successful bargaining partner with the state.

Are elections strategic?

A potential concern for our analysis relates to the timing of rebel leader elections and a potentially ongoing process of negotiations with the state. Specifically, if rebel groups engage in electoral selection strategically and in direct response to a perception of eminent negotiations, then we may find an association between elected leaders and negotiations and errantly interpret this.

Based on the structure of the study, in particular our focus on rebel elections as part of an ascension process, it is unlikely that elections are being used strategically. Specifically, we account for elections only as part of the process through which a new leader comes to power, and do not include instances of rebel leaders calling for elections during their tenure. Thus, there needs to be some precipitating event that leads to new leader selection, such as the death or capture of a leader, the internal removal of an incumbent leader, or the election occurs at the time of group formation. The process is not akin to parliamentary leaders strategically calling elections to shore up support and, in this case, signal legitimacy and cohesion.  

To address the concern that the occurrence of elections of new rebel leaders was precipitated by negotiations (even if not strategic per se), we employ a logistic regression model to

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48 How such “called” elections influence the conflict process is beyond the scope of this study.
predict newly elected rebel leaders (Appendix Table 8). There is no obvious pattern on which rebel groups select new leaders through elections. Negotiations in the previous year do not predict an elected change in rebel leadership. It may be that elections within rebel groups are a function of organizational culture or reflect different contexts in which the rebel groups operate. These additional analyses suggest that the occurrence of elected leaders is not solely driven by the negotiations process, or by factors such as the presence of a legal political wing within the group or whether or not the state has democratic institutions. Moreover, the nature of the conflict itself does not seem to drive occurrence of new leader elections; whether or not the conflict is ethnic in nature and the intensity of the battle itself has no significant bearing on whether groups elect new leaders.

*How does this matter for war end?*

The preceding analyses demonstrate that leaders taking power though elections see negotiations sooner than other types of leaders. If this pattern reflects our understanding of the role of electoral selection, we can also hypothesize that such leaders will see conflict end at a higher rate. The election signals information about the leader and group, which we argue makes states more confident about the rebel leader’s ability to commit to a settlement. These characteristics that make an elected leader a desirable bargaining partner – orientation toward compromise, sufficient support from the rebel group members, and higher chance of maintaining coherence – should make the rebel group and state more likely to resolve the dispute all else being equal.

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49 Two and three year lags of negotiations also show no effect on elected leaders.

50 Appendix Table 8 also reports a similar logit model without lagged negotiations. Three factors are associated with rebel leader elections: intervention (negative effect), larger state military (positive effect) and larger country population (positive effect).
**H2:** Rebel leaders coming to power through elections will see war end sooner than leaders achieving power in other ways.

To evaluate this hypothesis, we use the Cox semi-parametric, proportional hazards model to assess the time to “failure,” in this case, negotiations. The Cox semi-parametric model offers an improvement over other duration models, as it does not assume a specific probability distribution in the time it takes for the event to occur, which can have large effects on the substantive interpretations of the results.

Table 2 reports the hazard ratios from a multivariate survival analyses that take into account the selection process of leaders, as well as other factors. We use tests of equality to help guide which variables are included in each model: the log-rank test of equality across strata (non-parametric) for categorical variables, and Cox proportional hazard regression for continuous variables. A hazard ratio of one suggests that the time to event, in this case negotiations, is no different between groups with elected leaders and groups without this type of leader. A hazard ratio greater than one suggests that elected leaders “fail” or enter into negotiations more rapidly than groups without such leaders. A hazard ratio less than one would suggest that the time to failure is longer for groups with elected selected leaders than for those without.

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51 Cox 1972.

52 We employ several tests to detect possible violations of the proportional hazards assumption, i.e., graphical methods and univariate tests (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). For categorical variables, the log-rank test of equality across strata is assessed, and for the continuous variables, the use of a univariate Cox proportional hazard regression where predictors are eliminated if their corresponding p-value is greater than 0.25.
The results reported in Table 2 demonstrate substantial support for our hypothesis. The coefficients on electoral selection are greater than one and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The emergence of a new rebel leader who assumes control through electoral selection significantly decreases the time to negotiations with the state.

