ARCHIVIO ISTITUZIONALE
DELLA RICERCA

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna
Archivio istituzionale della ricerca

Institutions, power-sharing, and the cohesiveness of rebel coalitions in the Syrian civil war

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:
Corradi, E., Cama, G. (2025). Institutions, power-sharing, and the cohesiveness of rebel coalitions in the Syrian civil war. SMALL WARS & INSURGENCIES, 36(2), 245-268 [10.1080/09592318.2024.2424055].

Availability:
This version is available at: https://hdl.handle.net/11585/1015877 since: 2025-05-17

Published:
DOI: http://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2024.2424055

Terms of use:

Some rights reserved. The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

This item was downloaded from IRIS Università di Bologna (https://cris.unibo.it/).
When citing, please refer to the published version.

(Article begins on next page)

17 October 2026

Institutions, Power-sharing, and the Cohesiveness of Rebel Coalitions in the Syrian Civil War

Edoardo Corradi (University of Genoa) & Giampiero Cama (University of Genoa)

Abstract
Which factors contribute to the cohesion of alliances among rebel groups during civil wars? Through the case of the Syrian civil war, which experienced a high level of fragmentation and cohesion among rebel groups, we emphasise how the establishment and implementation of power-sharing mechanisms in horizontal wartime institutions ensure lasting cohesion in alliances. Moreover, we posit how the mere establishment of these mechanisms is insufficient, and they must be effectively implemented. The implementation of power-sharing mechanisms in horizontal wartime institutions increases the costs of defection, and it reduces the incentives for unilateral defection from an alliance by coalition members.

Keywords: civil wars, Syria, power-sharing, cooperation, alliance

Introduction

In the context of the Syrian conflict, several armed actors came to light, and conflictual and cooperative relationships emerged, which resulted in the creation of several rebel coalitions. Rebel cooperation in Syria followed different trajectories, such as limited military cooperation against a common threat, limited political cooperation in shared territories, or the institution of formal alliances between multiple parties. Among others, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) represented the largest and most organised opposition group at the beginning of the conflict.[1] Several others emerged, including the Syrian Democratic Forces,[2] the Authenticity and Development Front, and the Sham Legion.[3] Rebel coalitions, when formed, experienced different levels of internal cohesion, as in the case of the FSA, which faced high levels of defection.

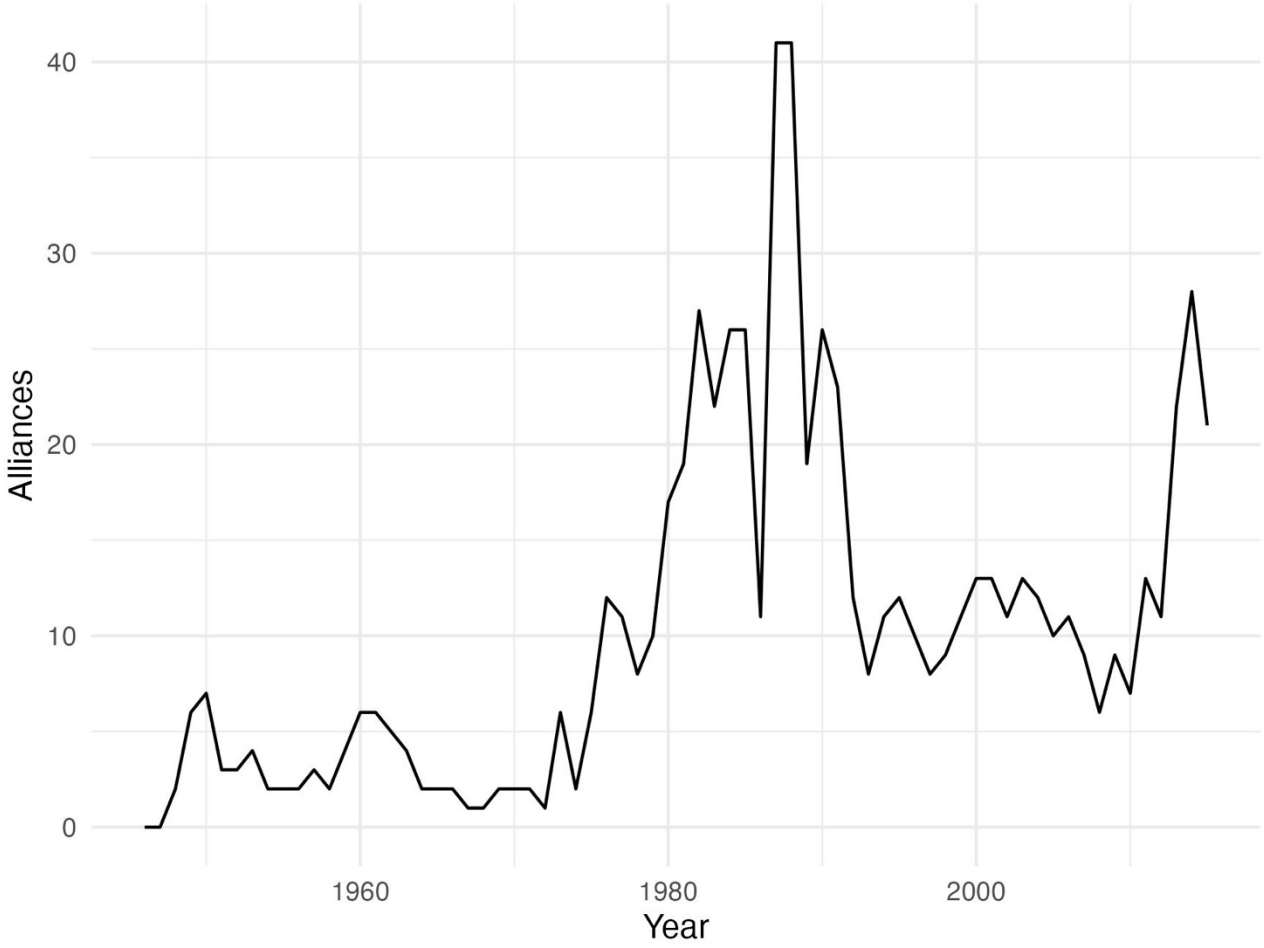
The existing literature on rebel alliances has thoroughly investigated the reasons behind alliance formation and the causes of rebel fragmentation but has overlooked the factors contributing to alliance cohesiveness. Which factors contribute to the cohesion of alliances among rebel groups during civil wars? The article argues that allied rebel groups create specific institutions to manage inter-rebel relations based on power-sharing mechanisms. The establishment and implementation of such mechanisms reduce information asymmetries among members and the risk connected with the commitment problem, thus reducing defection and increasing cohesiveness. To fill this gap in scholarship on civil wars and rebel alliances, the article compares the case of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the Kurdish National Committee (KNC) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), finding that the institutional designs based on implemented power-sharing mechanisms positively affect the cohesiveness of alliances.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows: in the first paragraph, we analyse the existing scholarship on alliance formation and collapse, from an International Relations and civil war perspective. Secondly, we develop our argument, claiming that power-sharing mechanisms influence alliance cohesiveness in the Syrian civil war. In the third paragraph, we compare the case of the Free Syrian Army, the Kurdish Supreme Committee, and the Syrian Democratic Forces to understand how power-sharing mechanisms have been institutionalised within the coalitions.

Rebel Groups' Alliances in Civil Wars

The existing scholarship on alliance formation in civil wars intermittently delved into why rebel groups decide to act cooperatively, who their optimal partners are, and what factors can influence alliance fragmentation and disintegration. However, informal or formal cooperation between non-state armed actors is common, particularly at the end of the Cold War. In the latest conflicts, the dynamics of cooperation between rebel groups have increased due to the increasing number of competing factions operating in a single conflict.[4]

Figure 1: Number of rebel coalitions in civil wars, 1946-2015. Data retrieved from Balcells, Chen, and Pischedda (2022).



