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When militant organizations lose militarily but win politically

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Abstract

The literature on political violence emphasizes two main ways that militant organizations 'win': eliminating the adversary outright or coercing the adversary into making concessions. While most do not win in this way, some organizations that fail to win go on to achieve their goals in post-conflict political competition. What explains variation in the post-conflict political success of militant organizations that did not achieve their organizational goals on the battlefield? In this study, we run the first large-*n* empirical analysis of the phenomenon. Our empirical results show that organizational size and wartime lethal capacity positively predict the political success of militant organizations that did not win on the battlefield. Other plausibly related features of militant organizations, such as their united wartime front or coherent ideology, do not predict eventual political success. Additionally, we investigate the case of Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional in El Salvador and present marginal effects analyses—further illustrating the effects of a legacy of violence and organizational size on post-conflict political success.

Keywords

Militant organizations, militant transition, political outcomes, post-conflict success

Military organizations that fail to win on the battlefield sometimes go on to achieve their goals politically. In this article, we provide the first large-*n* study of the relatively uncommon occurrence of post-conflict political success of militant organizations. We seek to understand the predictors that separate the many post-conflict militant organizations that flounder or fail to compete in elections from those that go on to hold executive office in their nations. We contend that organizational size and wartime lethality are crucial elements in forging the potential for future success in the political arena.

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Lebanon cogently exemplifies the phenomenon. Between 1975 and 1990, a civil war and overlapping regional conflict ensnared the Mediterranean country in a 'labyrinth of violence,' ultimately killing upward of 150,000 people (Phares, 1995: 158). At an early point in the conflict, political parties came to understand that their political standing was only as good as the killing capacity of their affiliated militias (Harris, 2006; Rizkallah, 2017). As the Clausewitzian maxim dictates: 'war is [merely a] continuation of [politics by] other means' (Clausewitz, [1832] 1984: 77).

Though often framed as a conflict between Muslims and Maronite Christians, Palestinians and Lebanese, or Syrians and Lebanese, much of the war involved intra-sectarian violence. Perhaps the most brutal of such conflicts pitted Samir Geagea's Maronite al-Quwwat al-Lubnaniyye (Lebanese Forces, or LF) against the renegade army of rogue Maronite General Michel Aoun. While quite effective in lethal capacity—killing thousands of rivals and at least 500 Syrian troops in a final battle before accepting military defeat (Harris, 2006: 277)—Aoun's renegade army failed to secure integration into the post-conflict political system. In 1991, Aoun fled to France, where he would stay in exile for over a decade. Yet, Aoun's renegade army and movement, which adopted the name at-Tayyar al-Watani al-Hurr (Free Patriotic Movement, or FPM), maintained two qualities that would enable its continuation and eventual prominence in Lebanese politics: (1) a legacy of violence and (2) a large and loyal following that preserved that legacy.

Following the 2005 Cedar Revolution—the series of popular demonstrations that ended with the expulsion of Syrian occupation forces—Lebanon reinstituted democratic elections. Aoun, having once eschewed politics as 'unnecessary,' entered the political arena to advance FPM's interests (Harris, 2006). Beginning with the 2005 elections, Aoun harnessed FPM's legacy of violence and large support base and translated it into electoral power—providing his party with the most seats in Lebanon's unicameral Chamber of Deputies of any Christian party, including longtime adversaries LF and al-Kata'eb al-Lubnaniyye (Kataeb, or the Lebanese Phalanges). By 2009, FPM held the largest role in Lebanon's ruling government, and by 2016 FPM firmly led the government, with Aoun ascending to the presidency. A picture, now immortalized, shows Aoun upon election as Lebanon's 13th President, at a victory podium with arms raised in imitation of shooting two guns in the air.[1]

In an electoral setting, even defeated militant organizations can live on and potentially win, so long as they have the numbers to get out the vote. Further, organizations like Aoun's FPM that thrive off of a history of violence can draw on such legacies not only to mobilize proud supporters (Acosta, 2014a; Crenshaw, 1981) but also to discourage rivals and adversaries from attempting to exclude them from electoral and political processes. In this latter regard, legacies of violence empower organizations with a deterrent capacity. In this article, we contend that if a defeated militant organization preserves a large support base and legacy of violence, it can potentially apply its militant legacy to secure participation in electoral politics and, once it has done so, use its large support base to win a political victory.

The literature on political violence and the transition of militant organizations to political parties lacks a paradigm or large-*n* study that addresses the phenomenon of militant organizations losing militarily but coming back to win politically. We aim to fill this gap

in the following ways. First, we review the literature on the post-conflict development of militant organizations and elaborate on our theory of how a small subset of defeated militant organizations win politically in post-conflict environments. Second, we detail the research design. Third, we run a large-*n* empirical analysis, demonstrating that both organizational size and wartime organizational lethal capacity positively predict the political success of defeated militant organizations. Moreover, the models show organizational size and lethal capability explain more variation in the post-conflict political success of defeated militant organizations than alternative explanatory factors. Fourth, we illustrate the findings with the case of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador. We conclude by discussing the study's implications for post-conflict development.

Explaining the post-conflict political success of defeated militant organizations

The literature on political violence notes two main ways that militant organizations 'win' (i.e. achieve their political ends or outcome goals): (1) eliminate the adversary or (2) coerce the adversary into making concessions (Abrahms, 2006, 2012; Sullivan, 2012). Less frequently, militant organizations win by reaping the benefits of third-party intervention (Acosta, 2014b). Still yet, they can achieve their outcome goals through a fourth route. When militant organizations concede military defeat, if they preserve their organizational fabric and legacy of violence, they are not necessarily 'out of the game.' Indeed, frequently, they may have new 'rules of the game' to exploit.

