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De Facto States: Survival and Disappearance (1945-2011)

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Adrian Florea*

University of Glasgow

Abstract

De facto states—polities, such as Abkhazia (Georgia) or the Donetsk People’s Republic (Ukraine), that appropriate many trappings of statehood without securing the status of full states—have been a constant presence in the postwar international order. Some de facto states, such as Northern Cyprus, survive for a long period of time. Others, including Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, are forcefully reintegrated into their parent states. Still others, such as Aceh in Indonesia, disappear as a result of peacemaking. A few, such as Eritrea, successfully transition to full statehood. What explains these very different outcomes? I argue that four factors account for much of this variation: the extent of military assistance that separatists receive from outside actors, the governance activities conducted by separatist insurgents, the fragmentation of the rebel movement, and the influence of government veto players. My analysis relies on an original dataset that includes all breakaway enclaves from 1945 to 2011. The findings enhance our understanding of separatist institutional outcomes, rebel governance, and of the conditions that sustain nonstate territorial actors.

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From Somaliland in the Horn of Africa to, more recently, the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics in Eastern Ukraine, *de facto states* function as alternative structures of authority in a post-1945 international order dominated by recognized nation-states. De facto states are separatist polities that rule autonomously over portions of territory, establish governance structures, but lack international legitimacy. De facto states bestride the realm between rebellion and statecraft and raise important questions about the conditions under which state and nonstate actors share authority in the contemporary system. These entities attempt to exercise a legitimate—although not legal—monopoly on violence, acquire concrete attributes of statehood, and institutionalize alternate socio-political orders. Dismissed by some as fleeting buffer enclaves and heralded by others as viable alternatives to nation-states, de facto states exercise practical sovereignty over swaths of seemingly anarchic spaces. Their existence highlights the need to depart from static conceptions of authority, and look at the full range of actors that appropriate sovereign functions (Ahram and King 2011; Bartleson 2001; Clunan and Trinkunas 2010; Florea 2014).

Despite their resilience alongside recognized countries, de facto states receive comparatively less attention. We know a lot about when states are born or die (Coggins 2014; Fazal 2007; Hale 2008; Roeder 2007; Spruyt 1994; Tilly 1990; Wimmer 2013), but our understanding of the conditions under which de facto states survive or perish remains partial. The current international order places a great deal of importance on recognition as a condition for sovereign statehood. This makes the persistence of de facto states puzzling. Also surprising is the fluidity in their lifespan. Some, like Western Sahara, have adapted quite well to inauspicious systemic conditions and have survived for a long period of time. Others, like Biafra, Nigeria (1967-1970), failed to “fit in” and disappeared (Caspersen 2012; Pegg 1998). It is the variation in de facto state trajectories that lies at the core of this study. Specifically, I ask two questions. First, why do some de facto states disappear while others survive? And, second, what explains the fate of those that do disappear? Why do some end up being forcefully or peacefully reintegrated into their parent states while others make the transition to full statehood?¹

My explanation for the variability in de facto state outcomes focuses on the commitment problems engendered by four factors: the extent of *military support* that separatists receive

¹*Forceful reintegration* occurs when the parent state reasserts control over the de facto state through violent means. *Peaceful reintegration* occurs when parent state and de facto state leaders reach an autonomy agreement. *Transition to statehood* also amounts to de facto state “disappearance” because it marks the polity’s transition to a different institutional status. Irredentism, full annexation of a de facto state by another country, is another possible trajectory. During the analytical timeframe (1945-2011), there was no instance of de facto state annexation.

from outside patrons; the degree of *state building* in the breakaway region (the extent of governance activities conducted by rebels);² the level of *fragmentation* within the separatist insurgency; and the influence of government *veto players*. Each of these factors shapes the power configuration between the parent state and the separatists as well as the power balance among actors within the parent state and the separatist insurgency, and, in so doing, creates commitment issues that push a de facto state towards a particular trajectory.

Using an original dataset with all de facto states from 1945 to 2011, I find that these territorial nonstate actors are less likely to be peacefully reintegrated into their parent states when they receive substantial military assistance from foreign sponsors, when they are fragmented, and when they engage in extensive state building (governance) activities. Perhaps counterintuitively, the results also show that a negotiated reintegration of separatist enclaves is more likely when the parent state government has multiple veto players. Moreover, de facto states that are internally fractured and build solid statelike structures find themselves better positioned to make the transition to statehood. At the same time, statehood emerges as a less likely outcome when separatists receive considerable external military support and when the parent state is internally divided.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section offers an operational definition of the de facto state that situates it among the larger population of nonstate actors which operate violence monopolies. The second section develops a credible commitment explanation for de facto states' resilience which yields several hypotheses about the conditions that precipitate or inhibit de facto states' disappearance. The third section tests these hypotheses empirically, and addresses the main implications of the findings. Finally, the fourth section proposes an important direction for future research.

De Facto States as Nonstate Actors

De facto states are separatist polities that exercise a monopoly over the use of violence in a given area, but lack international legal sovereignty. Yet, various types of insurgent actors—for example, militias, terrorists, or warlords—institutionalize monopolies of force. To understand what de facto states are, and are *not*, we need to locate them among the population of rebel organizations that hold monopolies on violence. Thus, I define de facto states as polities that: (1) belong to (or are administered by) a recognized country, but are not colonial possessions; (2) seek some degree of separation from that country, and have

²*Rebel state building* and *rebel governance* are used interchangeably throughout this article, and refer to the ensemble of activities aimed at enforcing socio-political order, implementing collectively binding rules, and providing public goods in insurgent-held territory (Risse 2011).

either declared independence or demonstrated aspirations for independence—for example through a referendum or a sovereignty declaration;³ (3) exerts military control over a territory or portions of territory inhabited by a permanent population; (4) is not condoned by the government; (5) performs at least basic governance functions (provision of social and political order); (6) lacks international legal sovereignty;⁴ and (7) exists for at least 24 months.

The operational indicators yield a population of 34 de facto states (Table 1), and distinguish these enclaves from territories controlled by other types of rebel actors. De facto states are different from warlord areas (for example spaces ruled by the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda) where the goal of the insurgency is not self-determination and where there is little governance beyond the production of violence. De facto state rebels resemble the Olsonian (1993) “stationary bandits” who control and govern territory rather than the “roving bandits” who roam and pillage. Also, de facto states differ from territories governed by rebels who aim to overthrow the government, like UNITA-controlled areas in Angola (1975-2002). While these organizations may share with de facto states some characteristics, like territorial control and governance, the goal of the insurgency is regime change rather than self-determination. Finally, de facto states are separate from areas ruled by pro-state paramilitary groups, such as government-sponsored anti-FARC militias in Colombia.

³A declaration of independence is a key attribute in Caspersen’s (2012, 11) definition of “unrecognized states,” and a main characteristic in Coggins’s (2011, 454) definition of secessionist movements.

⁴In this study, *international legal sovereignty* refers to recognition from a simple majority of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent members plus recognition from a simple majority of UN members.

TABLE 1: Population of de facto states (1945-2011)

De facto state	Parent state	Emergence	Disappearance	Type of disappearance
<i>Katanga</i>	Congo (DRC)	1960	1963	forceful reintegration
<i>Biafra</i>	Nigeria	1967	1970	forceful reintegration
<i>Krajina</i>	Croatia	1991	1995	forceful reintegration
<i>Chechnya</i>	Russia	1991	1999	forceful reintegration
<i>Anjouan</i>	Comoros	1997	2008	forceful reintegration
<i>Tamil Eelam</i>	Sri Lanka	1984	2009	forceful reintegration
<i>Rwenzururu Kingdom</i>	Uganda	1963	1982	peaceful reintegration
<i>Găgăuzia</i>	Moldova	1991	1995	peaceful reintegration
<i>Bougainville</i>	Papua New Guinea	1975	1997	peaceful reintegration
<i>Eastern Slavonia</i>	Croatia	1995	1998	peaceful reintegration
<i>Ajaria</i>	Georgia	1991	2004	peaceful reintegration
<i>Aceh</i>	Indonesia	2001	2005	peaceful reintegration
<i>Karen State</i>	Burma	1949	—	alive
<i>Kachin State</i>	Burma	1961	—	alive
<i>Taiwan</i>	China	1971	—	alive
<i>Mindanao</i>	Philippines	1973	—	alive
<i>TRNC^a</i>	Cyprus	1974	—	alive
<i>Western Sahara</i>	Morocco ^b	1974	—	alive
<i>Cabinda</i>	Angola	1975	—	alive
<i>Casamance</i>	Senegal	1982	—	alive
<i>Abkhazia</i>	Georgia	1991	—	alive
<i>Kurdistan</i>	Iraq	1991	—	alive
<i>Nagorno-Karabakh</i>	Azerbaijan	1991	—	alive
<i>Puntland</i>	Somalia	1991	—	alive
<i>Somaliland</i>	Somalia	1991	—	alive
<i>South Ossetia</i>	Georgia	1991	—	alive
<i>Transnistria</i>	Moldova	1991	—	alive
<i>Republika Srpska</i>	Bosnia-Herzegovina	1992	—	alive
<i>Palestine</i>	Israel ^c	1995	—	alive
<i>Gaza</i>	Palestine ^d	2007	—	alive