Literature focusing on the drivers of rebel alliances focused on two different approaches.[5] The first approach examines the formation of non-state coalitions through the lens of neo-realism, underlining how power-politics dynamics drive alliance formation. In this context, rebel groups identify their optimal partners depending on their relative power to establish minimum-winning coalitions to maximise the chances of winning the conflict with low future payoffs.[6]

The second approach stresses the relevance of identity factors, focusing on the role of ideology and ethnicity in driving alliance formation.[7] Rebel groups rationally calculate the cost and benefits of forging alliances, and both factors help reduce the costs due to ideological and ethnic similarities.

Both approaches underline the salience of commitment and distrust in rebel alliances.[8] On the one hand, the power politics approach is based on creating minimum-winning coalitions, which result from specific strategic calculi made by individual coalition members. According to this approach, power shifts determine different alliance configurations, increasing the likelihood of alliance fragmentation and collapse.[9] Similarly, battlefield gains and losses create the conditions for alliance fragmentation due to the evolving hierarchical preferences of armed actors and commitment problems, in contrast to stalemates.[10]

On the other hand, scholars who focused on ideological and ethnic constituencies in determining the likelihood of cooperation, claim that ideology is more powerful than ethnicity in forging durable coalitions since co-ethnic groups are more likely to fight one another due to common constituencies.[11] However, independently from ethnicity or ideological similarities, alliances built on long-term goals are considered more cohesive coalitions since the real aim is to achieve those common goals rather than possibly resort to infighting.[12]

However, despite the extant scholarship regarding the logic and factors that trigger alliance formation and collapse, the causes of alliance cohesiveness still need to be addressed.

Wartime Institutions, Power-sharing Mechanisms, and Alliance Cohesiveness

Which factors contribute to the cohesion of alliances among rebel groups during civil wars? We argue that the institution and implementation of power-sharing mechanisms in rebel alliances reduce uncertainty, increase mutual trust, and reduce the possibility of new minimum-winning coalitions.

Civil wars are fractionalised and dynamic environments in which different state and non-state actors compete for limited resources and power, intending to reach specific goals related to their political agenda.[13] Moreover, civil wars are anarchic environments in which survival is the crucial aspect of rebel organisations[14], and due to the multi-party nature of civil wars, they enable dynamics of cooperation and conflict to be commonly experienced. Alliances among rebels have positive effects on non-state armed groups: first, it positively reduces the duration of the conflict,[15] thus influencing other dynamics such as the level of violence and casualties;[16] second, it relatively increases military capabilities, augmenting the likelihood of favourable outcomes for rebels.[17]

We define rebel coalitions[18] as *informal or formal organisations that comprise different rebel groups that maintain their organisational structures and institute new and shared ones.* [19] This article focuses on what literature defines as "strategic coalitions" based on long-term goals such as seizing the central government or seceding.[20]

The article aims to understand the factors that influence alliance cohesiveness. We conceive it as *the capacity to withstand and secure the constitutive goal, with a low or absent degree of defection by its constituting members and a low or absent level of merging dynamics*. This definition is in line with Dowding and Kimber's definition of stability, conceptualised as 'the state in which a political object exists when it possesses the capacity to prevent contingencies from forcing its non-survival- that is, from forcing a change in one or more of that object's criteria of identity'.[21] However, we did not use "stability" or "durability" to avoid any possible misconception because stability and durability are generally linked with the duration of a specific phenomenon.[22]

Governing alliances: horizontal and vertical wartime institutions

The International Relations scholarship[23] on alliance formation and fragmentation identified the factors that reduce mutual distrust among actors. In this regard, Walt argues that strong and reliable leaders, highly institutionalised coalitions, and ideological or identity solidarity create favourable conditions for enduring and stable alliances.[24] Similarly, Oye argues that norms generated by institutions and internalised by states modify the payoff structures, increase mutual iterations, and reduce uncertainty and greedy behaviours. In particular, repeated iterations among allies affect the shadow of the future, making defection less attractive and promoting cooperation.[25]

Rebel groups in civil wars do not behave differently from states in the international anarchic system, creating different types of wartime institutions. They might be necessary to govern specific portions of territory,[26] to engage with foreign governments,[27] or to manage military coordination.[28] Depending on the recipient of these institutions, i.e., civilians or other non-state armed groups, we differentiate between "vertical wartime institutions" and "horizontal wartime institutions".

When controlling a territory, insurgents may create governing institutions to rule that territory and its population. Depending on the legitimacy of pre-existing institutions among civilians, rebels can decide how extensively to intervene in their governance, enforcing taxation, providing security and public goods, or even running elections.[29] These political institutions might be created at the local level, where it is possible to assess more variation depending on the level of civilian resistance, and at the "national" level, which we refer to those that regulate the entirety of the territory under rebel control. We consider these institutions as "vertical wartime institutions" since they manage the daily interaction between rebels and civilians, both politically and as service providers. For example, among many, the FARC-EP in Colombia or the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq engaged in different types of vertical wartime institutions, with cases in which rebels intervened more or less extensively in local governance.[30]

When part of coalitions, rebels can create different types of institutions to manage the interaction between the other coalition members. These platforms, which might have vertical effects on civilians, have the other coalition members as recipients. Such institutions might take different forms, such as shared military commandos used to coordinate the alliance's militias, or political platforms that represent coalition members. In this respect, Topal claims that what she defines as "united fronts" create specific

institutions to increase reliability among members.[31] However, the internal dynamics of these institutions with no power-sharing regulatory mechanisms rely on the dynamics of power politics: the weakest actors bandwagon, and the strongest take decisions for the others. In this sense, despite an increase in mutual trust, coalition members might still be perceived as threatened, and defection might still happen depending on individual cost-benefit calculations and shifts in relative power.[32]
International Relations theories argue that the mere creation of institutions is a solid base for actors to increase mutual trust due to continued iteration between them.[33] However, inter-state coalitions generally arise when a specific state emerges as a potential source of threat to other actors' security.[34] On the contrary, civil wars are embedded in unpredictable environments where conflict has already broken out, and power shifts happen frequently.[35] In this scenario, horizontal wartime institutions set up by rebels do not necessarily increase mutual trust, reliability, and coalition members' commitment. Nonetheless, single rebel groups can defect when a power shift occurs, or the alliance faces windows of vulnerability. To obtain the above-mentioned results, these institutions must increase the cost of defection of coalition members.
We argue that power-sharing mechanisms in horizontal wartime institutions create the conditions to increase the cost of defection from the alliance and to constrain armed actors to act according to the coalition's aims.