Former militant organizations can continue pursuing their outcome goals via politics rather than violence (Acosta, 2014a; Criado, 2011; Rizkallah, 2017). A growing literature discusses the transition from militant organization to competitive politics, with a focus on the conditions that make this a more likely result (Lyons, 2005; Matanock, 2017a, 2017b; Wittig, 2016). Dudouet (2013) finds that de-escalation from violence to nonviolence arrives with the political sophistication of militant organizations. While it remains uncommon that militant organizations that lose on the battlefield go on to win through electoral or other political processes, the phenomenon does occur across regions and contexts.

For example, in 2009, 17 years after its military defeat in El Salvador's civil war, the FMLN won El Salvador's presidential election—putting the organization on its best footing ever to achieve its long-standing goals of instituting redistributive policies nationwide. But what explains the FMLN's comparative success to similar organizations, such as Guatemala's Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), that likewise lost armed campaigns under ostensibly similar circumstances yet have failed to make any revivalist advancements in the political and electoral arenas? That is, what explains the variation in the post-conflict political success of defeated militant organizations?

The pathway to political, and electoral, success for defeated militant organizations in post-conflict political systems usually involves two elements. First, organizations work to establish a credible threat during the armed conflict. Building a credible threat is not

only a milestone for any coercive campaign (Abrahms, 2013; Crenshaw, 1990; Kydd and Walter, 2006; Schelling, 1960) but also sets up an eventual entrance into the target political system (if so desired by a particular organization). Simply put, the currency of an intensely violent legacy can work to purchase admission into formal institutions and raise the prospective costs of excluding that organization down the road (Cronin, 2009). Second, organizations that mobilize their support base amid the armed conflict increase their odds of achieving political success in the event that the organization transitions to a political party and stands for elections (De Zeeuw, 2008). As constituents (rather than organizational leaders) are often the last to willingly abandon violent campaigns (Irvin, 1999), defeated militant organizations rely on violent legacies to advance political movements. Overall, we expect organizations with high capacity and a broad following during the war to be more likely to preserve those assets in the post-conflict period, thereby being more likely to succeed at politics.

Killing for credibility

In the realm of non-state political violence, militant organizations adopt a wide range of violent tactics and strategies, as well as output varying degrees of violence. Research remains divided on the effect of violence on militant outcomes. Some argue that high levels of violence can benefit militant organizations (Kydd and Walter, 2006), whereas many acknowledge the downsides of some levels and types of violence in resistance campaigns (Abrahms, 2006, 2012, 2013; 2018; Cronin, 2009; Fortna, 2015). Nevertheless, target states are incentivized to incorporate highly lethal organizations into the formal political system in efforts to coopt their elites (Magaloni, 2008), if not their constituents.[2] Cronin (2009: 36), for example, argues, 'violence creates a need for states to "manage" the perpetrator. Management of militant organizations takes on many forms from counter measures like targeted killings at one end to political inclusion at the other.' Accordingly, militant organizations that develop the capacity to kill at high levels are more likely to establish a credible threat and legacy of violence and therefore eventually gain access into an existing political system.

H_1: Highly lethal militant organizations are more likely to win politically after failing to win militarily.

Fighting to mobilize

Numerous facets of political violence suggest that some organizations employ violence with the primary aim of mobilizing supporters to maximize political efficacy (Acosta, 2014a). Nearly a century ago, Bryce observed that 'physical force of the citizens coincides. . .with their voting power' (1921: 25–26). Entrance into an electoral political system is unlikely to help smaller organizations in any politically meaningful way beyond organizational survival (Foster et al., 2013).[3] Organizations need constituent support to end an armed campaign and transition to a political party considering such support is essential to build a voting bloc that can advance organizational outcome goals through

elections (Allison, 2006; De Zeeuw, 2008). Numbers always tend to bring power (DeNardo, 1985; Leighley, 2001). But, because of the strict equalization of individual contributions to the outcome, numbers likely matter more in electoral politics than they do in violent politics. Size also provides a cushion for the inevitable post-conflict splits between organizers and constituents that allows organizations to endure early upheaval in political competition. Accordingly, we expect larger militant organizations to engage in electoral competition, where they have a greater likelihood of success. The theoretical framework, then, suggests that an organization may use armed conflict to mobilize its constituent population and, after losing militarily, may rally that support base to attempt to win electorally/politically.

H_2: Larger militant organizations are more likely to win politically after failing to win militarily.

Research design

The dataset and unit of analysis

For data analyses, we utilize the newly released Revolutionary and Militant Organizations Dataset (REVMOD),[4] which includes 536 resistance organizations operative sometime between the years 1940 and 2014.[5] REVMOD operationalizes resistance organizations 'broadly as *non-state organizations that employ noninstitutionalized (i.e., illegal or extralegal) means to pursue political outcome goals*' (Acosta, 2019: 725). Our unit of analysis, *militant organizations*, represents the violent resistance organizations within REVMOD. Due to our criteria for the use of violence and military defeat, we necessarily exclude organizations that won militarily from the analysis, as well as strictly nonviolent resistance organizations—bringing the total number of organizations (*n*) down from 536 to 380.

The dependent variable

The dependent variable is whether a militant organization won politically after losing a militarily campaign. The coding derives from two key components: the notions of military defeat and political success, respectively. We define *military defeat* as an organization's inability or unwillingness to continue armed conflict aimed at eliminating or coercing a target and thereby achieving the central outcome goal.[6] In other words, the category includes the organizations that used violence and did not win as a direct result of it—meaning they did not physically succeed on the battlefield. Thus, defeat can also be interpreted as 'failing to win' on the battlefield, such as in cases of a negotiated end to the conflict.