TABLE 1: Population of de facto states (1945-2011)

De facto state	Parent state	Emergence	Disappearance	Type of disappearance
<i>Eritrea</i>	Ethiopia	1964	1993	statehood
<i>East Timor</i>	Indonesia	1975	2002	statehood
<i>Kosovo</i> ^e	Serbia	1998	2008	statehood
<i>South Sudan</i>	Sudan	1956	2011	statehood

^aTurkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, ^bAdministered by Morocco, ^cUnder Israeli occupation,
^dUnder Hamas control, ^eNot a UN member

De facto states warrant investigation for multiple reasons. For one, they illuminate the diversity of units populating the international system. De facto states are polities that have adapted well to a world of recognized countries while staying outside of their grasp. They vividly illustrate the need to regard political order in ways other than sovereign statehood (Acharya 2014; Lemke 2006; Paul 1999; Sharman 2013; Staniland 2012; Vinci 2008). Sovereignty is divisible both as a matter of principle and as a matter of experience, and is shared by state and nonstate actors alike (Krasner 1999). By recognizing no higher authority and creating spaces of self-rule, de facto states project an image of sovereignty as a malleable and variable concept (Florea 2012). As alternate structures of political organization, these entities fulfill roles often considered the exclusive preserve of states; they emerge as contenders for authority in an era of contested sovereignty. Their resilience alongside state units in the post-1945 environment indicates an inherent distribution of practical authority between state and nonstate actors.⁵

Relatedly, de facto states help us better understand the provision of governance in areas beyond state control. These polities institutionalize alternative modes of governance, and, in some cases (such as Somaliland), prove more effective at developing administrative structures than does the nominal territorial sovereign. De facto separation marks a disjuncture between the locus of (international legal) authority and the locus of governance. In most of these statelets, separatists completely dislodge the sovereign power and assume the burdens of government: they set up separate institutions, maintain order, levy taxes, and administer justice.

De facto states also capture the dynamic character of separatism. Recent scholarship reveals that de facto separation does not amount to successful secession, but constitutes a “near miss” (Laitin 2007, 17). This observation underlies a tension in current works: though historical evidence suggests that separatism is a matter of degree, we typically analyze this phenomenon in binary terms—separation either succeeds or fails (Saideman 2001; Sambanis 2004; Tir 2005; Toft 2010; Walter 2009). Separatism includes demands for the creation of separate states as well as for broad measures of autonomy or quasi-independence (Horowitz 2000, 231). This perspective conveys a dynamic process of bargaining which can yield various institutional forms of separation that are more or less stable.⁶ Yet, most of the literature remains focused on a dichotomous outcome: unsuccessful or successful separation. Conven-

⁵Vinci (2008, 297) claims that autonomous armed groups inside fragmented states “should be seen as being units in the international system proper.”

⁶Chapman and Roeder (2007) probe the effect of four institutional arrangements—partition, de facto separation, autonomy, unitarianism—on the likelihood of recurring violence, and find that partition and de facto separation are less likely to lead to reescalation of conflict while autonomy and unitarianism widen the menu of escalatory options.

tional explanations for why some separatist struggles succeed while others fail focus on the characteristics of the actors involved in the dispute (separatist organization; ethnic group; government), the environment in which these actors interact, the violent or nonviolent tactics employed to pursue their objectives, or on outside intervention (Sorens 2012; Regan 2000; Toft 2003; Walter 2002). Degrees of separation rarely enter the analysis. With some exceptions (Chapman and Roeder 2007; Roeder 2007; Seymour 2008), separatism is black-boxed: current works leave unmeasured and theoretically unexplored much of the variation in institutional outcomes that lie between unsuccessful and successful separation.

This article attempts to bridge this gap by investigating the conditions that make a particular type of separatist outcome, *de facto* separation, more or less durable. Specifically, it seeks to explain why some *de facto* states survive while others disappear. Drawing inspiration from the larger literature on civil war and separatism, and the specialized works on *de facto* states, I offer below a credible commitment account for *de facto* state trajectories. The central contention is that the power distribution between and within the government and the separatist insurgency produces different kinds of commitment problems which translate into different types of outcomes for these enclaves. The next section develops this argument.

Credible Commitment and De Facto State Outcomes

I begin with the premise that credible commitment functions as the key mechanism that shapes bargaining between separatists and governments, and, therefore, causes much of the variation in *de facto* state outcomes (forceful reintegration, peaceful reintegration, transition to statehood). Bargaining breakdown in conflicts over *de facto* states is less likely to be triggered by other rationalist drivers of war—informational asymmetry (uncertainty about capabilities and resolve) or issue indivisibility (Fearon 1995). Ample case study evidence indicates that *de facto* states operate in information-rich environments (Caspersen 2012; Caspersen and Stansfield 2010; Lynch 2004; Pegg 1998). Prior episodes of conflict or contention, geographical contiguity, frequent interactions at the *de facto* border, and mutual monitoring reduce the uncertainty that actors have about their capabilities and resolve.⁷ Similarly, issue indivisibility is unlikely to emerge as the main obstacle to successful bargaining between the separatists and the parent state. This is because, compared to disputes over

⁷Cunningham (2010, 118) argues that covert external assistance to rebels is not easily detectable and exacerbates informational asymmetries. *De facto* separation encapsulates a situation of military stalemate where the rebels and the government have sufficient information about each other's resolve and capability. With the passage of time, informational asymmetries are likely to be reduced because "after a few years of war, fighters on both sides of an insurgency typically develop accurate understanding of the other side's capabilities, tactics, and resolve" (Fearon 2004, 290). Powell (2012, 44) contends that, even if informational problems persist, they cannot explain the duration of the conflict nor the way in which it might end.

government, disputes over territory are more amenable to resolution since there exists, in principle, a division of the territory that both parties would be content with (Walter 2002; 2009). Viewed through this lens, indivisibility is not an inherent property of the disputed territory but a by-product of bargaining failure (Goddard 2009). Hence, credible commitment mechanisms likely to play a key role in complicating bargaining between separatists and governments.

Commitment problems emerge in most warring group interactions (Christia 2012; Cunningham 2014; Pearlman 2011). Antagonists often prove unable to commit themselves to abide by an agreement. They also face incentives to renege on agreements. Recent works overwhelmingly focus on commitment problems as barriers preventing rebels from entering into or reneging on an agreement with the government. This line of inquiry holds that the proliferation of civil war participants expands the range of preferable agreements and reduces actors' willingness, or ability, to abide by a deal (Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour 2012; Cunningham 2011). By disaggregating the number of conflict parties, this approach marks a welcome departure from the unitary actor assumption that undergirds commitment-centered explanations of warfare. It provides a more realistic view of the conditions that lead to bargaining collapse in internal conflicts. Nonetheless, key challenges remain: "not to identify commitment problems per se, but rather to identify mechanisms that provide important insights into the forces underlying...persistent inefficient behavior" (Powell 2012, 46). Without attention to its origin, a commitment problem becomes nothing but a "catch-all label" that doesn't tell us much about why some conflicts last more than others unless we examine the relationship among different *kinds* of commitment problems and the outcomes they generate (Powell 2012, 51).

In conflicts over de facto states, the preference structure for the government and the rebels tends to shift in relation to the dyadic power distribution and internal struggles. The relative power distribution operates at inter-related levels—the dyadic/interaction level and the actor level (government; de facto state)—to produce different kinds of commitment problems with varying implications for outcomes. Stated otherwise, the power distribution between the government and the insurgency (a structural bargaining condition) as well as the power struggles within each of them (a structural organizational condition) alter the strategic environment in unique ways to generate various commitment problems and produce divergent trajectories for de facto states. The relative capability between the separatists and the parent state as well as these actors' internal struggles are really doing the work behind de facto state survival or disappearance by shaping incentives to commit to a deal or continue fighting. The ultimate fate of a separatist statelike entity revolves around dynamics of two-level power "games" (Putnam 1988)—power "games" at the dyadic/interaction level and

power “games” at the actor (government; separatist) level—which affect actors’ willingness or ability to commit to an agreement.