The establishment of power-sharing mechanisms

Power-sharing mechanisms are considered relevant for civil war settlement since they reduce future uncertainty when armed actors seek a negotiated resolution. The primary interests of armed groups and the incumbent are to restore peace and increase security for their constituencies, avoiding the resurgence of insecurity and violence.[36] To do so, armed groups agree to share power to avoid concentrating too much power in one group's hand, diminishing security threats, enhancing credibility and mutual trust, and inducing "actors to stick to the deals they have made by convincing them that they will not be better off and, indeed, may be made worse off should they fail to do so".[37] Literature on negotiated settlement in intrastate conflicts points out how power-sharing and power-dividing mechanisms in post-conflict institutions help former belligerents craft long-lasting peace by increasing each group's commitment to the settlements.[38] Due to the anarchical context of civil wars, alliances might be understood as negotiated settlements between some armed actors to reduce the number of warring factions. While in negotiated settlements warring factions agree to establish power-sharing mechanisms for post-conflict political architecture, rebel alliances need specific wartime institutions – what we define as horizontal wartime institutions - to set these mechanisms up.
In this respect, as power-sharing mechanisms increase the constraints on armed actors to avoid the resurgence of violence and conflict, binding them to negotiated settlements, we expect that power-sharing mechanisms have similar effects in constraining coalition members to stick to the alliance and avoid defection, potential alliance fragmentation, and reduce uncertainty, insecurity, and potential inter-rebel conflicts. For this reason, we hypothesise that:

H_1: Alliances that establish power-sharing mechanisms in horizontal wartime institutions are more cohesive than alliances that do not create such mechanisms

From establishment to implementation

However, we argue that the establishment of power-sharing mechanisms is not a sufficient condition to achieve cohesion since it does not ensure that the coalition implements such mechanisms. As mentioned above, in negotiated settlements, power-sharing mechanisms are established in formal post-conflict institutions. However, the volatile nature of civil wars makes wartime institutions less constraining, thus providing coalition members with some interest in defecting from the alliance. We argue that the lack of implementation does not bind groups to remain committed to the coalition and seek other potential options depending on their preferences, windows of opportunity, or conflict dynamics.[39] In this respect, implementing such agreements in horizontal wartime institutions modifies the payoff structure, making defection costly. Again, literature on negotiated settlement shows the relevance of such a mechanism in

achieving positive outcomes. Accordingly, the likelihood of durable peace agreements is based on reducing the risk of "the failure to implement any single power-sharing provision".[40] Thus, the implementation of power-sharing mechanisms binds more actors to the coalition and reduces the commitment problem and the effects of possible shifts in relative power. As Woldermariam points out, "in civil war, there are no permanent friends, only permanent interests",[41] and power-sharing mechanisms increase the likelihood that single armed organisations can pursue their specific interests. Other than increasing mutual trust between different groups, their commitment to the coalition, and modifying the payoff structure, power-sharing mechanisms in horizontal wartime institutions also affect the leadership of each rebel group and the vertical relationships with their constituencies. Specifically, power-sharing mechanisms affect the shadow of the future, which reduces unilateral defection, as rebel leaders anticipate repeated interactions within the coalition and with their constituency.[42] Therefore, leaders aim to maintain their power positions and stabilize their relationships over time, recognizing that defection in the short term could undermine their long-term interests and standing within the coalition and among their followers.[43] Horizontally, power-sharing mechanisms allow armed groups to pursue their interests by securing power positions within the coalition's institutions. Vertically, they can maintain the support of their constituencies by remaining committed to the alliance due to the safeguards that power-sharing mechanisms provide, thus increasing the costs of defection.
For this reason, we hypothesise that

H_2: The implementation of established power-sharing mechanisms increases the costs of defection, thus strengthening coalition cohesiveness

Alliances, Power-sharing, and Horizontal Wartime Institutions in the Syrian Conflict
We argue that power-sharing mechanisms in horizontal wartime institutions are the variable that explains the cohesiveness of rebel alliances. In our argument, the establishment (H_1) and implementation (H_2) of power-sharing mechanisms in horizontal wartime institutions create the conditions for non-state violent actors to remain engaged in rebel coalitions. Specifically, power-sharing mechanisms reduce the commitment problem, uncertainty, and exit strategies and enhance mutual trust among actors. Since alliances increase the capabilities of each single coalition member, affecting conflict duration and the likelihood for rebels to achieve positive outcomes from the conflict,[44] in the case of an implemented power-sharing mechanism, a coalition members' defection is not an optimal decision.
To demonstrate that the establishment and implementation of power-sharing mechanisms in horizontal political institutions affect the cohesiveness of inter-rebel alliances, we will conduct an in-depth case study analysis of the Syrian conflict. The conflict in Syria showed a high level of insurgent fragmentation,[45] a high number of different alliances between rebel groups, a high level of conflictual dynamics between non-state actors, as well as a high level of unpredictability and dynamism, and the presence of different external actors supporting different local groups.[46]
Specifically, we look at the case of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). These two alliances consisted of several rebel organisations[47] with different ethnic and ideological backgrounds.[48] The two coalitions formed different institutions and received external support from various countries.[49] The institutions created by the FSA and the SDF differed in terms of institutional design. While the SDF based its horizontal wartime institutions on power-sharing mechanisms, the FSA did not. However, the FSA faced a high number of defections, which led to a downward spiral that finally ended with the rebranding of the coalition under the name of the Syrian Nation Army, supported by Turkey. At the same time, the SDF maintained its cohesiveness even after the different Turkish military operations in North-East Syria and insurgency led by tribal groups in South-Eastern Syria.
To assess more variation and to have a more nuanced understanding of how power-sharing mechanisms affect the cohesiveness of rebel coalitions in Syria, we will look at the Kurdish Supreme Committee (KSC) case. Unlike the FSA and the SDF, the KSC is a coalition of two Kurdish actors, the PYD and the Kurdish National Council (KNC). Despite being ethnically homogeneous, while ideologically heterogeneous and formed by only two parties, the alliance collapsed in November 2013 due to the lack of implementation of the instituted power-sharing mechanisms.[50]

The Syrian Civil War

After the imprisonment of some teenagers in the city of Dara'a, guilty of having written anti-governmental graffiti, in 2011, on the wave of the Arab Spring, Syria experienced protests against the al-Asad regime.[51] Contrarily to other countries in the region, the Syrian government violently repressed the popular demonstrations, increasing the level of conflict between the government and the protestors.

The Syrian civil war consisted of several actors that emerged and disappeared rapidly or were able to maintain control of large portions of territories and rule over millions of people, such as, for example, the al-Qaeda-associated group Jabhat al-Nusra, later renamed Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Kurdish People Protection Units and the Women Protection Units, Ahrar al-Sham, the Islamic State, etc.[52]

The Free Syrian Army

In June 2011, the high-rank Syrian army official Hussein Harmoush, alongside other top-rank officials of the national army, defected and founded the Free Officers Movement (FOM), the first armed opposition to the Syrian government. Subsequently, other high-rank officials defected from the military and founded the Free Syrian Army under the leadership of Riad Mousa al-Asaad.[53] The two organisations later merged into the Free Syrian Army, forming a single rebel organisation with a centralised structure.

The Free Syrian Army quickly attracted several organisations with the most diverse ideologies.[54] According to the FSA requirements, members willing to join had to meet specific criteria, such as self-identification within the FSA, loyalty to moderate principles of the revolution, and support exclusively from Turkey and Jordan.[55] However, the FSA was made up of numerous Islamist groups, including groups such as Liwa al-Islam and Suqor al-Sham. Initially, the FSA created the Syrian National Council (SNC), a political institution formed in Turkey working as an exiled government.