Several other factors also influence time to negotiations. Democratic governments enter into negotiations more readily than non-democracies, as do more governments in more ethnically diverse states. The finding on democracies is consistent with much of the work on norms that suggests such governments are likely to pursue conflict resolution through negotiation. Ethnically diverse states may be more prone to negotiations if governance requires compromise across groups in general.

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**H2**: Rebel leaders coming to power through elections will see war end sooner than leaders achieving power in other ways.

To evaluate this hypothesis, we provide two sets of analyses, a duration analysis of negotiated war termination and a bivariate probit that connects the two outcomes (negotiations and war end). We measure conflict termination as a two or more year break in conflict that reaches the 25 battle-death threshold. Recall a hazard ratio greater than 1 means that termination will occur sooner.

***Table 3 About Here***

The results in Table 3 on war end show a similar pattern as Table 2 on negotiations alone. The coefficient on electoral selection of rebel leaders is greater than one and statistically significant. Elected leaders see conflict end sooner than leaders that take power in other ways. In contrast to the

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57 When identical covariates are used for termination and negotiations, the results for elected leaders are similar to presented models. See Appendix Table 9.
results on rebel strength in Table 2, rebel troop strength predicts a slower end to the conflict. Thus, stronger rebels appear to see negotiations sooner, but not conflict end. Consistent with some of the extant literature, external support to states decreases the length of the conflict. Increases in population size, in contrast, are associated with longer time to a war end.

The preceding analysis provides robust support demonstrating that the election of a rebel leader is associated with both a shorter time to negotiations and a shorter time to war termination than any other type of leader change. Yet these two outcomes are linked together in many instances. Specifically, negotiations are likely correlated with the termination of the conflict, and more specifically, conflict termination is endogenous to negotiations. As such, we employ a second analysis technique, a bivariate probit analysis, to model this process more explicitly.

Using a bivariate probit model is an appropriate choice to model correlation in the error terms. Any unobserved factors — such as the perceived resolve of a rebel group — are likely to affect both the probability of entering into negotiations with the state as well as the probability of conflict termination. The bivariate probit model corrects for such correlation between the unobserved factors. The two equations are solved simultaneously using full information maximum likelihood estimation to allow for all possible combinations of the two dependent variables. Following the approach specified by Carter and Signorino (2010), we include three time controls, \( t \), \( t^2 \), and \( t^3 \) to account for issues of temporal dependence. Table 4 reports the results of the bivariate probit model with robust standard errors where negotiations and conflict termination are the two binary dependent variables.

***Table 4 About Here***

This analysis supports our theoretical expectations: when rebel leaders are selected through elections (as opposed to leaders rising to power through any other means outlined above) the group
is significantly more likely to enter into negotiations with the state (Column 1). Subsequently, civil conflict between the state and a rebel group with an elected leader is more likely to terminate (Column 2).

We use a seemingly unrelated two-equation probit model in order to allow the independent variables to vary for each dependent variable, tailoring each model according to feedback from the data and with respect to theory. The Wald-likelihood ratio test indicates that we can reject the null hypothesis of zero correlation between the error terms in the two models, lending support to our model specification.\(^{58}\) The results demonstrate that when rebels ascend to power through elections, the joint predicted probability of the group entering into negotiations and the conflict reaching a termination more than doubles (increasing by approximately 6.22 percentage points, statistically significant at the 0.05 level). Figure 2 compares the marginal effects of elected rebel leadership to other statistically significant predictors across outcomes in Table 4. Elected rebel leadership has the largest substantive effect on the joint probability of negotiations and conflict termination.\(^{59}\)

***Figure 2 About Here***

The control variables perform similarly to Table 3. The results of the bivariate probit and duration models provide substantial empirical support for the importance of elected leaders in determining which rebels get to the table and the positive effect of elected leaders on conflict

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\(^{58}\) Chi-squared value: 61.33; p<0.001.