Power distribution and commitment problems at the dyadic level

Anticipated shifts in the power distribution function as major obstacles to credible commitment across all types of conflict. Expectations about adverse changes in the relative power balance reduce actors’ desirability of striking a deal or committing to an agreement that has already been reached. Applied to de facto states, this logic suggests that a settlement that is preferable in the present cannot be sustained for the long term because changes in the power distribution between the separatists and the government alter the appeal of a deal. Shifts in the power balance reverberate throughout the strategic environment in which the de facto state and the government operate, impinge on actors’ discount rate (the rate at which they discount future benefits), and raise barriers to successful bargaining. With a relative power balance in flux, neither side has the incentive or the ability to commit to a settlement.

I make two assumptions about the power distribution between the de facto state and the government. First, I assume that this power distribution varies, depending on actors’ military resources and mobilizational effectiveness. Second, I assume that commitment problems become more acute when the power distribution is altered by the capabilities of the de facto state rather than by those of the parent state. The rationale behind this premise suggests that, even with a change in the power distribution in government’s favor (through external assistance, for instance), it will retain a preference for peaceful resolution because warfare is costly and comes with a baggage of uncertainty about the evolution of hostilities and the contours of the post-conflict environment.⁸ The larger literature on the politics of self-determination and the more specialized works on de facto states suggest that, in an attempt to maintain military parity with the government, separatists engage in both external and internal balancing behavior. The former strategy involves attracting *external military support* while the latter centers around *state building* activities that allow separatists to acquire domestic legitimacy and maintain mobilization against the government. The next section explores the processes through these two factors might alter the dyadic power distribution, exacerbate commitment problems, and propel a de facto state towards a particular path.

⁸Robustness tests included in the supplementary materials show that the relaxation of this assumption with the inclusion of controls for government assistance produces similar conclusions.

External military support

As actors interested in their survival, de facto states have a fundamental need to mobilize resources. De facto states' survival hinges on their capacity to balance militarily against the parent state. Functionally, they are undifferentiated from sovereign countries in that the survival imperative compels them to balance both externally and internally. Securing *military support* from an external patron is a common form of external balancing that allows separatists to maintain mobilization. Military support can come in various forms: arms, communication technologies, and hardware; personnel; training for rebel troops; provision of safe havens (Carter 2012; Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham 2011).

For the de facto state, military assistance galvanizes hopes of sustained self-rule. For the parent state, outside support for the insurgency alters its incentives to resolve the dispute peacefully. To forestall adverse shifts in the power distribution triggered by external assistance for the rebellion, the government might contemplate military action. At the same time, military aid from sponsors injects vital lifeblood into the arteries of a de facto state by providing rebels with the resources needed to prevent forceful reintegration. Outside support enables de facto state leaders to resist attempts at forceful reintegration, and amplifies commitment problems because, in the presence of military assistance, rebels will likely radicalize their demands (Jenne 2007). When negotiating with the parent state, separatists may promise “not to seek independence if greater territorial autonomy is granted, but may have difficulty convincing the government that they will not escalate their demands” if they benefit from external sponsorship (Walter 2009, 37). De facto state leaders are less likely to accept an autonomy deal when they are confident of resources that will allow them to maintain military parity with the government. Essentially, with extensive external sponsorship, rebels have few incentives to credibly commit to a settlement that gives them anything less than the status quo.

Some argue that we should observe less support for separatists because separatism threatens established boundaries and, hence, the stability of the international system (Saideman 2002, 28). However, many de facto states receive substantial assistance, which indicates that third parties are more concerned with immediate geopolitical goals than with larger systemic considerations. In many situations, such as Russia's support for Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria (Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2011; Caspersen 2012; King 2001; Lynch 2004; Pegg 1998), powerful sponsors throw their weight behind a de facto state ostensibly to protect ethnic kin but in reality to pursue larger geostrategic objectives such as destabilizing host regimes (Jenne 2007, 126). Sponsorship lowers the probability that the de facto state will be forcefully reintegrated into the parent state, and hinders the prospects for a settlement. With a strong supporter in their backyard, separatists will gain confidence at the negotiating

table, and will likely escalate their demands rather than acquiesce to autonomy offers made by the government.

While sponsorship enables de facto states to survive for longer periods of time, it can also undermine separatists' independence aspirations. With external patronage for the rebellion, the parent state will be less inclined to commit to a final agreement through which it recognizes the de facto state's independence. In a scenario of external military assistance for the separatists, the government will likely oppose any agreement that grants independence to the breakaway entity. Additionally, other countries might be reluctant to recognize the independence of these entities since they will perceived them as mere "puppets" of regional or global powers (Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham 2011, 717). For instance, in their quest for independence, Abkhaz separatists have unsuccessfully tried to dissociate themselves from Moscow's patronage by projecting the image of a legitimate right for statehood based on prior separate existence (Bakke, O'Loughlin, Toal, and Ward 2014). Although Abkhaz politics often unfolds contrary to Russia's preferences (Kremlin-backed presidential candidates have twice been defeated at the polls in 2004 and 2011), the close military and economic cooperation between Moscow and Abkhazia casts an aura of patron-client dependence which delegitimizes the Abkhaz independence struggle in the eyes of the international community. Therefore, these rationales suggest that:

H₁: The greater the extent of external military support for the separatists, the lower the likelihood of de facto state reintegration (peaceful or forceful) or transition to statehood.

State building

De facto state leaders face a paradox: reliance on external patrons strengthens them militarily, but also makes them vulnerable. For various reasons, sponsors may be unwilling or unable to bolster a de facto state. Fluctuations in external military support can jeopardize a de facto state's survival prospects. For instance, separatists in Krajina, a Serb enclave of Croatia which declared independence in 1991, could not consistently rely on Serbia's military support because Belgrade pursued its own interests and was more interested in controlling the decision-making process in the province than ensuring its survival. Serbian patronage was more of a curse rather than a blessing because it was intermittent and encouraged splintering within the rebel movement. By supplying rival factions with both coercive and economic resources, Belgrade actually contributed to the demise of the de facto state since divisions among separatists stymied their efforts to coordinate military activities against the government (Caspersen 2012, 104). Unsurprisingly, in 1995 Krajina was forcefully reinte-

grated into the parent state.

The Krajina example conveys a straightforward message: external patronage can be a two-way street. It may enhance a de facto state's survival prospects, but it may also limit its room for maneuver. Strategic interests fluctuate—international, regional, or domestic considerations frequently lead patron states to rethink their priorities and recalibrate their policies towards friends and foes alike. The unpredictability of external assistance coupled with concerns for loss of autonomy and legitimacy make rebels aware that they also need a domestic resource base, one generated through *state building* (governance) activities. The imperative of balancing against the government forces de facto states to centralize power, expand the institutional apparatus, and extract resources. The threat of war with the parent state pushes rebels to create an alternative order with state making consequences. Beneath the apparent chaos of de facto separation lies a reconfiguration of political order with processes functionally equivalent to state formation. State building can substantially affect de facto states' viability. This form of internal balancing has important consequences: if it is large and sustained, it leaves behind solid institutional structures that create material bases for mobilization against the government. Many de facto states, such as Abkhazia or Transnistria, exhibit a sprawling bureaucracy akin to a sovereign country (Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2011): they have a separate government with functional ministries, separate health and education institutions, and, in some cases, separate central bank and local currency.

The establishment of a statelike architecture in rebel-held territory provides the actors with a mix of incentives. Governments may prefer a peaceful deal with the rebels, but cannot commit to it when the latter become “rulers of the domain” (Olson 1993). To forestall the institutionalization of separate rule on their territory, governments may contemplate violence as a mechanism for dispute resolution. However, rebel governance likely inhibits a de facto state's forceful reintegration because it facilitates recruitment (the local population becomes invested in the alternative order) and resource mobilization (Arjona 2014). Rebel governance also decreases the prospects of peaceful reintegration. State building lowers the likelihood that de facto state leaders will accept an agreement that does not represent an improvement over the status quo. Decisions to develop a complex governance architecture signal resolve: by engaging in onerous state building projects, insurgent leaders communicate that nothing short of de facto separation would be acceptable in the long run. The opportunity costs of governance signal commitment to local rule, and affect the bargaining range such that separatists' preference structure may exclude any deal that involves the enclave's reintegration into the parent state. In Northern Cyprus, for instance, over the past four decades external support from Turkey coupled with a robust governance apparatus have made separatist leaders less willing to accept agreements that give them something less than what they already

have (quasi-independence).