According to the SNC website, the SNC worked to establish "standards for representing the Syrian people on the Council in a manner that reflects the diverse nature of Syria socially, ideologically, and politically, with reasonable ratios".[56] As reported in the SNC's official statement to the Friends of Syria conference, the SNC repeatedly tried to represent all the components of the different coalition members fairly.[57] Equal representation of each actor in the SNC was not translated into the establishment of power-sharing mechanisms. Specifically, veto power and consensus were not agreed, thus affecting its cohesiveness, and the SNC did not considered some groups.[58] For example, in 2012, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) temporarily withdrew from the SNC after the latter's decision not to guarantee federalist options to the Kurds and not provide the required participation of KNC members within the SNC.[59] In the same year, to strengthen its position, the SNC decided to enlarge the coalition by forming the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, agreeing to represent 33% of the total seats, with the other seats allocated to independent figures and ethnic representatives.[60] However, in 2012, after agreeing to take part in the Geneva peace talks with the central government, some Islamist rebel organisations defected from the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces and the FSA. In September 2012, these groups, formerly part of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, formed the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front (SILF), which, due to the lack of central coordination, dissolved in 2013.[61] In March 2013, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces formed the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) as a parallel governing institution in FSA-held territories. Despite some ethnic representation in the SIG, the decision did not follow power-sharing mechanisms but was based on meritocracy.[62] However, in 2014, the SNC defected from the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces due to its decision to participate in the Geneva II talks. The lack of shared decision and the absence of veto powers led different groups to defect from the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, weakening its main armed counterpart, the FSA.[63]

Alongside the SNC, the FSA formed institutions to organise its military structure. In 2012, the FSA formed the Supreme Military Council (SMC) to coordinate the different armed groups, battalions, and militias that were part of the FSA.[64] The SMC was established to represent all the groups operating in the different areas and military fronts in Syria, and it comprised 30 members, 6 for each front.[65] Although the SMC aimed to represent the different military fronts equally, it based its internal dynamics on power

politics. Specifically, the FSA never agreed to share military supplies equally with each front, provoking a North-South divide regarding arms procurement and military and political power in the coalition.[66] The emergence of competing actors, specifically Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State, sped up the FSA and SMC's crisis. The continued clashes between these groups and the Free Syrian Army led to FSA infighting dynamics and the latter's decline.[67] In December 2013, some of the most prominent Islamist armed formations of the FSA, specifically Liwa al-Islam, Suqor al-Sham, and Liwa al-Tawhid, formerly part of SILF, decided to join the Syrian Islamic Front (SIF) and establish the Islamic Front (IF), defecting from the FSA.[68]

In 2014, months after the defection of the Syrian National Council, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces dismantled the SMC to reorganise its military institutions.[69]

The downward spiral of the FSA and its political institution saw different armed actors defecting from the FSA to join different alliances, such as the Islamic Front, or merging to form united groups. The crisis of the Supreme Military Council, the other horizontal political institutions, and the centralised vision of the FSA led to a decentralisation of the FSA itself. Several groups afferent to the FSA then merged into local groups, still linked to the FSA but more independent both in terms of military targets and international partners.[70] Initially, the decentralisation process led to a reinforcement of the FSA itself.

Despite the initial revitalisation of the FSA with the decentralisation process, this led to its disintegration. Several groups linked to the FSA, located in northern Syria and supported by Turkey, decided to form a different organisation called the Syrian National Army (SNA), also known as the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army, to distinguish these organisations from the remnants of what was the FSA.[71] Under the banner of the SNA, several armed groups with different ideologies operated, such as the powerful Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham. However, despite apparent cohesiveness, several episodes of infighting occurred within the SNA ranks.[72]

The FSA faced a downward spiral that led the organisation from being the strongest and most reliable actor on the ground to disintegrating into different groups. Despite setting up different horizontal wartime institutions, which should have increased trust and commitment among members, the FSA and its related political structures collapsed over the years. The case of the FSA showed how the lack of establishment of power-sharing mechanisms in its horizontal wartime institutions did not create a cohesive coalition. When created, these power-sharing mechanisms have rarely been implemented, as in the case of the North-South divide and the lack of veto power in the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. In that case, the SNC and other Islamist groups decided to defect from the alliance due to the centralised and unilateral decision to take part in the Geneva peace talks.

The PYD-led alliances: the Kurdish Supreme Committee and the Syrian Democratic Forces

While Syria was quickly descending into a civil war, the Syrian Kurds had different opinions regarding their participation in the mass protests against the regime. The Kurdish political landscape in Syria was anything but monolithic. Several parties disagreed with joining the mass protests that were inflaming the country. In this context, the PKK-linked Democratic Union Party (PYD), one of the most relevant Kurdish parties in Syria, was in favour of not joining the protests and the subsequent violent conflict. However, in 2012, after the Syrian government moved its army from the Northern regions to the frontlines, the PYD and its armed units, the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), declared control of the Northern regions and imposed its administrative government made up of the People's Council of West Kurdistan (PCWK) and the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM).[73] In June 2012, a series of talks between the PYD and its main competitor, the Kurdish National Council (KNC), gave rise to the establishment of horizontal wartime institutions based on equal representation, namely a joint Supreme Committee and a Supreme Organizational Committee.[74] In July 2012, the PYD and KNC signed the Erbil (Hewlêr) Declaration[75] and formed the Kurdish Supreme Committee (KSC), based on power-sharing mechanisms to manage territorial control and govern civilians.[76] According to the Hewlêr Declaration, the two organisations agreed on "the principle of equality in the structuring of all committees and the principle of consensus in the decision-making process".[77] The document, signed by Ismaʿil Hami of the Kurdish National Council and Salim Mustafa Muhammad and ʿAbdussalam Ahmad for the PCWK, stated how the KSC

horizontal wartime institutions had to be based on power-sharing mechanisms in the form of equal representation and veto-power. However, these power-sharing mechanisms were not implemented. Moreover, the two organisations agreed to recognise each party's militias as legitimate armed actors of the coalition. However, "the PYD insisted that KNC forces must fight under the banner of the PYD's armed wing",[78] isolating KNC's peshmerga and even prohibiting them from operating in the Syrian Kurdish territories. Against this background, the two organisations did not build trusting relationships. As a result, the two groups did not remain committed to the coalition and the institutions they had set up with the Hewlêr Declaration. Specifically, in 2014, the PYD unilaterally decided to institute the autonomous cantons of Afrin, Kobane, and Jazira, issuing also "The Social Contract of the Autonomous Regions of Afrin, Jazira, and Kobane" in the same year.[79] The lack of implementation of power-sharing mechanisms, despite the two organisations agreeing to establish such mechanisms, caused mutual mistrust and commitment, resulting in the alliance's collapse.[80]

On the contrary, in 2015, the PYD formed the Syrian Democratic Forces, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious alliance between several armed actors.[81] Contrarily to the KSC experience, the SDF was based on a power-sharing agreement that has been implemented on several issues. The SDF and its constituting members created both vertical and horizontal political institutions. Regarding the latter, the SDF instituted the Syrian Democratic Council, an elective governing body of the territories under the SDF control, and issued a constitutive document known as the Social Contract of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria.[82] While the Social Contract may be claimed to be a facade document that does not accurately depict the reality of events, especially in a complex context such as that of civil wars, the creation of the Syrian Democratic Council better represents the reality on the ground. Against this background, the SDC is co-governed by a Kurdish and an Arab representative, which correspond to the two main ethnicities of the coalition. The Council is then made up of forty-two members with at least one member for each ethnicity, namely Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians, and Chechens, as reported in the Constitution.[83]

Another example of power-sharing mechanisms is related to military operations. Unlike the KSC experience, the SDF implemented a sort of territorial and ethnic devolution. While most of the units are part of the Kurdish YPG and YPJ, the SDF managed to devise a system to represent each ethnicity in military operations. Despite functioning as a coalition, the SDF leadership managed to deploy units of the same ethnicity in the area in which they were operating.[84] The SDF decided on military devolution for two main reasons: first, to represent all the different parties of the coalition that have better knowledge and possible pre-existing social ties with the area; second, to avoid any potential sense of resentment of military invasion by the local population.[85] Moreover, the SDC developed self-defence units in the areas under its control, promoting territorial and ethnic devolution.[86]

The SDF military operations against the Islamic State increased the relevance of the SDF in the Syrian arena,[87] allegedly threatening Turkey due to the link between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the PYD. As a response, Turkey launched several military operations alongside the SNA, with boots on the ground, drones, and its air force.[88] By targeting the SDF members YPG and YPJ in Northern Syria, the SDF members faced a window of opportunity to defect not to be potentially targeted by the Turkish army as part of more extensive efforts to hit the SDF. However, SDF coalition members did not leave the group and jointly condemned Turkish military operations.[89] On the contrary, the coalition between the SDF and the Arab Deir ez-Zor Military Council evolved into a conflict situation between the two parties due to pre-existing grievances and the lack of implementation of a power-sharing mechanism between the two parties.[90]

Conclusions

The article investigated the specific case of the Syrian civil war, analysing which factors contributed to the cohesion of alliances among rebel groups during the conflict.

