

Alliance Formation in Civil Wars

Some of the most brutal and long-lasting civil wars of our time – those in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Lebanon, and Iraq, among others – involve the rapid formation and disintegration of alliances among warring groups, as well as fractionalization within them. It would be natural to suppose that warring groups form alliances based on shared identity considerations – such as Christian groups allying with other Christian groups, or Muslim groups with their fellow co-religionists – but this is not what we see. Two groups that identify themselves as bitter foes one day, on the basis of some identity narrative, might be allies the next day and vice versa. Nor is any group, however homogeneous, safe from internal fractionalization. Rather, looking closely at the civil wars in Afghanistan and Bosnia and testing against the broader universe of fifty-three cases of multiparty civil wars, Fotini Christia finds that the relative power distribution between and within various warring groups is the primary driving force behind alliance formation, alliance changes, group splits, and internal group takeovers.

Fotini Christia is Associate Professor in Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She received her PhD in public policy from Harvard University in 2008. Her research interests deal with issues of ethnicity, conflict, and cooperation in the Muslim world. She has done extensive ethnographic, survey, and experimental research in Bosnia and in Afghanistan. Her current Afghanistan research project, which draws on a randomized impact evaluation of a \$1 billion community-driven development program, assesses the effects of foreign development aid on post-conflict governance and state-building initiatives. Professor Christia has received support for her research from the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, the International Growth Center, the UN World Food Program, USAID, and the World Bank, among other institutions. She has published work in journals such as *Science*, *Comparative Politics*, and the *Middle East Journal*. She has also written about her experiences in Afghanistan, Iran, the West Bank, and Uzbekistan for *Foreign Affairs*, the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Boston Globe*. She graduated magna cum laude with a joint BA in Economics and Operations Research from Columbia College and an MA in International Affairs from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.

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To my parents

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Having spent several months in the former Yugoslavia during my undergraduate years, I came to Harvard to write a dissertation on post-conflict reconstruction and nation building. The turn of global affairs – 9/11 was the first day of my graduate student career – instead prompted me to focus on conflict itself. There was a notable surge in academic work on violence at the time, but the discourse was still very much dominated by questions of how civil wars start and end rather than on how they are fought. In my decision to try to decipher some of the pathologies in civil conflict – namely what brings groups together and what breaks them apart – I benefited greatly from my interactions with my advisors Robert Bates, Roger Petersen, Monica Toft, and Stephen Walt. They all played instrumental roles at different times and on different aspects of this project. The imprint of their rich and diverse contributions to my scholarship is no doubt visible throughout this book.

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with whether the individual had ended up on the war's winning or losing side. In the process, I met several people with blood on their hands (some had even been convicted for their war crimes) and was relieved when cultural norms prevented me from having to shake those hands or look them in the eye. There was an eerie banality in how both winners and losers viewed violence that made for fascinating, albeit disturbing, narratives that I am nevertheless grateful they shared. I would not have been able to hear these stories or theorize on them were it not for the support I received from Harvard University.

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