A high degree of state building could also increase the likelihood of transition to statehood. Governance consolidates the enclave’s separation, and sends a powerful signal that nothing short of independence would satisfy the rebels in the long run. The establishment of a separate statelike apparatus punctures any link that may remain between the parent state and the local population, and bolsters the enclave’s legitimacy for both domestic and international audiences. Separatist state builders claim that successful governance legitimizes their bid for independence and international recognition (Caspersen 2012). State building has historically been a key condition for admission into the club of internationally recognized states. In many cases of state emergence, polities claiming a right to statehood had to first demonstrate that they displayed statelike characteristics: control over territory, governance provision, and capacity to enter into relations with other units (Fabry 2010). In the contemporary environment where statehood is mutually constituted, earned sovereignty is no longer a *sine qua non*. A recent example is South Sudan which in July 2011 entered the state system with inchoate governance structures. As exemplified by Kosovo’s case, however, earned sovereignty remains a valuable ticket of admission into the international arena. Kosovo’s independence was recognized by a plurality of UNSC-permanent members (the US, France, Great Britain) only after meeting certain standards of good governance delineated by the international community.⁹ Hence, these arguments give rise to the second proposition:

H₂: The greater the degree of state building in the de facto state, the lower the likelihood of reintegration (forceful or peaceful) and the higher the likelihood of transition to statehood.

Power distribution and commitment problems at the actor level

Issues of commitment also arise with the variability in the power distribution at the actor level (the rebel movement and the government), and have ramifications for whether a *de facto* state survives or disappears. On the one hand, fragmentation among the separatists—an indicator of the relative power of various factions comprising the insurgency—can create insurmountable commitment hurdles. On the other hand, obstacles to successful bargaining can equally emanate from divisions within the parent state, more precisely from veto players—central government actors with potential for preventing change in policy. Below, I examine mechanisms through which rebel movement fragmentation and central government

⁹The international community’s “standards before status” approach expressly stated that Kosovo’s ultimate status would be determined by the entity’s capacity to acquire functional attributes of statehood.

veto players shape the bargaining environment, and might catapult de facto states towards a certain trajectory.

Rebel movement fragmentation

Despite public claims of unity, many rebel movements include multiple factions with varying origins and agendas (Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour 2012). As Pearlman and Cunningham (2012, 4) aptly note, “the norm in more recent civil wars is not coherent antagonists as much as shifting coalitions of groups with malleable allegiances and, at times, divergent interests.” *Fragmentation* among separatists complicates the bargaining environment and exacerbates commitment problems. With radical rebel factions intent on undermining autonomy negotiations, governments cannot commit to pursuing peaceful solutions. In fact, insurgent splintering provides parent states with incentives to destabilize the de facto state, playing one faction against the other. When the separatist enclaves suffer from internal schisms, they will be less successful in their attempt to balance against the government, and will be more vulnerable to forceful reintegration¹⁰

Fragmentation is particularly pernicious in the context of autonomy negotiations between the separatists and the parent state because it expands actors’ preference dimension and, thus, shrinks the range of possible deals. Rebel factionalism creates a double-commitment problem, and makes peaceful reintegration elusive. On the government side, leaders might be reluctant to sign onto an agreement since, under conditions of acute splintering, rebels cannot commit to abide by it. On the rebel side, some factions might have rational incentives to continue their struggle rather than acquiesce to a deal with the parent state. In particular, those splinter groups with lower leverage over decision-making in the larger separatist movement worry that, if they partake into a deal with the government, the dominant faction cannot commit that it will not try to eliminate them in order to get a larger piece of the post-settlement “pie” (Christia 2012). Many de facto states display splintering dynamics wherein various armed factions crystallize around competing centers of authority.¹¹ For example, in 1991 the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) split into two main factions, each claiming to be the “true” representative of the South Sudanese: A Dinka-dominated group led by John Garang (SPLA-Main/Torit) and a Nuer-dominated group (SPLA-United) led by Riek Machar and Lam Akol. Garang favored extensive autonomy for South Sudan (not least in deference to his Ethiopian patron who was engaged in a protracted struggle against Eritrean separatists) while SPLA-United openly sought an independent state. Dur-

¹⁰Akcinaroglu (2012, 884) suggests that fragmentation might actually help the polity survive because the government is subjected to a constant war of attrition by different factions in different places.

¹¹In highly institutionalized de facto states, such as Transnistria, splintering is visible through the presence of political parties rather than armed groups.

ing the 1990s, SPLA's efforts to reach a comprehensive autonomy deal with the government were hampered by splinter groups, such as SPLA-United, that were opposed to any deal involving reintegration into the parent state.

Fragmentation can also hamper de facto states' independence aspirations. One reason is that a fragmented movement is less likely than a cohesive one to maintain full control over the territory and engage in effective governance activities—often, but not always, key conditions for advancing a legitimate claim to statehood. Another reason is that fringe rebel factions often gain more from the continuation of the struggle than from peace. In an independence scenario, the stronger organization in the rebel movement cannot guarantee that it will not turn on its weaker partners in order to capture complete control of the polity (Christia 2012, 21). Additionally, other states, particularly those located in the proximity, may be reluctant to recognize a fragmented polity for fear that factional infighting could morph into post-independence civil war with spillover potential, as is the case with South Sudan. Taken together, these rationales produce the third hypothesis:

H₃: The greater the level of fragmentation in the de facto state, the higher the likelihood of forceful reintegration, and the lower the likelihood of peaceful reintegration or transition to statehood.

Government veto players

Parent state veto players—individual or collective actors that have institutional or extra-institutional means of preventing change (Tsebelis 2002)—can also block negotiated agreements. Any solution to conflicts involving de facto states inexorably involves redistribution of state power. Reintegration and transition to statehood have distributional implications for the relative power position of various groups within the parent state. Peaceful reintegration can upset the domestic balance of power since the cooptation of de facto state leaders within central or local government structures, which generally accompanies such agreements, might lead to a reshuffling of the ruling coalition. Faced with the prospect of a change in the ruling coalition, veto players have rational incentives to spoil agreements. The 2004 Annan Plan for Northern Cyprus provides a telling example of such pattern: the plan failed mainly because it was rejected by Greek Cypriot leaders who were concerned about its distributional implications. The mechanism linking government veto players to commitment failures can operate irrespective of regime type. Democracies typically exhibit multiple veto players, such as legislators or regional administrators, who might dislike the distributional consequences implicit in a de facto state's peaceful reintegration. Non-democratic regimes can also include a variety of veto players who might oppose a negotiated settlement that

redistributes domestic power and influence.¹²

Paradoxical as it may seem at first sight, several actors within democratic or authoritarian parent states may have entrenched interests in *preventing* the disappearance of a de facto state: politicians may veto a negotiated solution for fear that it might alter the composition of the ruling coalition; the army’s modal reaction is to oppose self-determination demands;¹³ those bureaucrats (tax officers, inspectors, border guards) who accrue substantial benefits from the lucrative trade in consumer goods, arms, narcotics, or even people across the often porous borders between the de facto state and the parent state will also be averse to any kind of change.¹⁴ With such an array of veto players with potential to block agreements, the government’s ability to enter negotiations and commit to a deal will be significantly diminished. Therefore, the last expectation is:

***H₄*: The higher the number of government veto players, the lower the likelihood of reintegration (forceful or peaceful), or transition to statehood.**

Empirical Analysis

The hypotheses are tested with an original dataset of 34 de facto states in the post-WWII period (1945-2011).¹⁵ The unit of analysis is the de facto state-year for a total of 780 observations. The dependent variable is *de facto state duration* — time in months from de facto state emergence until de facto state disappearance. De facto state emergence is observed in the month where a self-determination polity in an officially-recognized country exhibits empirical sovereignty (military control over a territory), lacks universal recognition, is not condoned by the government, and engages in at least basic governance activities. If a de facto state was already in place before the declaration of independence of a newly formed

¹²Just like democracies, autocratic regimes display great variation in veto points. In some cases, dictators create domestic institutions, and, thus, potentially expand the number of potential veto players, as a strategy to maintain power. For example, Gandhi (2008, 184) argues that autocrats often “co-opt the potential opposition in an attempt to broaden their bases of support and increase their power relative to other political actors.” On the other hand, authoritarian leaders could also use the continued threat posed by separatists to consolidate their rule and stifle domestic dissent.

¹³As an organization with its separate corporate interests, the military might prefer a continuation of the separatist dispute in order to amass resources and bolster its power within the parent state bureaucracy.

¹⁴Domestic actors can also pressure the government to resist a transition to statehood imposed by others. At the same time, a dysfunctional parent state might, theoretically, be unable to resist a transition to statehood imposed from the outside. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

¹⁵The codebook (see the supplementary materials) provides details about coding procedures, variable measurement, and the sources consulted.

parent state, then this date is used for emergence.¹⁶ The median survival time for de facto states is 345 months. The shortest-lived de facto state is Eastern Slavonia (Croatia) with a survival time of 25 months. The longest-lived de facto state is Karen State (Burma) with 756 months at the end of the observation period (December 2011).