The main argument of the article is that rebel groups create wartime horizontal institutions to manage inter-rebel relations in the case of rebel coalitions. These institutions need power-sharing mechanisms to develop more cohesive coalitions by reducing the commitment problem, uncertainty, and untruthfulness between rebels, thus increasing the defection costs for rebel groups.

The different case studies showed different outcomes: first, the Free Syrian Army set up horizontal wartime institutions without developing power-sharing mechanisms; this favoured divisions and infighting between the different FSA armed groups, defections, and coalition fragmentation. Similarly, the Kurdish Supreme Committee formed by the Democratic Union party (and its armed wings, the YPG and the YPJ) and the Kurdish National Council did not last due to the lack of implemented power-sharing mechanisms.[91] Finally, the case of the Syrian Democratic Council and the Syrian Democratic Forces showed how the implementation of power-sharing mechanisms within the different horizontal wartime institutions maintained the coalition cohesive despite different external shocks that might have led to its disintegration.

The article's contribution to the field of civil wars and the specific subfield of cooperation and conflict dynamics between non-state armed groups is threefold. First, it provides an initial and non-exhaustive differentiation between horizontal and vertical political institutions, with the former related to inter-rebel dynamics while the latter is responsible for managing relations between rebels and civilians. Second, it first investigated which factors contribute to forming cohesive alliances. In particular, the article posits that power-sharing mechanisms and territorial and political devolution of horizontal wartime institutions create the conditions for solving the commitment problem, increasing trust among coalition members and increasing the costs for coalition members to defect unilaterally. Third, it provides a comparative analysis of three different coalitions during the Syrian civil war, namely the Free Syrian Army, the Kurdish Supreme Committee, and the Syrian Democratic Forces, increasing knowledge of the specific case study of Syria. The different outcomes of the coalitions and the different degrees of implementation of power-sharing mechanisms sustain our argument.

However, other variables might affect the cohesiveness of rebel alliances in Syria. An alternative factor that influences rebel alliances' cohesion might be the role of external supporters. Specifically, external support might affect rebel groups' behaviour by opening windows of opportunity for insurgent organisations to defect from coalitions. When external supporters back a specific non-state armed group, the former increases the share of the relative power of the latter.[92] By doing so, even if the alliance establishes and implements power-sharing mechanisms, the external supporter may function as a credible exit for coalition members. While power-sharing mechanisms solve the commitment problem,[93] external support may increase uncertainty regarding coalition members' behaviour. Future research on rebel coalitions should investigate the role of external supporters in providing new windows of opportunity for rebels to defect from alliances, thus affecting coalitions' cohesiveness in civil wars.

An alternative explanation regarding the specific case of Syria might be the lack of leadership decapitation. In this respect, existing scholarship shows how leadership decapitation affects the likelihood of alliance fragmentation.[94] Therefore, the cohesiveness of alliances is not due to horizontal wartime institutions based on implemented power-sharing mechanisms but the absence of leadership decapitation that led to the coalition's collapse.

Finally, to avoid any possible selection bias and provide external validity to the theory, further research should quantitatively and qualitatively focus on supplying evidence for the argument. In this respect, the article offers a working hypothesis on the role of power-sharing mechanisms in affecting coalition cohesiveness in civil wars. For this reason, at this stage, the role of power-sharing mechanisms can explain the specific Syrian case.

Bibliography

Akcinaroglu, Seden. 'Rebel Interdependencies and Civil War Outcomes'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 5 (1 October 2012): 879–903. doi:10.1177/0022002712445741.

Ake, Claude. 'A Definition of Political Stability'. *Comparative Politics* 7, no. 2 (1975): 271–83.

Al Jazeera. 'Kurdish-Arab Coalition in Syria Forms Political Wing'. *Al Jazeera*, 11 December 2015. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/11/kurdish-arab-coalition-in-syria-forms-political-wing.

Albert, Karen E. 'What Is Rebel Governance? Introducing a New Dataset on Rebel Institutions, 1945–2012'. *Journal of Peace Research* 59, no. 4 (1 July 2022): 622–30. doi:10.1177/00223433211051848.

Allsopp, Harriet, and Wladimir van Wilgenburg. *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts*. Governing Diversity, volume 2. London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: I.B. Tauris,

2019.
ANF. 'Muslim: Talks in Hewler Positive', 12 December 2013. https://anfenglish.com/news/muslim-talks-in-hewler-positive-8927.
Arjona, Ana. *Rebelocracy. Social Order in the Colombian Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
Arjona, Ana, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly, eds. *Rebel Governance in Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
Asharq al-Awsat. 'Syrian Opposition Government Begins Work as Kurds Announce Self-Rule'. *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 2013.
https://web.archive.org/web/20131113182740/http://www.aawsat.net/2013/11/article55322280.
Axelrod, Robert M. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. Rev. ed. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006.
Bacon, Tricia. *Why Terrorist Groups Form International Alliances*. Philadelphia (Pa.): University of Pennsylvania press, 2018.
Baczko, Adam, Gilles Dorronsoro, and Arthur Quesnay. *Civil War in Syria. Mobilization and Competing Social Order*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
Balcells, Laia, Chong Chen, and Costantino Pischedda. 'Do Birds of a Feather Flock Together? Rebel Constituencies and Civil War Alliances'. *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1 March 2022): sqab095. doi:10.1093/isq/sqab095.
Balcells, Laia, and Stathis N. Kalyvas. 'Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration, and Outcomes of Civil Wars'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 8 (December 2014): 1390–1418. doi:10.1177/0022002714547903.
Bamber-Zryd, Matthew. 'Cyclical Jihadist Governance: The Islamic State Governance Cycle in Iraq and Syria'. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 33, no. 8 (17 November 2022): 1314–44. doi:10.1080/09592318.2022.2116182.
BBC News. 'Guide to the Syrian Rebels'. *BBC*, 13 December 2013. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24403003.
Beccaro, Andrea. 'Urban Warfare in the Middle East: The Battle of Mosul and the Operations in Syria'. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 35, no. 3 (2024): 377–98.
Bencherif, Adib, and Aurélie Campana. 'Alliances of Convenience: Assessing the Dynamics of the Malian Insurgency'. *Mediterranean Politics* 22, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 115–34. doi:10.1080/13629395.2016.1230942.
Blair, Christopher W, Erica Chenoweth, Michael C. Horowitz, Evan Perkoski, and Potter, Philip B. K. 'Honor Among Thieves: Understanding Rhetorical and Material Cooperation Among Violent Nonstate Actors'. *International Organization* 76 (2022): 164–203.
Blair, Christopher W., Michael C. Horowitz, and Philip B. K. Potter. 'Leadership Targeting and Militant Alliance Breakdown'. *The Journal of Politics* 84, no. 2 (1 April 2022): 923–43. doi:10.1086/715604.
Carenzi, Silvia. 'A Downward Scale Shift? The Case of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham'. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 6 (2020): 91–105.
Carter, Brian, and Ashka Jhaveri. 'The Syrian Democratic Forces' Arab Coalition Is Crumbling, Creating Opportunities for ISIS, Iran, and Turkey'. *The Institute for the Study of War*, 15 November 2023. https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syrian-democratic-forces'-arab-coalition-crumbling-creating-opportunities-isis-iran-and.
Christia, Fotini. *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139149426.
Le Monde. 'Composition de La « Coalition Nationale Des Forces de La Révolution et de l'Opposition Syrienne »', 12 November 2012. https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/syrie/2012/11/12/composition-de-la-coalition-nationale-des-forces-de-la-revolution-et-de-lopposition-syrienne/.
'Constitution of Rojava (The Social Contract): January 29, 2014 (Syrian Arab Republic [Sy])'. In *Oxford Constitutions of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
Corradi, Edoardo. 'Beyond Armed Competition: The Logic of Rebel Groups' Alliance Formation'. *Civil Wars* 25, no. 2–3 (2023): 249–67. doi:10.1080/13698249.2023.2249323.
———. 'The Kurdish Protection Units in Northern Syria: A Deviant Case of Peaceful Cohabitation