We define *political success* as the entrance of a militant organization into a leadership role within a formal governmental executive institution.[7] We focus on executive institutions as the most likely place to propel the organization to achieving its outcome goal. In parliamentary systems, executives tend to dominate policymaking, making it vital that

Table 1. Winners depending on coding.[9]

Definition of political success	Number of victors
Broad definition	11
Only fully ended conflicts	10
Without any third-party intervention	4
Only direct party ties	8

parties be part of the executive to achieve policy goals. In most presidential systems, especially those in developing world contexts that are more likely to experience violent conflict, executives typically hold more policymaking power than legislatures (Shugart and Carey, 1992).[8]

The core coding of the dependent variable is a *general* measure of political success under the parameters outlined above. It codes political success for organizations that attained leadership in the executive of a given political system. For robustness, we apply three additional coding variations that limit the dependent variable's scope. The first variation accounts for political success only in *fully ended conflicts*, where the armed conflict has stayed 'cold' for at least a decade without any relapses into violence (either directly involving the organization at hand and/or indirectly via allies that pursue a similar outcome goal). This coding excludes the political success of organizations such as Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) in Aceh, Indonesia. The second variation only looks at organizations that achieved political success *without third-party intervention*, and therefore excludes organizations like Hezb al-Da'awa al-Islamiyya (HDI), which began heading the Iraqi government amid United States (US)-imposed democratic elections. The third variation codes political success only for organizations *directly tied* to the given political party. This means the victorious party is not a political wing or political stand-in for a previously violent organization but, rather, is the identical organization in name and public stature. This measure excludes the political success of parties with indirect connections or ties with a defeated militant organization, such as Movimiento de Participación Popular vis-à-vis Tupamaros in Uruguay and Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA or the National Republican Alliance) vis-à-vis Ejército Segredo Anti-Comunista in El Salvador. Table 1 displays the count of the qualifying victorious parties, given the various coding rubrics.

Core explanatory variables

We include a comprehensive set of core explanatory variables in each model, based on the standard in research on political violence. All variables come from the REVMOD dataset. The first core explanatory factor revolves around the ability of organizations to mobilize supporters. To operationalize this concept, we rely on the variable of organization *size*, which indicates the estimated size of an organization at its peak membership. For robustness, we also code the estimated size of the organization in its final year of armed conflict. The variable aims to work as a proxy for potential electoral/political mobilization capacity. Due to the difficulty in estimating the population sizes of

constituencies related to militant organizations, and especially those with ideologically centered followings (as opposed to ethno-nationalist or sectarian constituencies), organization size works as an optimal indicator of a given organization's ability to mobilize supporters for a specific cause.

The second core explanatory factor refers to an organization's ability to generate a credible threat and legacy of violence to raise the costs of excluding them, or nullifying results should they win politically. Here, we look to three interrelated variables: the number of *attacks* an organization has carried out, the number of *kills* an organization has inflicted,[10] and an organization's attack *lethality* or average inflicted-kills per attack. Lethality likely captures this concept optimally as it showcases an organization's ability to punish a target state significantly and quickly in a limited number of events.[11] It also implies a tactically competent organization—a characteristic that may translate into effective political maneuvering.

Alternative explanatory variables and controls

In our empirical analysis, we consider a range of alternative mechanisms that may explain the post-conflict electoral success of defeated military organizations.[12] In particular, two organizational features strike us as plausibly predictive of electoral success—united wartime front and ideology. A united wartime front, with cohesive organizational goals and strategies, should presumably translate into similarly united electoral organizations. Likewise, ideology could, in theory, translate into a loyal support base of ideological adherents and a programmatic platform. Both united wartime front and ideology should limit the strong risk of post-conflict splintering and ideological fissures that would ostensibly threaten the survival and success of the post-conflict party. We test for both possibilities, and others, in our models.

Alternative explanatory variables and controls include the continuous measures of the following: organization *age*, an organization's number of *state sponsors*, the number of *network ties* an organization has made to fellow militant organizations, and the number of *safe havens* an organization has utilized. We also analyze the following binary variables: whether an organization engaged in *negotiations* to lay down its arms,[13] whether an organization is the largest organization pursuing a specific outcome goal (*hegemonic*), whether an organization represents a unified front or an alliance of all groups seeking a distinct outcome goal (*unified front*),[14] whether an organization engages in a domestic conflict (*civil war*), whether an organization carries out attacks against civilians (*terrorism*),[15] whether an organization maintains a combat alliance with a state (*sponsor fights*), whether an organization originated as a *political party* and turned to militancy, whether an organization pursues an *anti-system outcome goal* that seeks to separate from or eliminate an existing political system (as opposed to an organization pursuing a *within-system outcome goal*). We likewise analyze the organization ideology variables of *political Islam, leftist, rightist*, and *nationalist*.

We also include the *polity* score and *gross domestic product (GDP) per capita* of an organization's primary adversary. The *polity* score indicates the degree of openness and competition in the political arena. This variable could represent the likelihood of fair elections, suggesting defeated militants have a shot to win at the ballot box. On the other

Table 2. Summary statistics.

Variable	*n*	Measure	Mean	*SD*	Min	Max
Win politically	380	BINARY			0	1
Size	380	LOGGED	6.16	3.8	2.30	15.32
Age	380	CONTINUOUS	20.04	19.91	0.1	148
Unified front	380	BINARY			0	1
Hegemonic	380	BINARY			0	1
Attacks	380	CONTINUOUS	141.86	475.94	0	4518
Kills	380	CONTINUOUS	305.75	1114.81	0	11458
Lethality	380	CONTINUOUS	3.14	7.13	0	73.25
Civil war	380	BINARY			0	1
Terrorism	380	BINARY			0	1
State sponsors	380	CONTINUOUS	0.64	1.10	0	9
Sponsor fights	380	BINARY			0	1
Ties	380	CONTINUOUS	3.02	4.04	0	48
Safe havens	380	CONTINUOUS	0.21	0.48	0	3
Antisystem	380	BINARY			0	1
Polity	380	CONTINUOUS	13.23	7.90	0	20
GDP per capita	380	CONTINUOUS	6.96	3.45	0	11.33
Political party	376	BINARY			0	1
Negotiations	374	BINARY			0	1
PR system	380	BINARY			0	1
One party	379	BINARY			0	1

hand, the *polity* score could indicate the initial conditions that led to conflict and incentivize support for militancy. In the case of the former, the coefficient should be positive, in the case of the latter, the coefficient should be negative. Additional controls include binary variables measuring democratic and autocratic institutional permissiveness. To analyze the effects of 'representative permissiveness' of democratic electoral systems, we include the binary variables *proportional representation* and *majoritarian*.[16] The size of the militant organization should be more important in majoritarian than proportional systems. To test the effects of autocratic participatory institutions, *single-state party system*, which identifies regimes that govern with a sole party that represents the ruling executive's views, and *non-single-state party system* are assessed.[17] Table 2 displays summary statistics.