Variables

The first hypothesis posited that outside military assistance exacerbates commitment problems and entrenches the continuation of the status quo. Sponsorship lowers the probability that a de facto state will be forcefully reintegrated into the parent state, and hinders the prospects for peaceful resolution by reducing separatists' incentives to sign onto an agreement. An ideal measure for external *Military support* would be an estimated dollar amount of military assistance a de facto state gets from other countries. The covert nature of military interactions between de facto states and external patrons limits the availability of such data. To circumvent this problem, I resort to a second-best measurement. Specifically, I construct a proxy that captures how much external military assistance a de facto state gets in any given year from state sponsors (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, and Brannan 2001; Carter 2012). This variable is a score composed of five types of military external support, where each type of support receives equal weight: (1) weaponry and military hardware; (2) foreign military personnel; (3) foreign military advisors; (4) training for de facto state troops abroad; and (5) safe havens. The mean value for this covariate is 2.78 while the median value is 3. For example, Tamil Eelam registers a score of 4 for the 1984-1988 period when the LTTE received substantial support from India, and a score of 1 after 1988 when New Delhi withdrew its military assistance.¹⁷

The theory suggested that state building activities conducted by separatists can also affect a de facto state's survival prospects by providing the resources needed to mobilize against the government, conferring a sense of legitimacy to the separatist movement, and reducing incentives to commit to an agreement that offers anything less than de facto separation. To gauge the effect of *State building* on outcomes, I construct a variable which captures the number of statelike institutions that a de facto state exhibits in any given year. This variable is a count of the number of governance institutions that are present in each de facto state, and includes the following indicators: (1) an *executive*—coded as present if there is an executive authority that makes decisions in the de facto state; (2) a *legislature* and/or

¹⁶For example, while Nagorno-Karabakh exhibited de facto state characteristics prior to Azerbaijan's independence, the date of emergence is the month when Azerbaijan became a sovereign state (October 1991). The emergence date for Taiwan is October 1971 when People's Republic of China replaced Taiwan as a UN member and took its seat in the UN Security Council.

¹⁷Descriptive statistics are included in the supplementary materials.

regional councils—coded as present if there is a legislative body in the de facto state capital and/or regional councils; (3) a *court* or semi-formalized legal system—coded as present if there is a formal or semi-formal juridical authority that adjudicates disputes between individuals or institutions in the de facto state; (4) a *civilian tax system*—coded as present if there are institutions for regularized extraction of taxes from the local population and/or from the diaspora; (5) an *educational system*—coded as present if the authorities in the de facto state establish a system of education that functions in parallel with or in lieu of the one provided by the government; (6) a *welfare system*—coded as present if the authorities in the de facto state establish a system of welfare (healthcare and/or pensions) that replaces or complements the one provided by the parent state; (7) institutions for *foreign affairs*—coded as present if the authorities in the de facto state conduct diplomacy by establishing missions abroad and engaging in contacts with IGOs and/or foreign governments; (8) *media* or propaganda system—coded as present if the authorities in the de facto state establish media or propaganda outlets; (9) *police* and/or gendarmerie system—coded as present if the authorities in the de facto state establish a system of domestic control (police and/or gendarmerie) that operates separately from the army; (10) a *central banking system*—coded as present if the authorities in the de facto state establish a central banking system that functions separately from the parent state’s banking network. The mean for this variable is 5.95 while the median is 6. For instance, Transnistria (Moldova) registers a value of 7 for its emergence year (1991) and a value of 10 for the 1992-2011 period. Găgăuzia, a short-lived de facto state in the same country, registers a value of 2 on this variable for its entire survival period (1991-1995).

Another expectation was that the level of *Fragmentation* in the rebel movement can shape de facto state outcomes. Splintering can be perilous to a de facto state because military and political resources might be redirected towards internal power struggles rather than organized resistance against the government. Additionally, fragmentation erodes actors’ incentives or ability to commit to an agreement. To measure the level of fragmentation, I look at the number of factions that make demands on behalf of the de facto state (Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour 2012; Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour 2012). The higher the number of factions, the higher the level of fragmentation of the rebel movement. A faction is an organization that claims to represent the population of the de facto state and makes demands regarding the status of the enclave, such as: reintegration into the parent state; limited autonomy; broad autonomy; no change in status; independence; (re)union with another state; membership in a supra-national entity. A faction can be a political party, military organization, or civic group that operates within or outside the de facto state. The fragmentation variable ranges from 1 to 21 with a mean of 3.95 and a median of 3. The fragmentation variable ranges

from 1 to 21 with a mean of 3.95 and a median of 3. Ajaria, Găgăuzia, and Rwenzururu Kingdom are the only de facto states with a single faction throughout their entire existence, while Palestine displays the largest number of factions – 21 at the end of 2011.

One final theoretical expectation was that central government *Veto players* can block changes in the status quo. To assess the influence of veto players, I include a variable that measures the degree of veto opportunities in the parent state. I use Polity IV’s “executive constraints” variable as a proxy for the degree of veto opportunities. This indicator captures institutionalized constraints on the decision-making powers of the chief executives, whether individuals or collectivities. The advantage of this proxy is that it encompasses constraints on decision-making from both within and outside the government (constraints on decision-making can originate with legislatures, political parties, powerful advisers, private corporations, the army, or judicial bodies).¹⁸ The executive constraints variable is created on a 7-point scale, with 1 representing unlimited decision-making authority (no limitations on executive’s decisions) and 7 representing highly constrained decision-making authority (several veto players can block a decision). In the middle, a value of 3 represents slight to moderate limitation on decision-making authority, while a value of 5 represents substantial limitations on decision-making authority. 2, 4, and 6 are intermediate categories, bridging the gap between adjacent values. The mean value for this covariate is 4.03 while the median is 3.

In addition to the main predictors, I control for factors that can affect both the independent variables and the outcomes. One such factor is the de facto state’s *Prior status* as an independent or autonomous territory. Although de facto states coalesce around concentrated minorities, their boundaries do not map neatly onto minority groups’ spatial distribution; instead, their frontiers tend to correspond to previous administrative units. For example, Somaliland’s borders roughly coincide with the eponymous British protectorate (1884-1960) and short-lived independent republic which on July 1st, 1960, united with the former Italian Somaliland to form modern-day Somalia.¹⁹ When South Ossetia first declared independence from Georgia in May 1992, it claimed sovereignty over the territory of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Region (Oblast). Similarly, the Abkhaz de facto state formally encompasses the territory of the defunct Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

Prior status can emerge as a powerful determinant of separatist claims for at least two reasons. First, past institutional experience leaves behind institutional remnants, of formal

¹⁸The Database of Political Institutions (DPI) provides an alternative measure of veto players. However, DPI collects data starting with 1975 which produces missing observations for the 1945-1974 period. It is worth noting that the correlation between the Polity IV and DPI veto player measures is 0.53.

¹⁹Somaliland functioned as an independent state between June 26 and June 30, 1960, and was recognized by 35 states.

or ideational fabric, that enable rebels to rally the local population around the separatist claim and mobilize resources. Prior existence as an independent/autonomous territory enhances the domestic legitimacy of the self-determination struggle, and lowers the cost of collective action. Institutional legacies not only reinforce ethnic identities and facilitate coordination, but also inculcate a territorial identity that is distinct from that of the core (Siroky and Cuffe 2015). Prior independence or autonomy give de facto states ready-made institutions and networks of cooperation that increase separatists' willingness, cohesion, and capacity to act against the government (Brancati 2006, 651; Lynch 2004, 24). Second, past institutions can serve as focal points or ready-made solutions for future cooperation between the rebels and the government. As the post-Soviet experience indicates, de facto states typically emerge out of lower level jurisdictions, which may limit their capacity to organize a self-determination challenge. Roeder (2007, 10) holds that successful separations tend to be associated with higher-order jurisdictions, such as union republics, rather than with lower-level jurisdictions, like autonomous republics or autonomous regions. This logic suggests that institutional legacy may leave some de facto states structurally disadvantaged in their attempts to mobilize against the parent state. Operating with an impaired ability to mount a sustained resistance in an environment so averse to unilateral separations, de facto state leaders may use the territory's institutional legacy as a building block for a future agreement with the government. A de facto state's prior status can thus serve as a focal point for rebel-government cooperation because it minimizes uncertainty and costs for both sides. As Carter and Goemans (2011, 284) note, previous administrative boundaries coordinate actor expectations about bargaining outcomes. A legacy of autonomy, for instance, mitigates coordination problems related to the range of possible institutional configurations that can be produced by negotiations.

Relatedly, the historical legacy of a de facto state as a former *Colony* can also impact its trajectory. A de facto state may inherit institutional vestiges dating from the colonial period which can serve as material and ideational bases for sustained mobilization. Colonial legacy is also a powerful tool for forging a separate identity for the de facto state population, acquiring legitimacy, and attracting military support from outside actors. A colonial past has potential to affect both the degree of state building in the de facto state and the extent of military support separatists get from third parties—two key factors that, in their turn, are expected to lower the likelihood of reintegration.

