

Former rebel groups become more moderate after gaining political power in nations with democracy, research shows

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Former rebel groups who transform into political parties have adopted a moderate stance after gaining power in more democratic political systems, a study shows.

In contrast, the tactics and policies of the former rebel groups remained unchanged if the issue which attracted supporters to them continued to remain. This is exacerbated in nations where there is a tradition of solving conflict outside of formal politics, often in a violent manner, according to the research.

The analysis of the former rebel groups, from Africa, the Balkans, Asia and Latin America, shows how the political environment at the time of the transformation of former rebel groups into [political parties](#), and the timing of their electoral victory, shapes how these formerly excluded parties behave once in power.

In countries with a legacy of one-party systems, the former rebel groups have been the least moderate, while post-rebel parties entering political systems with a tradition of competitive electoral politics have been comparatively more moderate as their power has been limited by opposition parties, most notably at the time of the first elections held after the conflict

In countries where power is rooted in the use of force—often combined with patronage—the groups eventually also used such methods to maintain power—if not already doing so—mimicking the environment they entered.

The research, by Dr. Lise Storm from the University of Exeter, is published in the *Open Journal of Political Science*.

Dr. Storm said, "Post-rebel parties who can no longer rely upon garnering support on the basis of the issues which drove their popularity during conflict are more likely to behave inclusively once in power and remain moderate in the longer term.

"Where the issue which attracted voters to them remained, parties were

less likely to moderate as there was not much of an incentive for them to change. Where the importance of the issue driving support disappeared, the former rebel groups became more moderate in order to attract voters and win power."

Some of the groups examined still had an armed wing and some also had not renounced the use of violence. They had obtained government power via the electoral process, and some operated both as political movements and militant groups.

Dr. Storm used qualitative data showing electoral success for 12 parties: the African National Congress in South Africa, the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie in Burundi, the Communist Party of Nepal, the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional in El Salvador, the Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste in East Timor, the Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica in Croatia, the Mouvement Patriotique du Salut in Chad , the National Resistance Movement in Uganda, the Parti Congolais du Travail in Congo Brazzaville, the Partia Demokratike e Kosovës in Kosovo, the Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Front Patriotique Rwandais (Inkotanyi) in Rwanda.

Dr. Storm said: "These findings have important implications for research into the inclusion of Islamist parties into formal politics and the debate on whether such parties are likely to moderate. The evidence from the experiences of the post-rebel parties in power, which share a similar background to the Islamist, shows that the issue is not one of whether such parties should be included or excluded from political participation, but rather how to best create an environment that facilitates Islamist moderation.

"Exclusionary authoritarian contexts breed immoderate post-rebel parties in [power](#), whereas more inclusive, competitive regimes that rely

on elections as a means to solve conflict facilitate more moderate behavior amongst former rebel parties once in national government."

More information: Lise Storm, Exploring Post-Rebel Parties in Power: Political Space and Implications for Islamist Inclusion and Moderation, *Open Journal of Political Science* (2020). [DOI: 10.4236/ojps.2020.104038](https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2020.104038)

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