Empirical results

Table 3 presents a series of logit regression analyses testing the hypotheses.[18] Models 1 through 4 represent baseline models, demonstrating the positive and statistically significant relationships between organization size and political success, as well as between organization-attack lethality and political success.[19] Model 5 is a Firth-logit analysis, which corrects for potential bias in *rare events* of the dependent variable (Firth, 1993).

Table 3. Logit results.

DV: Winning politically after losing militarily	Model 1 *Broad definition*	Model 2 *Broad definition*	Model 3 *Broad definition*	Model 4 *Broad definition*	Model 5 *Broad definition, Firth logit*	Model 6a *Broad definition*	Model 6b *Standardized coefficients*
Size (logged)	0.462***	0.444***	0.395***	0.390***	0.330*	0.374**	0.421
	(0.114)	(0.107)	(0.084)	(0.095)	(0.142)	(0.125)	
Age	0.013	0.007	0.014	0.020	0.018	0.019	0.140
	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.013)	
Unified front						0.296	0.037
						(1.207)	
Hegemonic Vis-à-vis rivals						0.796	0.142
						(1.330)	
Attacks	−0.0003			−0.001	−0.001	−0.0004	−0.063
	(0.001)			(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	
Kills		0.0002		0.0003	0.0003	–0.0004	0.118
		(0.0002)		(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	
Lethality			0.070***	0.061**	0.058*	0.062**	0.161
			(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.029)	(0.021)	
Civil war						0.428	0.073
						(1.182)	
Terrorism						0.088	0.012
						(0.891)	
Sponsors						−0.013	−0.005
						(0.217)	
Sponsor fights						1.151	0.077
						(0.769)	
Ties						−0.052	−0.077
						(0.061)	

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

DV: Winning politically after losing militarily	Model 1 *Broad definition*	Model 2 *Broad definition*	Model 3 *Broad definition*	Model 4 *Broad definition*	Model 5 *Broad definition, Firth logit*	Model 6a *Broad definition*	Model 6b *Standardized coefficients*
Safe havens						0.325	0.057
						(0.911)	
Anti-system	0.642	0.732	0.696	0.546	0.431	−0.507	−0.076
	(0.999)	(1.011)	(0.978)	(0.998)	(0.946)	(0.673)	
Adversary polity	−0.078	−0.099	−0.073	−0.082	−0.074	−0.158	−0.457
	(0.044)	(0.049)	(0.052)	(0.057)	(0.054)	(0.105)	
Adversary GDP						0.395	0.498
Per capita (logged)						(0.219)	
Constant	−7.410***	−7.181***	−7.521***	−7.476***	−6.521***	−9317***	
	(1.531)	(1.546)	(1.447)	(1.452)	(1.540)	(2.146)	
Observations	380	380	380	380	380	380	380
Pseudo R^2	0.30	0.31	0.37	0.38		0.49	
Wald χ^2	(5) 23.58***	(5) 23.91***	(5) 43.59***	(7) 43.49***	(7) 26.18***	(16) 104.71***	
Log pseudolikelihood	−34.80	−34.38	−31.40	−30.72	−0.36	−25.65	
Correctly classified	96.32%	96.58%	97.37%	97.63%		98.68%	

Note: coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses.
***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.
DV: Broad definition refers to all cases of political success for organizations that attained leadership in the executive of a given political system.

Model 6a adds a series of alternative explanatory variables and controls. In general, the control variables do not show statistically significant values but most are in the expected direction. For example, age of the organization is positively associated with success. Model 6b reports the fully standardized coefficients of Model 6a, underscoring the substantive effects of organizational size and lethality. Models 1 through 6 offer consistent support for the hypotheses.

Alternative estimation techniques and robustness checks

In Table 4, we add different controls and present alternative estimation techniques as sensitivity analyses. The literature on militant transition to party politics often investigates those that originated as parties prior to conflict onset (Acosta, 2014a; Allison, 2006; Manning, 2008; Shugart, 1992). As such, Model 7 controls for whether organizations originated as a political party and turned to militancy at some point. The model shows no effect with the political-party variable.

Similarly, much of literature on civil war outcomes and conflict recurrence investigates the role of negotiations in ending armed conflict, including through rebel-to-party provisions and electoral oversight (Huang, 2016; Matanock, 2017a; Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz, 2016; Wood, 2000). Model 8 demonstrates that participation in negotiations has no statistically significant effect. Models A and B in the Appendix (online supplemental material) show that participation in negotiations does not even have a statistically significant bivariate relationship with post-conflict political success.[20]

Model 9 replaces the anti-system outcome goal variable for organization ideology signifiers.[21] Models 10 and 11 replace the adversary polity score with extreme ends of democratic and autocratic regime types: proportional representation systems—viewed as the more inclusive type of democracies, and single-state party systems—seen as the more autocratic of autocracies.[22] The models uphold the hypotheses.

To further assess the robustness of the findings, we next test alternative measures of the dependent variable. Model 12 restricts the analysis to only contexts where the armed conflict has remained dormant for at least 10 years. The hypotheses remain supported, with the additional statistical significance of the kills variable.