Additionally, I control for the presence of *Peacekeepers* on the territory of the de facto state²⁰ and for the number of countries that officially recognize a de facto state in any given year (*Recognition*). Prior scholarship suggests that, while peacekeepers may prevent conflict

²⁰Data for this variable are based on Fortna (2008).

recurrence, their presence can also reinforce the status quo (Fortna 2008). By determining which units are legitimized as states, recognition functions as a powerful selection mechanism that can influence a polity’s survival prospects. Fazal (2007, 83) finds that international recognition is strongly related to unit longevity: the more recognition a would-be state receives, the greater its chances of survival. Shelef and Zeira (2015, 3) argue that recognition increases the appetite for secession and decreases support for a negotiated compromise. There is large variability in recognition patterns for de facto states: some (like Somaliland) lack any kind of recognition or are only recognized by a patron state (like Northern Cyprus), while others receive recognition from many countries (for example, Western Sahara—recognized by 48 countries at the end of 2011). Nonrecognition reduces de facto states’ long-term viability as it prevents them from enjoying key benefits of statehood (Coggins 2011, 448). Membership in the club of recognized states confers not only legal privileges but also more tangible gains such as access to international trade, investment, loans, and arms purchases that enable countries to boost their military wherewithal (Fazal and Griffiths 2014). A country’s decision to recognize (or withdraw recognition from) a de facto state is rarely based on legal principles, but is primarily driven by strategic objectives.²¹ Regardless of countries’ reasons for supporting a de facto state’s independence, recognition is essential because it signals support for separatists’ aspirations at both the domestic and international level. Domestically, countries that recognize a de facto state often provide assistance that bolsters rebels’ military arsenal and governance activities. For example, after Algeria recognized the independence of Western Sahara on March 6, 1976, it immediately offered extensive military and political support that has allowed the de facto state to survive to this day. Internationally, even limited recognition confers legitimacy to separatists’ independence aspirations, and imparts a veneer of statehood (Ker-Lindsay 2012).

Estimation procedure

To assess the relationship between variables and de facto state outcomes, I estimate a series of competing risks hazard models. Competing risks refer to the probability of any type of de facto state disappearance relative to the probability of de facto state survival. Competing risks assess the relationship between covariates and the disappearance rate or the corresponding probability of any one of the possible types of de facto state outcomes allowing for

²¹The case of Northern Cyprus, for instance, reveals that recognition can be a tool for inflicting costs on a rival. Ankara’s support for Northern Cyprus cannot be disentangled from the Greek-Turkish rivalry. Coggins (2014) finds that countries are more likely to recognize separatist movements that weaken their rivals and less likely to do so with movements that weaken their friends.

competing risks from the other types of outcomes.²² These models estimate cause-specific hazards; hence, the effect of covariates may be different for each type of de facto state disappearance.

Competing risks models compute sub-hazards – cause-specific hazards for the outcome of interest as well as for the other possible, or “competing,” outcomes. The sub-hazard for outcome i at time t gives the instantaneous probability for a de facto state to experience outcome i given that it has survived up to time t and that all types of outcomes are possible. Sub-hazards have a similar interpretation to hazard ratios where values greater than 1 indicate a higher likelihood of an outcome and values lower than 1 a lower probability of an outcome. The conventional approach to analyze competing risks data is to run a Cox model for each event separately – in this case, for each type of de facto state disappearance – while the other “competing” types are censored.²³

Results and discussion

Table 2 presents the results of the competing risks models, one for each type of de facto state outcome.²⁴ Table 3 summarizes the substantive effect of key variables on outcomes.

²²These models assume that competing risks are independent. The independence assumption implies that, for example, a de facto state that disappeared by forceful reintegration was neither more nor less likely to experience other outcomes (peaceful reintegration or transition to statehood) had it not disappeared by forceful reintegration (i.e. at time of disappearance, the de facto state was at risk of experiencing all possible types of outcomes).

²³I estimate nonparametric Cox proportional hazards models which make no assumption about the baseline hazard. The Cox model formula is composed of two parts: a baseline hazard function and an exponential function. The former is a function of time but *not* of covariates, while the latter involves the covariates but does *not* involve time. Yet, predictors of de facto state disappearance (military support, state building, fragmentation, veto players) are time-varying. This requires adjustment for duration dependence where the time-varying covariates are interacted with a function of time. A Cox model with time-varying variables assumes that the effect of such variables on the survival probability at time t depends on the value of these variables at that specific time t .

²⁴The supplementary materials indicate that the findings are robust to a more expansive conceptual definition of the de facto state, alternative measurements for key variables, and the inclusion of additional controls.

TABLE 2: De facto state outcomes

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Forceful reinteg.	Peaceful reinteg.	Statehood
Prior status	1.234(1.103)	0.515(0.639)	
Colony	0.860(1.250)	0.243(0.316)	
Peacekeepers	3.072(4.477)	7.125(11.328)	7.430** (6.653)
Recognition	0.998** (0.001)		
Military support	0.995(0.003)	0.990* (0.005)	0.986*** (0.003)
State building	0.997(0.002)	0.997** (0.001)	1.015*** (0.005)
Fragmentation	1.003(0.002)	0.986** (0.006)	1.002*** (0.001)
Veto players	1.001(0.002)	1.005** (0.002)	0.993*** (0.002)
<i>Subjects</i>	34	34	34
<i>Failures</i>	6	6	4
<i>N</i>	780	780	780

Hazard ratios are reported with robust standard errors clustered by de facto state.
* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

TABLE 3: Percentage change (per year) in the hazard of each de facto state outcome

Recognition	Military support	State building	Fragmentation	Veto players	<i>De facto state outcome</i>
-0.2%	insig.	insig.	insig.	insig.	<i>Forceful reintegration</i>
n.e.	-1.0%	-0.3%	-1.4%	+0.5%	<i>Peaceful reintegration</i>
n.e.	-1.4%	+1.5%	+0.2%	-0.7%	<i>Statehood</i>

Results significant at the .10 level or above.
 insig. = effect is statistically insignificant
 n.e. = not estimated (outcome perfectly predicted or insufficient variation)

The results are supportive of some propositions and less so of others. Model 1 explores the forceful reintegration outcome. The covariates fail to achieve standard levels of statistical significance, with one exception: recognition. The hazard ratio is 0.998, showing that international recognition decreases the risk of forceful reintegration by roughly 0.2% per year. Recognition from UN-member countries may not single-handedly offer a de facto state the entry pass into the international community, but may provide a ticket for survival. To get a better sense of the effect of recognition on the likelihood of a de facto state’s forceful reintegration, Figure 1 plots (smoothed) hazard estimates for forceful reintegration at different values for the recognition covariate. As we can see from the graph, the likelihood of forceful reintegration seems to be lower for those de facto states that manage to secure recognition from a larger number of countries. This pattern is noteworthy because it provides cross-case validation of small-N works which regard recognition as a critical ingredient for the long-term viability of de facto states (Caspersen 2012; Kingston and Spears 2004; Lynch 2004).

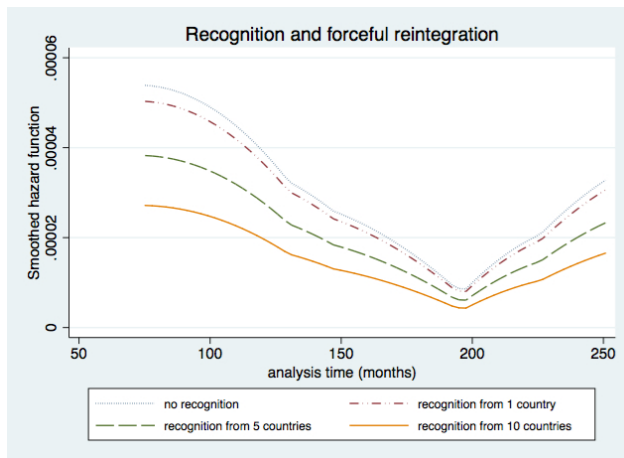


Figure 1: International recognition and forceful reintegration

The results under Model 2 focus on peaceful reintegration, and reveal multiple trends. The theory postulated that rebels have few rational incentives to sign onto an agreement with the government when they benefit from external military assistance (H_1). The findings corroborate this expectation: the hazard ratio for the *Military support* variable is 0.990, showing that each additional type of external support lowers the risk of peaceful reintegration by about 1% per year. This result lends credence to accounts which hold that separatists have few incentives to commit to an agreement with the parent state when they benefit from a constant flow of military assistance (Jenne 2007:12). Figure 2 offers a window into how important external support is for the prospect of peaceful reintegration. As depicted in the graph, each additional type of outside assistance substantially reduces the likelihood of peaceful reintegration such that the probability of a negotiated deal for those de facto

states that receive extensive military support (three or more types of support) is close to 0. The message here is straightforward: as long as separatist enclaves such as Transnistria or South Ossetia continue to be backed up by external patrons, the chances for a negotiated agreement remain slim, if not inexistent.