between Foreign Fighters and Local Civilians?' *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2022, 1–22. doi:10.1080/1057610X.2022.2091038.
———. 'The Propagandistic Use of Rebel Governance: The Case of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq'. In *Rebel Governance in the Middle East*, edited by Ibrahim Fraihat and Abdalhadi Alijla, 87–115. Singapore: Springer Nature, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-1335-0_4.
Cunningham, David E. *Barriers to Peace in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
Cunningham, Kathleen Gallagher, Reyko Huang, and Katherine M. Sawyer. 'Voting for Militants: Rebel Elections in Civil War'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 1 (January 2021): 81–107. doi:10.1177/0022002720937750.
Daher, Joseph. 'Federalism Might Be an Option, but Inclusiveness Is a Must'. *Syria Untold*, 19 July 2016. https://syriauntold.com/2016/07/19/federalism-might-be-an-option-but-inclusiveness-is-a-must/.
Democratic Syria Congress. 'Final Declaration of the Democratic Syria Congress: "Towards Building a Free and Democratic Syria"', 9 December 2015. https://rojavainformationcenter.org/storage/2021/07/2015-Final-Declaration-of-Democratic-Syria-Congress.pdf.
Desgrais, Nicolas, Yvan Guichaoua, and Andrew Lebovich. 'Unity Is the Exception. Alliance Formation and de-Formation among Armed Actors in Northern Mali'. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 4 (4 July 2018): 654–79. doi:10.1080/09592318.2018.1488403.
Dowding, Keith M., and Richard Kimber. 'The Meaning and Use of "Political Stability"*'. *European Journal of Political Research* 11, no. 3 (September 1983): 229–43. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6765.1983.tb00060.x.
Furlan, Marta. 'Understanding Governance by Insurgent Non-State Actors: A Multi-Dimensional Typology'. *Civil Wars* 22, no. 4 (2020): 478–511. doi:10.1080/13698249.2020.1785725.
Gade, Emily Kalah, Michael Gabbay, Mohammed M. Hafez, and Zane Kelly. 'Networks of Cooperation: Rebel Alliances in Fragmented Civil Wars'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 9 (1 October 2019): 2071–97. doi:10.1177/0022002719826234.
Gunter, Michael M. 'The Kurdish Spring'. *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (April 2013): 441–57. doi:10.1080/01436597.2013.785339.
Gurr, Ted Robert. 'Persistence and Change in Political Systems, 1800–1971'. *American Political Science Review* 68, no. 4 (December 1974): 1482–1504. doi:10.2307/1959937.
Hartzell, Caroline A., and Matthew Hoddie. *Crafting Peace: Power-Sharing Institutions and the Negotiated Settlement of Civil Wars*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2007.
Hartzell, Caroline, and Matthew Hoddie. 'Institutionalizing Peace: Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Conflict Management'. *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 2 (2003): 318–32.
Hashim, Ahmed S. *The Caliphate at War. The Ideological, Organisational and Military Innovations of Islamic State*. Londra: Hurst & Company, 2018.
'Hewlêr Declaration', 11 July 2012. https://web.archive.org/web/20160705160101/http://www.kurdwatch.org/pdf/KurdWatch_D031_en_ar.pdf.
Holliday, Joseph. 'Syria's Armed Opposition'. Middle East Security Report. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2012. https://web.archive.org/web/20120512145439/http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Syrias_Armed_Opposition.pdf.
Horowitz, Michael C., and Philip B. K. Potter. 'Allying to Kill: Terrorist Intergroup Cooperation and the Consequences for Lethality'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 2 (March 2014): 199–225. doi:10.1177/0022002712468726.
Huang, Reyko. 'Rebel Diplomacy in Civil War'. *International Security* 40, no. 4 (1 April 2016): 89–126. doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00237.
Jarstad, Anna K. 'Sharing Power to Build States'. In *Routledge Handbook of International Statebuilding*, edited by David Chandler and Timothy D. Sisk. London: Routledge, 2013.
Jervis, Robert. 'Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma'. *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 167–214.
Lister, Charles. 'The Free Syrian Army: A Decentralized Insurgent Brand'. Analysis Paper. The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution,

2016.
———. *The Syrian Jihad. The Evolution of an Insurgency*. Londra: Hurst & Company, 2017.
Lund, Aron. 'Holy Warriors. A Field Guide to Syria's Jihadi Groups.' *Foreign Policy*, 15 October 2012. https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/15/holy-warriors/.
———. 'The Non-State Militant Landscape in Syria'. *CTC Sentinel* 6, no. 8 (2013): 23–28.
MacDonald, Alex. 'A Guide to the Kurds in Iraq and Syria'. *Middle East Eye*, 2017. https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/news/kurds-2135687288.
Mampilly, Zachariah, and Megan A. Stewart. 'A Typology of Rebel Political Institutional Arrangements'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 1 (1 January 2021): 15–45. doi:10.1177/0022002720935642.
'Minutes of the Meeting', 11 June 2012. https://web.archive.org/web/20160705132111/http://www.kurdwatch.org/pdf/KurdWatch_D027_en_ar.pdf.
Nilsson, Desirée. 'Partial Peace: Rebel Groups Inside and Outside of Civil War Settlements'. *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 4 (July 2008): 479–95. doi:10.1177/0022343308091357.
O'Bagy, Elizabeth. 'The Free Syrian Army'. Middle East Security Report. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2013. https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/The-Free-Syrian-Army-24MAR.pdf.
Oye, Kenneth A. 'Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies'. *World Politics* 38, no. 1 (1985): 1–24.
Özçelik, Burcu. 'Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18'. *Government and Opposition* 55 (2020): 690–710.
Parkinson, Sarah E., and Sherry Zaks. 'Militant and Rebel Organization(s)'. *Comparative Politics* 50, no. 2 (1 January 2018): 271–93. doi:10.5129/001041518822263610.
Perkoski, Evan. *Divided Not Conquered. How Rebels Fracture and Splinters Behave*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.
Phillips, Christopher. *The Battle for Syria. International Rivalry in the New Middle East*. New Haven e Londra: Yale University Press, 2020.
———. 'The Civil War in Syria: The Variety of Opposition to the Syrian Regime'. In *IEMed. Mediterranean Yearbook 2013*, 24–29. IEMed - European Institute for the Mediterranean, 2013.
Pischedda, Costantino. *Conflict Among Rebels: Why Insurgent Groups Fight Each Other*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020.
Popovic, Milos. 'Inter-Rebel Alliances in the Shadow of Foreign Sponsors'. *International Interactions* 44, no. 4 (4 July 2018): 749–76. doi:10.1080/03050629.2017.1414812.
Prasad, Hari, and Hampton Stall. 'The State of the Syrian National Army. Shifting Networks of the Turkish-Backed Armed Opposition in Syria's Northwest'. The Carter Center, 2022.
Salehyan, Idean, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and David E. Cunningham. 'Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups'. *International Organization* 65, no. 4 (October 2011): 709–44. doi:10.1017/S0020818311000233.
Shesterinina, Anastasia. 'Civil War as a Social Process: Actors and Dynamics from Pre-to Post-War'. *European Journal of International Relations* 28, no. 3 (2022): 538–62.
'Social Contract of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria', 2016. Rojava Information Center. https://rojavainformationcenter.org/storage/2021/07/2016-Social-Contract-of-the-Democratic-Federation-of-Northern-Syria.pdf.
Soz, Jiwan. 'Isolation of the Kurds in Syria'. *Atlantic Council*, 22 March 2016. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/isolation-of-the-kurds-in-syria/.
Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. 'Syrian Coalition Dissolves the FSA's Supreme Military Council'. *Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces*. Accessed 27 September 2024. https://en.etilaf.org/all-news/news/syrian-coalition-dissolves-the-fsa-s-supreme-military-council.
Syrian National Council. 'About'. *Syrian National Council Information*. Accessed 23 September 2024. https://syriancouncil.org/about.html.