Model 13 restricts the analysis to organizations that achieved political success without any support (whether military or diplomatic) from third-party (non-sponsor) intervention. The results on lethality hold; the results for organization size remain positive but dip below statistical significance. State sponsors and sponsor fights gain statistical significance with positive effects on the likelihood of political success without third-party (external) assistance. In the absence of third-party intervention, picking up a similar dynamic as with lethality, domestic voters may look to the most established (i.e. the oldest) organizations/parties to lead in times of political change. The coercive *legacy-of-violence* mechanism may also shift some to organizations' state sponsors, blurring the line between proxy and state puppet-master.[23] Nevertheless, lethality matters the most in the absence of external assistance, re-invoking the *guns* > *numbers* conflict framework. Reaffirming previous scholarship (Abrahms, 2012, 2013), Model 13 also shows that the use of terrorism and pursuing an anti-system outcome goal both lower the odds of political success.

Table 4. Logit results (Robustness Checks).

DV: Winning politically after losing militarily	Model 7 *Broad definition*	Model 8 *Broad definition*	Model 9 *Broad definition*	Model 10 *Broad definition*	Model 11 *Broad definition*	Model 12 *Only fully ended conflicts*	Model 13 *Without third-party intervention*	Model 14 *Only direct party ties*	Model 15 *Broad definition*
Size (logged)	0.341**	0.360**	0.397**	0.401**	0.413**	0.354**	0.198	0.437***	0.469***
	(0.118)	(0.109)	(0.134)	(0.118)	(0.120)	(0.118)	(0.283)	(0.110)	(0.093)
Age	0.014	0.019	0.021	0.021*	0.019	0.024	0.047**	0.025	0.017
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.012)
Unified front	0.632	0.270	0.325	−0.135	0.015	−0.656	−0.085	0.7333	
	(1.366)	(1.136)	(1.251)	(1.125)	(1.162)	(1.533)	(1.845)	(1.598)	
Hegemonic	0.639	0.845	0.606	1.185	0.761	1.275	1.306	−1.275	
Vis-à-vis rivals	(1.409)	(1.210)	(1.309)	(1.421)	(1.513)	(1.557)	(1.513)	(1.079)	
Attacks	−0.0001	−0.0004	−0.001	−0.0004	−0.0004	−0.0004	0.001	−0.0001	
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.0001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	
Kills	0.0003	0.003	0.0004	0.0002	0.0002	0.0004*	0.002	0.0003*	0.0001
	(0.0002)	(0.0001)	(0.0002)	(0.0001)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0001)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Lethality	0.062**	0.059**	0.065**	0.064**	0.058**	0.065**	0.110**	0.057*	0.064**
	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.033)	(0.029)	(0.018)
Civil war	0.212	0.370	0.328	0.314	0.186	1.557	0.003	−0.801	
	(1.301)	(1.257)	1.111	(0.927)	(0.929)	(1.720)	(0.788)	(1.058)	
Terrorism	−0.186	0.049	−0.245	−0.721	−0.726	0.493	−2.920***	−0.552	−0.932
	(0.971)	(0.874)	(0.906)	(0.613)	(0.678)	(1.123)	(0.750)	(1.178)	(0.590)
Sponsors	0.015	−0.032	0.046	0.099	0.057	−0.131	0.552**	0.188	0.153
	(0.216)	0.213	(0.232)	(0.168)	(0.214)	(0.254)	(0.172)	(0.254)	(0.196)
Sponsor fights	1.169	1.229	0.372	1.673	1.347	1.686	2.754*	2.076	1.533*
	(0.704)	(0.691)	(0.944)	(0.873)	(0.885)	(0.927)	(1.231)	(1.063)	(0.760)
Ties	−0.047	−0.048	−0.044	−0.070	−0.055	−0.088	−0.039	−0.026	
	(0.071)	(0.066)	(0.074)	(0.057)	(0.061)	(0.078)	(0.056)	(0.053)	
Safe havens	0.168	0.0384	0.385	−0.369	0.281	1.172	−0.435	−0.386	
	(0.967)	(0.850)	(0.925)	(0.715)	(0.754)	(1.212)	(0.782)	(1.010)	
Political party	0.919								
	(1.144)								
Negotiations		0.356							
		(1.046)							

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued)

DV: Winning politically after losing militarily	Model 7 *Broad definition*	Model 8 *Broad definition*	Model 9 *Broad definition*	Model 10 *Broad definition*	Model 11 *Broad definition*	Model 12 *Only fully ended conflicts*	Model 13 *Without third-party intervention*	Model 14 *Only direct party ties*	Model 15 *Broad definition*
Anti-system	−0.526	−0.434		−0.826	−0.758	−0.698	−1.949**	−0.074	−0.376
	(0.587)	(0.793)		(0.789)	(0.612)	(0.767)	(0.711)	(0.845)	(0.748)
Islamist			−0.653						
			(0.765)						
Leftist			−0.303						
			(0.994)						
Nationalist			−1.078						
			(1.114)						
Adversary polity	−0.161	−0.165	−0.168			−0.229	0.265	−0.161	
	(0.101)	(0.110)	(0.109)			(0.148)	(0.195)	(0.128)	
Proportional Representation				0.856					
				(0.946)					
Single-state party					0.556				
					(1.259)				
Adversary GDP	0.401	0.401	0.418	0.165	0.184	0.484	0.172	0.582*	0.182
Per capita (logged)	(0.206)	(0.232)	(0.248)	(0.154)	(0.161)	(0.252)	(0.142)	(0.285)	(0.148)
Constant	–8.747***	–9.312***	–9.028***	–9.293***	–9.109***	−10.613***	−12.860**	−10.636***	–9.230***
	(1.583)	(2.197)	(2.157)	(2.034)	(2.082)	(2.632)	(5.422)	(2.517)	(2.560)
Observations	376	374	380	380	379	380	380	380	380
Pseudo R^2	0.50	0.49	0.50	0.46	0.45	0.57	0.55	0.54	0.43
Wald χ^2	(17) 121.80***	(17) 98.07***	(18) 117.98***	(16) 92.42***	(16) 97.36***	(16) 58.18***	(16) 99.34***	(16) 83.96***	(9) 53.94***
Log pseudolikelihood	−25.03	−25.57	−25.16	−27.06	−27.27	−20.00	−10.10	−17.83	−28.26
Correctly classified	98.67%	98.66%	98.68%	98.42%	98.68%	98.95%	99.47%	98.42%	98.42%

Note: coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses.
***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.
DV: Broad definition refers to all cases of political success for organizations that attained leadership in the executive of a given political system.
Fully-ended conflicts are those in which the armed conflict has stayed 'cold' for at least a decade without any relapses into violence. Without third party intervetion refers to organizations that achieved political success without third party intervention. Only direct party ties refers to organizations with direct ties to the political parties that attained leadership.