The results are also consistent with the expectation that rebel state building lowers the prospects for peaceful reintegration (H_2). For each type of governance activity rebels engage in, the probability of a negotiated solution decreases by 0.3% per year. Rebel governance is costly, and signals long-term commitment to separate rule. The institutionalization of alternate structures of governance seems to shape separatists' preferences away from autonomy arrangements. Figure 2 reveals that, the more sophisticated the governance apparatus established by separatists is, the lower the likelihood of an autonomy deal. Where rebels establish complex architectures of separate rule, the chances of peaceful reintegration are minimal. The third hypothesis (H_3) anticipated that fragmented de facto states are less likely to be peacefully reintegrated. The result for rebel movement fragmentation under Model 2 seems to support this conjecture. The hazard is 0.986 indicating that an additional faction in the rebel movement reduces the risk of a negotiated deal by 1.4% per year. This finding falls squarely in line with the literature that stresses the commitment problems posed by an internally divided insurgency. Rebel leaders presiding over a fragmented movement have greater difficulty committing to an agreement with the government in the presence of splinter groups that might renege on the deal and continue the self-determination struggle. As shown in Figure 2, extremely fractionalized de facto states are unlikely to reach autonomy deals with the government. Where separatist enclaves encompass 8 or more factions, the probability of a peaceful settlement is close to 0. Hence, it is unsurprising that many resilient de facto states, like Palestine or Republika Srpska, are among the most fragmented in the population.

As for the impact of government veto players, Model 2 suggests a relationship that runs contrary to the hypothesized one (H_4). The hazard is 1.005 indicating that an additional veto player increases the risk of peaceful reintegration by about 0.5% per year. Recent work by Cunningham (2014) and Sorens (2012) helps us elucidate this apparently counter-intuitive finding. Both authors posit that governments with a moderate number of veto players are better positioned to reach deals with self-determination groups because they are more credible bargaining partners. Some level of division within the parent state enhances its credibility as a bargaining partner because the executive cannot unilaterally renege on concessions made to the rebels (Cunningham 2014, 75; Sorens 2012, 123). More generally, Gehlbach and Malesky (2010) demonstrate that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, the presence of multiple veto players might actually encourage policy change. The rationale

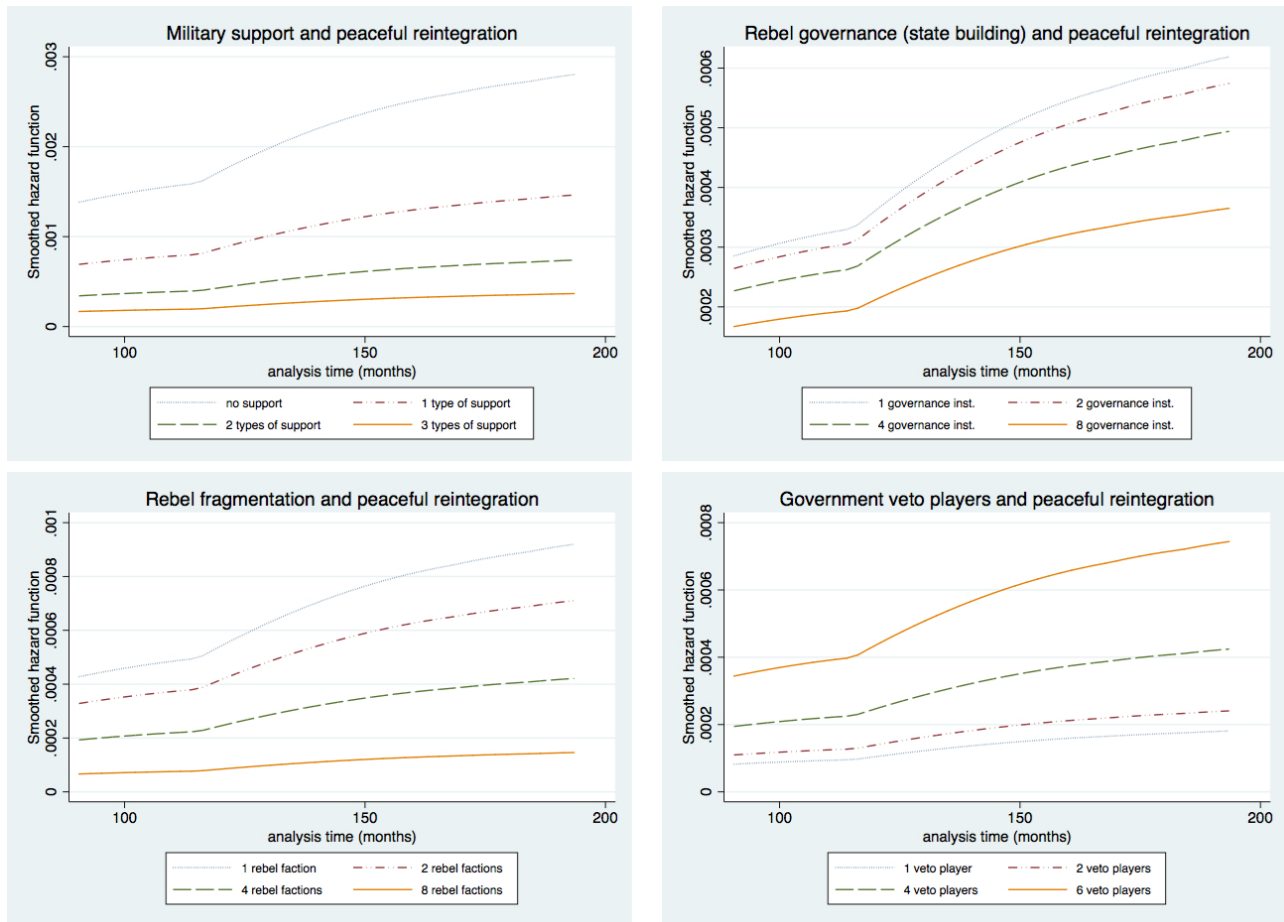


Figure 2: The effect of military support, rebel governance, rebel fragmentation, and government veto players on the likelihood of peaceful reintegration

behind this reasoning holds that a high number of veto players can weaken the power of those actors who prefer the status quo (Gehlbach and Malesky 2010, 957). The result for the effect of veto players on a de facto state’s peaceful reintegration prospects needs also to be understood in light of the proxy used to measure internal divisions within parent states, Polity IV’s “executive constraints” variable. This covariate can be interpreted to capture regime type (democracies typically exhibit a larger number of institutional veto points than autocracies, and are more effective at making credible commitments) or institutional variation across regime types (democracies, hybrid regimes, and autocracies display variability in the number of veto points). Since de facto states have endured in democracies (e.g., TRNC in Cyprus), semi-democracies (e.g., Chechnya in Russia during the 1990s), and dictatorships (e.g., Karen State in Burma/Myanmar), it appears that the veto player proxy reflects the degree of institutional variation across regime types, i.e. it captures constraints on executive decision-making across democracies and non-democracies alike. Hence, the veto player result

suggests that those parent state leaders who are more constrained in their decision-making process, regardless of regime type, are better situated to credibly commit to a peaceful agreement with separatists in a de facto state.²⁵

Model 3 presents the results for de facto states' transition to statehood. Overall, the findings are congruent with the theoretical expectations. The evidence suggests that those de facto states which benefit from external military support are less likely to join the community of internationally recognized states (H_1). The hazard for this variable is 0.986 indicating that each additional type of outside military assistance reduces the risk of transition to statehood by approximately 1.4% per year. In Figure 3, we notice that the probability of independence for a de facto state that receives substantial military assistance from third parties is 0. The chance of independence increases when a separatist enclave receives little or no military aid. External support may indeed be a blessing for a de facto state's survival, but the evidence presented herein suggests it is a curse for its independence aspirations. As the cases of Eritrea and South Sudan show, those de facto states that operate autonomously stand a better chance of being welcomed into the community of states than those which function under the protection of an external patron.

As expected, state building emerges as a strong predictor of a de facto state's transition to statehood (H_2). The hazard is 1.015 suggesting that an additional type of governance structure established by separatists increases the chance of independence by 1.5% per year. Figure 3 highlights the importance of rebel governance for de facto states' independence prospects. Those breakaway entities displaying 4 or less governance institutions have virtually no chance of joining the international community. The statehood prospects rise with the number of state building institutions erected by separatist rulers. The longer a de facto state manages to survive and the more statelike characteristics it acquires, the higher the likelihood of joining the international community. This is an important finding that adds to recent scholarship on governance by nonstate actors (Mampilly 2011). The result is noteworthy because it provides firsthand evidence of systematic effects of rebel governance on institutional outcomes in internal conflicts. The empirical pattern suggests that, in the long run, building statelike structures augurs well for separatists' independence aspirations. By replicating the state machinery, de facto state leaders accrue resources necessary to balance militarily against the government, generate civilian support, and gain legitimacy. In fact, by acting like a "real" country, de facto states may have some chance of eventually becoming one. Additionally, Model 3 provides support for the idea that the presence of international

²⁵The literature on the domestic institutions of non-democracies argues that authoritarian leaders are not credible bargaining partners unless they are constrained by internal veto players. See the discussion in Gandhi (2008, 186).

peacekeepers solidifies an enclave’s separation and might, eventually, pave the way for its independence.