\(^{59}\) Marginal joint effects are calculated using the bivariate model reported in Table 4. Standard errors are calculated using the delta-method.
We argue that the key mechanism through which elections have this impact is that they provide key information about the viability of a rebel group as a bargaining partner that can make and stick to a settlement deal.

Conclusion

There are many possible ways to categorize rebel groups and their leaders. Our focus here is on a critical link between the head of a rebel group and their followers, and emphasizes the very foundation of the power such leaders wield. Recent work on civil wars has centered on other characteristics of rebel groups, including group cohesion, alliances between groups, political wings, and recruitment practices. This article advances our understanding of conflict dynamics by offering a novel theory of rebel leader selection and its impact on conflict bargaining. Using new data on how rebel leaders come to power, we demonstrate that the rebel leader’s path to power is a key determinant for which rebels get to the bargaining table, a vital first step in conflict resolution that

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60 As additional robustness checks, we specified a model with an alternative specification of the power ratio (see Appendix Table 10) and whether or not the conflict began post-cold war (Appendix Table 11). The inclusion of this variable does not alter the impact of rebel elected leaders on either negotiations or conflict termination.
can have lasting consequences for post-war politics. By bringing new data on rebel leadership to bear on the questions of bargaining and war settlement, this research traces the entire process of the conflict, from the rebel leader’s ascension to power, to negotiations with the state, to war end.

Rebel leaders do not typically come to power in regularized fashion; the most common paths to leading a rebellion is to start a rebel group from scratch, or to splinter off an existing group. Yet, many rebel groups see changes in leadership, and leaders of a number or groups are elected. The way that leaders come to power has a significant effect on the trajectory of the group in conflict. Groups with elected leaders are more likely to get to the negotiating table and these wars are more likely to end. This pattern supports our argument that the election of a new leader signals information to the state about the new leader’s willingness to compromise, the degree of support for the leader, and the likely cohesion of the group moving forward in the negotiations process.

This research suggests that rebel groups with elected leaders are likely to be better bargaining partners from a conflict resolution perspective. The international community appears to be attuned to the challenges of bargaining for rebels. We have seen a variety of actors struggling to assist in the generation of a cohesive and legitimate opposition in Syria.

A direct implication from the theory and our findings is that parties interested in conflict resolution should encourage the electoral selection of a new rebel leader when these changes occur. This could be done in a number of ways, from attempts to facilitate more “free and fair” elections within rebel groups (or their constituent populations), to offering refuge to leaders that contest such elections but lose. While this is not a risk free strategy -- as we have noted, elections can be risky both for the incumbent leader and for the future of the group -- outside aid that encourages elections in rebel groups are more likely to lead to a negotiated settlement and peace.
References


Przeworski, Adam, Michael, E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. 2000. 


Table 1. Leader Ascension Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Founders (meets no other category criteria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected (founders and replacement leaders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherited (following death or imprisonment of incumbent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splintered off existing group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merged existing rebel groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installed by third party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadre of rebel officer selected</td>
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</table>
Table 2. Cox’s Proportional Hazard Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Negotiations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elected leader</td>
<td>3.091***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.227)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>1.993***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.443)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent intervention</td>
<td>0.859</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.226)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ln(State troops)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.045)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ln(Rebel troops)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic fractionalization</td>
<td>2.143**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.781)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal political wing</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>ln(Battle deaths) - best estimate</td>
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<td>(0.057)</td>
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<td>774</td>
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</table>

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, Reporting hazard ratios.
Table 3. Cox’s Proportional Hazard Model

<table>
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<td>774</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>(1) Negotiations</th>
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Observations 891 891

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Figure 1. Percent Rebel Leadership by Ascension Type
Figure 2. Marginal Effects: Joint Probability of Negotiations and Termination