Model 14 restricts the analysis to political success of only parties synonymously tied to defeated militant organizations. The model supports the hypotheses, with the kills and GDP per capita variables gaining statistical significance and having positive effects on directly violent organizations achieving political success. The statistical significance of the adversary GDP per capita variable indicates that wealthier states in sustained periods of peace represent prime political systems for defeated militant organizations to succeed politically.[24] Model 15 shifts back to analyzing the general coding of political success and assesses only the variables with some degree of statistical significance in the previous 14 models. The hypotheses remain supported and the sponsor fights variable also has a statistically significant and positive effect. In all of the models 1–15, the percentage of correct classifications—ranging from 96.32 to 99.47—imbues a high degree of confidence in the accuracy of the model specifications.

The FMLN: Case analysis

In order to bring the findings to life and further address alternative hypotheses, we investigate the case of the FMLN. In 2009, 17 years after the end of the Salvadoran civil war, a politician representing the former-rebel organization FMLN won the second round of the presidential election, garnering 51.32 percent of the vote. El Salvador's presidency transferred to the FMLN's Mauricio Funes from Antonio Saca, the president from ARENA, a government-aligned party formed in direct response to the FMLN's military agitation. This election marked the first handover to the post-combatant FMLN party, and only the third peaceful transfer of power in El Salvador's history. Two months later, the FMLN gained a legislative majority, facilitating unified control. In the most recent presidential elections in 2014, Funes' vice president and former-guerilla commander, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, retained the presidency for the FMLN by receiving 50.11 percent of the vote in the second electoral round.

The eventual political success of the FMLN in capturing executive office came despite major obstacles. The organization endured severe ideological disputes that led to numerous defections and two spinoff parties (Allison and Alvarez, 2012). The FMLN waited over a decade to gain the largest legislative bloc and nearly two decades to win the presidency. More than any other factor, the size of the FMLN helps to explain the post-conflict party's political endurance and ultimate success. Size allowed for endurance, vote share, and credibility. At the same time, the lethality that the FMLN demonstrated during the conflict bolstered its position in electoral competition, especially when it saw increasing success in elections that threatened incumbent power-holders.

By the early 1990s, the FMLN clearly demonstrated its capabilities through its lethal capacity and degree of mobilization. The organization reached the point at which the Clausewitzian maxim starts to transform into the Leninist retort that 'politics is the continuation of war under another guise' (Chernov, 1924: 366). That is, when achieving outcome goals becomes more likely through politics after the coercive equalizing effects of asymmetric conflict (Sullivan, 2012) result in a real-world competitive numbers game (DeNardo, 1985).

Ending the civil war

El Salvador's civil war ended in 1992 after years of negotiation between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government, as brokered by the United Nations (UN). By 1993, political violence in El Salvador waned to nearly nonexistent. Many laud the Salvadoran peace agreement as highly successful (Doyle et al., 1997), particularly given the size and effectiveness of the rebel army. Among the FMLN's military successes included significant territorial control and a military offensive that almost toppled the capital city, San Salvador (Bracamonte and Spencer, 1995). The peace agreement required the FMLN to disarm in exchange for allowing it to compete in democratic politics, and the integration of FMLN combatants into the police and security services.

The FMLN's decision to negotiate the end of the war hinged on two factors. One entailed a 'hurting stalemate,' wherein both sides understood that a conclusive end to the war was not forthcoming (Byrne, 1996; Crandall, 2016). The FMLN overcame long-standing reluctance within its ranks to negotiate a peace agreement after the loss of military support from the Nicaraguan, Cuban, and the Soviet governments following the latter's collapse (Crandall, 2016: 468). At the same time, the Salvadoran government, also sought an end to the civil war due to its impact on economic growth and planned economic restructuring (Chávez, 2015). The presence of UN peacekeepers and the Salvador government's concession to reform the police marked crucial pieces to assuring the FMLN could safely disarm. The second factor stemmed from the belief that the FMLN would do well politically. For some factions of the FMLN, the legal acceptance of the left into electoral competition was the point of taking up arms (Goodwin, 2001; Wood, 2000).[25] The FMLN benefitted from a sweeping potential support base as the party representing the poor in a highly economically unequal country.

The FMLN's capacity

The FMLN case, specifically, highlights the importance of organization size for eventual political success. The UN peace agreement demobilized 15,009 FMLN members—of these, 8552 fought as combatants, 2474 suffered wounds as noncombatants, and 3893 held positions as political cadres (Luciak, 2001). LeMoyne (1989) estimated the FMLN's civilian support at around 50,000 Salvadorans (one percent of the population) during the war. In interviews after the peace settlement, Wood (2000) found approximately one-third of those surveyed in FMLN-held municipalities backed the rebels during the conflict. The FMLN remained a very large organization relative to the size of its population, and it counted on far-reaching support in the civilian population. Regarding electoral competition, numbers are the most important measure of potential success (De Zeeuw, 2008); accordingly, the FMLN had a reasonable base from which to launch a political campaign.