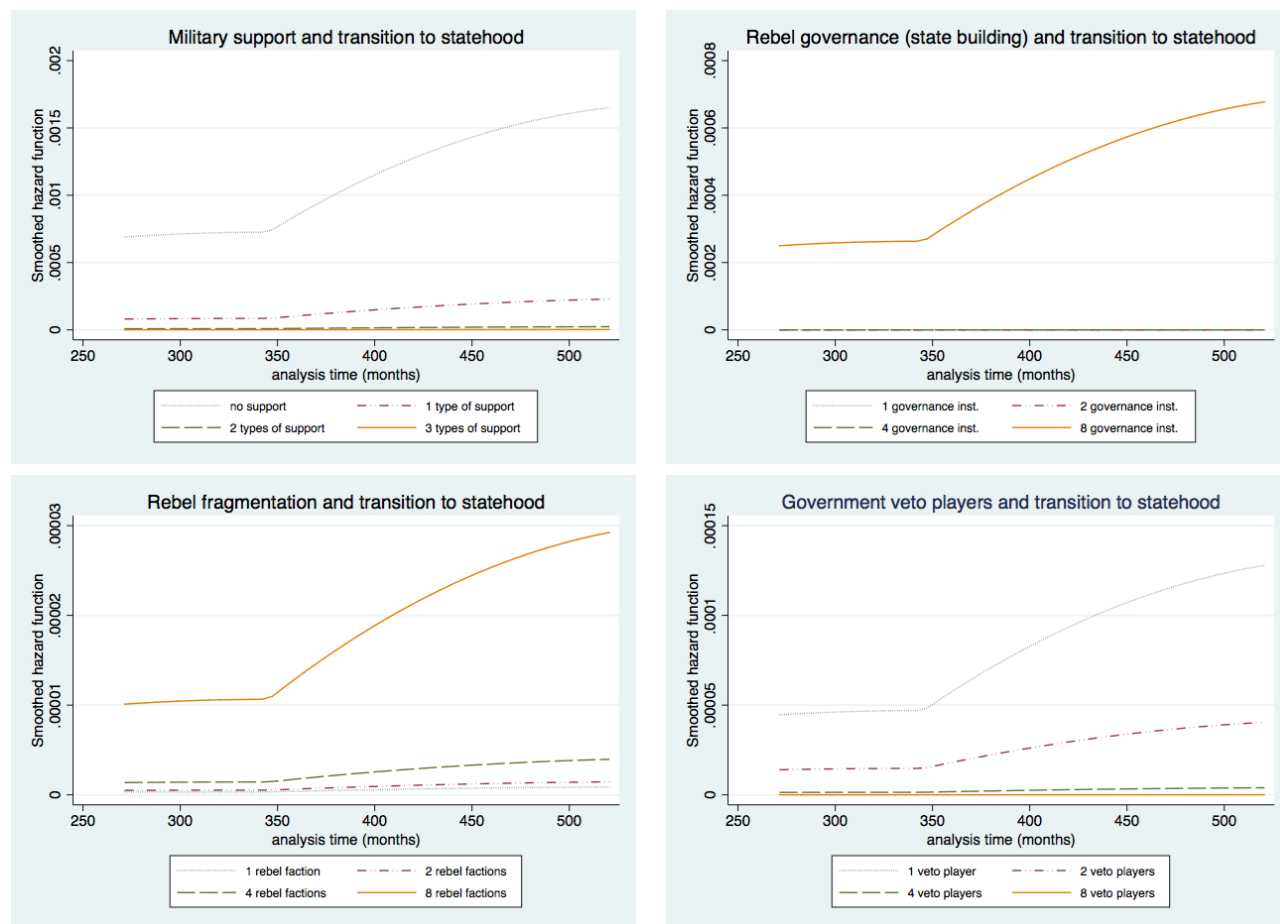


Figure 3: The effect of military support, rebel governance, rebel fragmentation, and government veto players on the likelihood of transition to statehood

When looking at the result for rebel fragmentation, it appears inconsistent with the theoretical expectation that fractionalized de facto states are less likely to make the transition to statehood (H_3). The hazard for this variable is 1.002, showing that an additional faction in the rebel movement increases the chance of independence by 0.2% per year. Figure 3 reveals that extremely divided de facto state exhibit a higher probability of making the transition to statehood. This finding warrants further investigation. Speculatively, one might conjecture that splintering could be an early indicator of political competitiveness and subsequent democratization in the post-independence environment (Huang 2012). Another plausible mechanism suggests that, while factions may complicate commitment in the short-term, they can also make long-term enforcement easier (Driscoll 2012). Finally, the results under Model 3 validate the claim that government veto players can prevent a de facto

state's independence (H_4). The hazard for this covariate stands at 0.993 indicating that an additional veto player reduces the chance of transition to statehood by approximately 0.7% per year. When institutional divisions are pervasive and multiple players have veto power, governments cannot commit to recognize the independence of a separatist enclave.²⁶

Conclusion

The nation-state remains the dominant unit in the contemporary system, but other political communities and actors also wield authority. The post-1945 environment produced a type of nonstate actor that operates quasi-independently and appropriates aspects of sovereign statehood—the de facto state. While norms against conquest make state death an unlikely scenario, de facto states are more ephemeral: some, like Northern Cyprus (1974–), survive, while others, like Katanga (1960–1963), disappear. Relying on original data, I found that four key factors that affect parent states' and separatists' ability or willingness to commit to an agreement—external military support for the enclave, insurgent governance, rebel fragmentation, government veto players—drive de facto state survival and disappearance.

A few results stand out. Military external support reduces separatists' incentives to negotiate, while fragmentation within the de facto state hampers insurgents' ability to commit to a deal with the government. Additionally, rebel governance and independence are intimately interwoven: those de facto states that build statelike structures prove more likely to make the transition to statehood. Taken together, the findings illustrate that bargaining between separatists and the government can yield a wide range of institutional outcomes, some of which endure longer than others.

A major lesson behind this study on de facto states is that internal conflicts—such as the ones surrounding quasi-independent enclaves—do not simply shatter existing orders; they also produce alternative orders where nonstate actors carve out areas of exclusive authority, regulate local interactions, and institutionalize their rule. In the case of de facto states, rebels do not simply talk as if they were leading a separate entity—they enact it through symbolism, coercion, and governance. While the evidence marshaled herein indicates that rebel governance can shape the outcomes of separatist disputes, future inquiries should focus more on the variation in rebel governance itself. Why is it that certain rebels are better state builders than others? Some suggest that the goal of the rebellion, separatist or center-seeking, plays a central role in the provision of governance by rebel organizations (Mampilly

²⁶Since the veto player covariate is also an indirect measure of democracy, the result could be an artifact of political dynamics in democratic regimes. Democracies tend to be more accommodative of separatist claims, which lowers the risk of independence.

2011). A dominant argument in previous works is that separatist rebels are more likely to build statelike institutions than rebels who aim to overthrow the government. The data on de facto states reveals great variation in governance activities among separatist groups. Why is it, then, that some separatist movements acquire more accoutrements of statehood than others?

This article also carries with it broader implications for the way in which we think about authority in international politics. De facto states endure in a twilight zone as pariah entities. They raise critical questions about the viability of alternate units in a system dominated by sovereign countries. Their limbo-like status—neither independence nor assimilation—seems to be more durable than we might think. This study revealed that de facto states' survival is mainly linked to external patronage, insurgent fragmentation, rebel governance, and government veto players. However, larger systemic forces may also explain the resilience of these polities. De facto separation represents an avenue for fragmentation of authority and territorial change in a world of arbitrary national boundaries that straddle multiple ethno-linguistic groups. Though some borders are artificial—as well as socially and economically inefficient—they remain juridically sacrosanct. By carving out areas of exclusive authority that overlap with minority ethnic or civic groups, de facto states make frontiers more meaningful in the contemporary age of de jure border fixity (Atzili 2012; Jackson 1990). From this perspective, de facto separation performs a twin function: it is both system-preserving in the sense that no new juridical states are formed, and system-destabilizing in the sense that nonstate territorial authority becomes institutionalized as an alternate way of structuring political and social order. De facto states seem to have permanently entered the realm of international politics. It is about time they entered mainstream international relations research as well.

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