———. ‘Home’. *Syrian National Council Information*. Accessed 23 September 2024. https://syriancouncil.org/.
Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution. ‘Syrian Supreme Military Council’, 1 March 2012. https://creativememory.org/chronology/syrian-supreme-military-council/.
Carnegie Middle East Center. ‘The Kurdish National Council in Syria’, 15 February 2012.
Carnegie Middle East Center. ‘The Syrian National Council’, 25 September 2013.
Topal, Sedef A. ‘Pathways to Cooperation: A Relational Theory of Rebel Alliance Formation’. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 12 February 2024, 00220027241232955. doi:10.1177/00220027241232955.
BBC News. ‘Turkey Kurdish Strikes: Operation Claw-Sword Targets Militant Bases’, 20 November 2022. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-63693308.
Ulutaş, Ufuk. ‘The Syrian Political Opposition: What Went Wrong?’ *Insight Turkey*, 2016. https://www.insightturkey.com/commentaries/the-syrian-political-opposition-what-went-wrong.
Vestenskov, David, and Andreas Høj Fierro. *Internal Kurdish Coherence. Analyzing Alliances, Capacities, Threats, and Political Objectives of Kurdish Groups and Parties in Syria and Iraq, 2015-2017*. Copenhagen: Scandinavian Military Studies, 2019.
Walt, Stephen M. ‘Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power’. *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3. doi:10.2307/2538540.
———. *The Origins of Alliance*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt32b5fc.
———. ‘Why Alliances Endure or Collapse’. *Survival* 39, no. 1 (1 March 1997): 156–79. doi:10.1080/00396339708442901.
Walther, Olivier, J., and Patrick Steen Pedersen. ‘Rebel Fragmentation in Syria’s Civil War’. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 31, no. 3 (2020): 445–74.
Wilgenburg, Wladimir van, and Mario Fumerton. ‘From the PYD-YPG to the SDF: The Consolidation of Power in Kurdish-Controlled Northeast Syria’. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2 January 2022, 1–20. doi:10.1080/1057610X.2021.2013758.
Woldemariam, Michael. *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa: Rebellion and Its Discontents*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press, 2018. doi:10.1017/9781108525657.
Yesiltas, Ozum. *Rethinking State-Non-State Alliances*. Londra: Lexington Books, 2022.
Yetim, Mustafa, and Tamer Kaşıkcı. ‘Re-Adapting to Changing Middle Eastern Politics: The Modification in Turkey’s Actor Perception and Turkey-Free Syrian Army (FSA) Relations’. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 8, no. 2 (2021): 193–209.

[1] Holliday, ‘Syria’s Armed Opposition’.
[2] Democratic Syria Congress, ‘Final Declaration of the Democratic Syria Congress: “Towards Building a Free and Democratic Syria”’.
[3] BBC News, ‘Guide to the Syrian Rebels’.
[4] Gade et al., ‘Networks of Cooperation’, 2072; Perkoski, *Divided Not Conquered. How Rebels Fracture and Splinters Behave*, 7.
[5] Corradi, ‘Beyond Armed Competition: The Logic of Rebel Groups’ Alliance Formation’, 251–53.
[6] Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*; Desgrais, Guichaoua, and Lebovich, ‘Unity Is the Exception. Alliance Formation and de-Formation among Armed Actors in Northern Mali’; Bencherif and Campana, ‘Alliances of Convenience’; Akcinaroglu, ‘Rebel Interdependencies and Civil War Outcomes’; Popovic, ‘Inter-Rebel Alliances in the Shadow of Foreign Sponsors’.
[7] Gade et al., ‘Networks of Cooperation’; Balcells, Chen, and Pischedda, ‘Do Birds of a Feather Flock Together?’; Blair et al., ‘Honor Among Thieves: Understanding Rhetorical and Material Cooperation Among Violent Nonstate Actors’.
[8] Bacon, *Why Terrorist Groups Form International Alliances*; Blair, Horowitz, and Potter, ‘Leadership Targeting and Militant Alliance Breakdown’.
[9] Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*; Bencherif and Campana, ‘Alliances of Convenience’; Bacon, *Why Terrorist Groups Form International Alliances*.
[10] Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa*, 37.
[11] Horowitz and Potter, ‘Allying to Kill’; Pischedda, *Conflict Among Rebels*; Blair et al., ‘Honor Among Thieves: Understanding Rhetorical and Material Cooperation Among Violent Nonstate Actors’; Balcells, Chen, and Pischedda, ‘Do Birds of a Feather Flock Together?’
[12] Corradi, ‘Beyond Armed Competition: The Logic of Rebel Groups’ Alliance Formation’, 259–60.
[13] Shesterinina, ‘Civil War as a Social Process: Actors and Dynamics from Pre-to Post-War’, 539.
[14] Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa*, 27.