For several reasons, size weighs heavily on a military organization turned political party. The first, as mentioned above, is that elections are a numbers game. Size of the organization and its supporters is a viable proxy for vote share (Foster et al., 2013). Size may also provide an idea of geographic distribution, which is critical in political systems organized by geographic districts. Militaries with support of only one region of a country

may win that region's seats, but have little success gaining a legislative majority to form a government or winning the presidency. Ladwig (2017: 221) estimates citizen support for the FMLN at the end of the war to have reached approximately 20 percent of the population—a number close to its national support in the 1994 election.[26] The FMLN not only saw electoral success in former-FMLN-held territories, but captured the mayorships in El Salvador's largest cities—San Salvador (1997) and Santa Tecla (2000). Size is also important because it affords a cushion for the inevitable early stumbles of post-combatant political parties (Allison, 2006).

Similarly, while many post-conflict political parties consistently win seats in the legislatures, few gain enough of the vote share to win politically as we define it. To attain the executive requires a plurality or majority vote share in the case of presidential systems (50+% in the case of El Salvador). In parliamentary systems, taking part in the government coalition typically relates to a sizeable vote share, or near a centrist position (Powell and Vanberg, 2000). Despite the challenges they bring to coordinating the electoral strategy and ideological platform, having a large size and vast support base greatly enhance the prospects of winning politically.

The second major reason that size is key pertains to what it suggests about the credibility of the party and whether the other parties can feasibly ignore or reject the post-combatant party's electoral success. From the perspective of voters, the FMLN was a large, coordinated, organization that had enough social support to be a viable electoral vehicle. From the government's perspective, the size of the rebel organization (and its previous lethality) forecloses the option to reject its election success, lest it take up arms again. Indeed, a strong resistance in the opposition ranks balked at allowing the FMLN to compete. The largest party in the country, the right-wing ARENA party, organized death squads against leftist sympathizers during the war (Wood, 2000). By the war's end, to represent its interests, the military actively supported ARENA (Crandall, 2016; Ladwig, 2017).[27] And, due to its potential to resume anti-government militancy, ARENA tolerated the inclusion of the FMLN in electoral competition.

Legacy over ideology

While the FMLN's success in recent elections is notable, it stumbled in its first decade to gain an electoral footing. The biggest threat to post-conflict political parties seems to be internal divisions and defections (Allison and Alvarez, 2012). The FMLN struggled for ideological coherence and organizational cohesion in its post-conflict period. During the war, failed cooperation among the component factions of the FMLN may have cost the organization victory in the war (McClintock, 1998). As a new party, members of Ejercito Revolucionaria del Pueblo (ERP) and Resistencia Nacional (RN) factions defected in 1994 to form the Democratic Party, which pursued a social-democratic ideology. Even after the conflict, many party members refrained from joining the FMLN directly, opting instead for its component factions remaining from the conflict: Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí (FPL), El Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (PCS), ERP, RN, and Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC). Only 3 years later, in 1995, did the FMLN subsume the factions. For over a decade, a strong rift between the social-democratic Movimiento Renovador (Renewalist Movement) and the

Table 5. Marginal effects (from Model 15).

	Likelihood of FMLN to win politically		Likelihood of URNG to win politically	
	56%	x	3%	x
	dy/dx		dy/dx	
Size (logged)	0.106***	14.1186	0.011	9.2103
	(0.027)		(0.006)	
Age	0.004	29	0.000	31
	(0.004)		(0.000)	
Kills	0.000	7868	0.000	1150
	(0.000)		(0.000)	
Lethality	0.018**	2.34376	0.002*	1.87786
	(0.007)		(0.001)	
Sponsors	0.046	4	0.005	1
	(0.015)		(0.005)	
Anti-system	−0.100	1	−0.014	1
	(0.152)		(0.025)	
Adversary polity	−0.041	14	−0.004	13
	(0.021)		(0.003)	
Adversary GDP per capita (logged)	0.103*	8.16	0.011	7.96
	(0.050)		(0.007)	

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.
FMLN: El Salvador's Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación; UNRG: Guatemala's Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca.

Revolutionary Socialist Current prompted numerous defections and harmed its electoral outcomes (Allison and Alvarez, 2012). One cannot easily attribute the FMLN's success to ideological or organizational coherence. It was a factionalized military organization and a factionalized party until the very recent period. Its sheer size and coercive legacy within society as a whole helped it to endure despite its ideological divisions and defections.

Logit marginal effects: Predicting the FMLN's electoral victory

In the following analysis, we aim to animate the quantitative results by deriving marginal effects directly from qualitative case assessments. Table 5 demonstrates that considering the FMLN's wartime lethality and support base, it had a 56% likelihood of going on to political success (as indeed it did) in post-conflict El Salvador. By contrast, the model predicts that the most obvious comparison case, the URNG, had only a 3% likelihood of similarly succeeding in post-conflict Guatemala. The URNG's smaller constituency and lower capability to kill accounts for most of the variation in the differences between the two organizations' post-conflict experiences.

Concluding remarks

This study reaffirms the Clausewitzian and Leninist notions that war is an extension of politics by other means and politics provides an avenue to continue wartime ends (Clausewitz, [1832] 1984; Chernov, 1924). It shows that infamous militant organizations defeated on the battlefield can transition to political parties and win in post-conflict political systems. In this regard, military defeat is less a loss than it is a possible ticket to political inclusion and, potentially, political dominance. Still, defeated militant organizations seldom complete the long route to political victory. Only a small subset of defeated organizations that hold two core attributes tend to successfully traverse the journey.

Central to the political success of defeated militant organizations are a vast constituency and prominent legacy of violence. Constituent size speaks to the necessity of inclusion in post-conflict political systems and organizational killing capacity deters sustained exclusion. Lethality signifies that the organization could come back and easily kill and disrupt if prevented from participating in the political arena and would likely enjoy a large portion of the population's support in doing so. The findings reveal the violent origins of political participation and align with works that empirically demonstrate political exclusion as the source of much political violence (Cederman et al., 2010; Wucherpfennig et al., 2012). Our research implies that many militant organizations gather a large constituency and engage in violence in order to invest in long-run political success. Anticipating this, states facing an outbreak of violent conflict should consider the political incorporation of the opposition.

This study counters a recent trend in resistance studies that downplays legacies of violence in ensuring political inclusion and participation (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011). As such, future work should further investigate the lasting political effects of violent legacies—something of perhaps obvious importance to political life, yet an area that remains greatly understudied from an empirical perspective. As Abrahms (2012, 2013, 2018) argues, future research should hone in on the dividing line between effective and ineffective political violence. Tactics like terrorism, degrees of targeting intensity, and other facets of violence likely matter in shaping whether legacies of violence strike a positive of negative note with the identity groups and constituencies affiliated with militant organizations.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Party members claim this common hand gesture by party officials represents an election 'checkmark' as seen on the FPM's flag, while acknowledging that it 'also might be a gun' (Benjamin Acosta's field research notes, July 2014). For an *Agence France-Presse* picture of Aoun making the sign, see Areeb Ullah, 'Michel Aoun: Political Survivor Finally Returns to Power,' *Middle East Eye* (1 November 2016), www.middleeasteye.net/news/michel-aoun-pyjamas-president-367339318
2. Substantial post-war demobilization may impact the success of post-conflict parties through the diminution of credible threat. See Rizkallah (2017).
3. Metternich (2011) argues that rebel organizations with large ethnic constituencies are more likely to end a militant campaign in expectation of subsequent electoral success.
4. The dataset and codebook are available at www.revolutionarymilitant.org. For sources of data within REVMOD, see Acosta (2019). For the two variables that we added for this study (*winning politically [WP]* and *negotiations*), see our coding rubrics in the Appendix (online supplemental materials).
5. REVMOD's sampling strategy addresses problematic issues found in previous datasets of contentious non-states actors that derived from selection biases, double counting (often from the use of multiple names by a single organization), and overemphasis on more-known organizations. REVMOD includes organizations from a variety of types of political violence: rebellion, insurgency, terrorism, among others. See Acosta (2019: 725–727).
6. 'Outcome goals' refer to the chief political ends organizations pursue (Abrahms, 2006, 2012; Acosta, 2014a, 2014b, 2019; Cronin, 2009; Sullivan, 2012). They signify an organization's *raison d'être* and purpose for its persistence.
7. This does not mean necessarily that the organization achieves its position through an electoral process. Organizations like the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) achieved regional political success before ascending to national-level power-sharing agreements.
8. Notably, winning a democratic election is not the only way for a previously militant organization to make post-conflict advancements toward their outcome goal, considering an organization could gain entrance into autocratic institutions. For discussions on the incorporation/cooptation of opposition organizations within autocratic institutions, see Gandhi (2008); Magaloni (2008).
9. See Table A in the Appendix (online supplemental material) for a breakdown of the cases by organization, country, and post-conflict time to political victory.
10. This includes all inflicted kills, whether in the context of civil war, insurgency, or terrorism. These different contexts likely do not elucidate underlying levels of organizational strength; for example, recent empirical work by Fortna (2015) shows that terrorism is not a 'weapon of the weak' as previously hypothesized.
11. Many studies emphasize that lethality implies strategy and precision and marks a superior measure of organizational capacity than kills or attacks alone (Asal and Karl Rethemeyer, 2008; Piazza, 2009).
12. Scholars have linked each of these alternative explanatory variables and controls to militant success and therefore they might presumably predict political success. See Innes (2007); Cronin (2009); Cunningham (2011); Abrahms (2012); Ginsberg (2013); Phillips (2014).
13. Importantly, we view participation in negotiations as an element of the conflict process—not conflict outcome. As such, we evaluated each outcome of negotiation to document whether it aligned negatively or positively with the end goal of the respective organizations.
14. This does not mean all of the contingent organizations adhere to the same ideology, but rather they seek the same outcome goal.

15. We define *terrorism* as the use of violence by a non-state actor against non-combatants for the purpose of political gain (Abrahms, 2006, 2012).
16. The data on representative permissiveness derives from the 'Democratic Electoral Systems around the World 1946–2011' dataset (Bormann and Golder, 2013). For cases outside of the dataset's timeframe and those not included in the dataset, we conducted independent research.
17. We coded the variables on autocratic institutions by referring to the 'Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited' dataset (Cheibub et al., 2010). For cases outside of the dataset's timeframe and those not included in the dataset, we conducted independent research.
18. To assuage concerns of some kinds of model misspecification, we report robust standard errors.
19. In Models 1–8, 10–15, WITHIN-SYSTEM is the excluded category.
20. This finding aligns with Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz (2016: 990) who show that rebel-to-party provisions in peace negotiations are 'neither necessary nor sufficient for rebel-to-party outcomes.'
21. In Model 9, RIGHTIST is the excluded category.
22. In Model 10, NON-PR SYSTEMS is the excluded category. In Model 11, NON-SINGLE-STATE PARTY SYSTEMS is the excluded category.
23. Here, our findings align with other recent empirical work (Matanock, 2017a, 2017b).
24. This aligns with other empirical work showing that economic development has the same effects on political development in post-internal conflict states as it does for other states (Fortna and Huang, 2012).
25. Although, one cannot explain the timing of the FMLN's entry into electoral competition by the left's intentions. The option for FMLN members to compete in elections had been offered since 1982 (Crandall, 2016). Indeed, the FMLN-aligned Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) had taken part in the 1989 elections.
26. At the same time, the FMLN and the civil conflict itself, was deeply unpopular within important constituencies in El Salvador (Brands, 2010: 205; Ladwig, 2017: 270–271). It is therefore not surprising that its post-conflict electoral numbers closely resembled its support at the end of the war, despite the ability of citizens to express latent support more freely.
27. Partido de Conciliación Nacional traditionally represented the military. During the civil war, this allegiance switched to ARENA. See Crandall (2016: 465–466) and Ladwig (2017: 271–273) on ARENA's wartime changes in leadership and outlook.

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