[15] Akcinaroglu, 'Rebel Interdependencies and Civil War Outcomes', 885.
[16] Balcells and Kalyvas, 'Does Warfare Matter?', 1405–7.
[17] Akcinaroglu, 'Rebel Interdependencies and Civil War Outcomes', 883.
[18] We use alliances and coalitions interchangeably.
[19] We use organisation conceptualisation as in Parkinson and Zaks, 'Militant and Rebel Organization(s)', 272.
[20] Corradi, 'Beyond Armed Competition: The Logic of Rebel Groups' Alliance Formation', 254–55.
[21] Dowding and Kimber, 'The Meaning and Use of "Political Stability"*', 238–39.
[22] Gurr, 'Persistence and Change in Political Systems, 1800–1971'; Ake, 'A Definition of Political Stability'.
[23] Walt, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power'; Walt, *The Origins of Alliance.*
[24] Walt, 'Why Alliances Endure or Collapse', 164–70.
[25] Oye, 'Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies', 9.
[26] Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil War*; Arjona, *Rebelocracy. Social Order in the Colombian Civil War*; Mampilly and Stewart, 'A Typology of Rebel Political Institutional Arrangements'; Corradi, 'The Propagandistic Use of Rebel Governance'.
[27] Huang, 'Rebel Diplomacy in Civil War', 94.
[28] Topal, 'Pathways to Cooperation', 8.
[29] Arjona, *Rebelocracy. Social Order in the Colombian Civil War*, 42; Furlan, 'Understanding Governance by Insurgent Non-State Actors: A Multi-Dimensional Typology', 479; Cunningham, Huang, and Sawyer, 'Voting for Militants'; Albert, 'What Is Rebel Governance?'
[30] Arjona, *Rebelocracy. Social Order in the Colombian Civil War*, 42; Bamber-Zryd, 'Cyclical Jihadist Governance'.
[31] Topal, 'Pathways to Cooperation', 8.
[32] Walt, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power'; Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars.*
[33] Oye, 'Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies', 9.
[34] Jervis, 'Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma'; Walt, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power'; Oye, 'Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies'; Walt, *The Origins of Alliance*; Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*.
[35] Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa*, 27.
[36] Hartzell and Hoddie, 'Institutionalizing Peace: Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Conflict Management'; Hartzell and Hoddie, *Crafting Peace.*
[37] Hartzell and Hoddie, *Crafting Peace*, 27.
[38] See, for example, the above-mentioned Hartzell and Hoddie, 'Institutionalizing Peace: Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Conflict Management'; Hartzell and Hoddie, *Crafting Peace*; and other contributions such as Nilsson, 'Partial Peace'; Cunningham, *Barriers to Peace in Civil War.*
[39] Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa*, 40–45.
[40] Hartzell and Hoddie, *Crafting Peace*, 37.
[41] Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa*, 36.
[42] Oye, 'Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies', 9.
[43] Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa*, 49.
[44] Akcinaroglu, 'Rebel Interdependencies and Civil War Outcomes'; Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa*; Topal, 'Pathways to Cooperation'.
[45] Walther and Pedersen, 'Rebel Fragmentation in Syria's Civil War', 445–47.
[46] Ibid., 456.
[47] Phillips, 'The Civil War in Syria: The Variety of Opposition to the Syrian Regime'; van Wilgenburg and Fumerton, 'From the PYD-YPG to the SDF'.
[48] We consider religion as an ideological factor, in particular when related to jihadist and Islamist groups.
[49] Phillips, *The Battle for Syria. International Rivalry in the New Middle East.*, 134–46; Yesiltas, *Rethinking State-Non-State Alliances*, 114–22.
[50] Vestenskov and Fierro, *Internal Kurdish Coherence. Analyzing Alliances, Capacities, Threats, and Political Objectives of Kurdish Groups and Parties in Syria and Iraq, 2015-2017*, 7.
[51] Baczko, Dorronsoro, and Quesnay, *Civil War in Syria. Mobilization and Competing Social Order*, 65.
[52] On the different Syrian non-state armed groups see, for example, Lister, *The Syrian Jihad. The Evolution of an Insurgency*; Hashim, *The Caliphate at War. The Ideological, Organisational and Military Innovations of Islamic State*; Carenzi, 'A Downward Scale Shift?'; Walther and Pedersen, 'Rebel Fragmentation in Syria's Civil War'.
[53] O'Bagy, 'The Free Syrian Army', 10.
[54] Holliday, 'Syria's Armed Opposition', 13.
[55] O'Bagy, 'The Free Syrian Army', 8.
[56] Syrian National Council, 'About'.
[57] Syrian National Council, 'Home'.
[58] Phillips, 'The Civil War in Syria: The Variety of Opposition to the Syrian Regime', 25.
[59] Daher, 'Federalism Might Be an Option, but Inclusiveness Is a Must'.
[60] 'Composition de La « Coalition Nationale Des Forces de La Révolution et de l'Opposition Syrienne »'; 'The Syrian National Council'.

[61] Lund, 'Holy Warriors. A Field Guide to Syria's Jihadi Groups.'; Lund, 'The Non-State Militant Landscape in Syria'; Lister, 'The Free Syrian Army: A Decentralized Insurgent Brand', 8.
[62] Asharq al-Awsat, 'Syrian Opposition Government Begins Work as Kurds Announce Self-Rule'.
[63] Ulutaş, 'The Syrian Political Opposition: What Went Wrong?'
[64] 'Syrian Supreme Military Council'.
[65] BBC News, 'Guide to the Syrian Rebels'.
[66] O'Bagy, 'The Free Syrian Army', 28.
[67] Ibid., 32.
[68] Baczko, Dorronsoro, and Quesnay, *Civil War in Syria. Mobilization and Competing Social Order*, 143.
[69] Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 'Syrian Coalition Dissolves the FSA's Supreme Military Council'.
[70] Lister, 'The Free Syrian Army: A Decentralized Insurgent Brand', 13–15.
[71] Yetim and Kaşıkcı, 'Re-Adapting to Changing Middle Eastern Politics: The Modification in Turkey's Actor Perception and Turkey-Free Syrian Army (FSA) Relations'.
[72] Prasad and Stall, 'The State of the Syrian National Army. Shifting Networks of the Turkish-Backed Armed Opposition in Syria's Northwest', 4.
[73] Gunter, 'The Kurdish Spring'; Allsopp and Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria*.
[74] 'Minutes of the Meeting'.
[75] ANF, 'Muslim: Talks in Hewler Positive'.
[76] 'The Kurdish National Council in Syria'; MacDonald, 'A Guide to the Kurds in Iraq and Syria'.
[77] 'Hewlêr Declaration'.
[78] Soz, 'Isolation of the Kurds in Syria'.
[79] 'Constitution of Rojava (The Social Contract): January 29, 2014 (Syrian Arab Republic [Sy])'.
[80] Vestenskov and Fierro, *Internal Kurdish Coherence. Analyzing Alliances, Capacities, Threats, and Political Objectives of Kurdish Groups and Parties in Syria and Iraq, 2015-2017*, 7.
[81] Al Jazeera, 'Kurdish-Arab Coalition in Syria Forms Political Wing'; van Wilgenburg and Fumerton, 'From the PYD-YPG to the SDF'.
[82] 'Social Contract of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria'.
[83] Vestenskov and Fierro, *Internal Kurdish Coherence. Analyzing Alliances, Capacities, Threats, and Political Objectives of Kurdish Groups and Parties in Syria and Iraq, 2015-2017*, 12–14; van Wilgenburg and Fumerton, 'From the PYD-YPG to the SDF'.
[84] Corradi, 'The Kurdish Protection Units in Northern Syria', 13.
[85] Allsopp and Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria*; van Wilgenburg and Fumerton, 'From the PYD-YPG to the SDF'.
[86] Özçelik, 'Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18', 699–700.
[87] Beccaro, 'Urban Warfare in the Middle East: The Battle of Mosul and the Operations in Syria'.
[88] Turkey launched several military operations specifically against YPG and YPJ positions. The military operations were the 2016 Euphrates Shield, the 2018 Olive Branch, the 2019 Peace Spring, and the 2022 Claw-Sword, see Allsopp and Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria*; 'Turkey Kurdish Strikes: Operation Claw-Sword Targets Militant Bases'.
[89] The website of the Syrian Democratic Council contains several joint documents of condemnation of the Turkish military operation by the SDC, https://m-syria-d.com/en/.
[90] Carter and Jhaveri, 'The Syrian Democratic Forces' Arab Coalition Is Crumbling, Creating Opportunities for ISIS, Iran, and Turkey'.
[91] Vestenskov and Fierro, *Internal Kurdish Coherence. Analyzing Alliances, Capacities, Threats, and Political Objectives of Kurdish Groups and Parties in Syria and Iraq, 2015-2017*, 7.
[92] Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham, 'Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups', 712.
[93] Jarstad, 'Sharing Power to Build States'.
[94] Blair, Horowitz, and Potter, 'Leadership Targeting and Militant Alliance Breakdown', 930–31.