

**Weapon of the Weak?  
Rebel Groups' International Law Talk, 1974-2011**

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[Note to the Ostrom Workshop Participants: This is the first time I am presenting this paper to an interdisciplinary audience. I cannot wait to hear from you how the paper is read from the scholars of other disciplines. I am open to any suggestions, but particularly keen on hearing about the logic and plausibility of the theoretical story and about the ways to communicate the results better.]

## **Abstract**

Why would rebel groups express their commitment to international law? Rebel groups rarely participate in codifying or ratifying international law as states do, and may also lose military capability by committing. It is puzzling then that approximately 15 percent of contemporary rebel groups have made expressive commitments to international humanitarian law. Rebel groups increasingly engage in “international law talk,” using unilateral declarations, bilateral agreements with international community, peace agreements with national governments, or internal codes of conduct. By developing an audience-based theory of rebel commitment to international law, we argue that rebel groups use the soft law documents as signals to convey their political status, strength and credibility. Rebel groups commit to international law because they are in political competition with governments and have to differentiate themselves facing a diverse set of audiences ranging from government forces, domestic populace, and external funders. Due to this competition and differentiation incentives, we hypothesize that militarily strong rebel groups commit to international law. We also hypothesize that rebels approaching peace negotiations are more likely to commit, in their differentiation effort. We test our hypotheses by conducting text and regression analysis of the archive of 500 humanitarian commitments made by 55 rebel groups in civil conflicts (out of 372 groups) between 1974 and 2011. Our analysis suggests that rebel commitment to international law has political value and helps rebels improve their lot, which has important implications for peacemaking and humanitarian action in civil conflicts.

Key words: rebel groups, civil wars, international law, commitment

Word count: 11,702

Rebel groups are the main protagonists of civil conflicts. Any policy intervention in civil conflicts will require understanding how rebels perceive their political and military environment as well as their relations to international community. We discovered that from 1974 to 2011, 55 out of 372 rebel groups have expressed their commitment to international law. This is approximately 15 percent of contemporary rebel groups in civil conflicts around the globe. The rebel commitments are with respect to the wartime conduct related to the use of weapons, or human rights, or treatment of victims of conflicts. Legal scholars call these rebel documents “soft” law – expressive commitments to international law, short of “hard” commitments as in some international treaties.<sup>1</sup>

The following are some examples of the expressions on international humanitarian law or human rights that have appeared in rebel documents. In 1997, at the height of its resistance against the South African government, the African National Congress wrote: “The President of the African National Council (ANC) informed the ICRC that his movement would observe the Geneva Conventions and Protocols.”<sup>2</sup> In 1998, Taliban issued a statement about anti-personnel mines: “The IEA [Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, i.e. Taliban] ... strongly condemns the production, trade, stockpiling and use of landmines, and considers it an un-Islamic and anti-human act.”<sup>3</sup> In 2002, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) condemned the government of the Philippines by mentioning “... the Fourth Geneva Conventions were adopted by the community of nations on August 12, 1949, and Islam had already prescribed that non-combatants such as children, women, old people, monks or priests and the like are not the objects of war.”<sup>4</sup> In 2010, the Justice and Equality of Movement (JEM) of Darfur, Sudan called for “immediate and periodic reviews of JEM directives relating to observation of human rights and rights of children and their harmonization with relevant international conventions and ethos” during the establishment of a JEM committee for human rights.<sup>5</sup>

Why would some rebel groups express commitment to international law while others do not? At first hand, it is not clear why rebel groups self-commit to international law and engage in “international law talk” at all. Rebel groups rarely participated in international law-making, so they do have rule-ownership to international law. Moreover, they are usually outlaw political actors, resisting conventional political establishment. Also, committing to international law might mean compromising their military strategies. By committing, they might have to limit the use of landmines, they might not be able to employ children in their ranks, or they have to exercise restraints in violence against civilians. Then, why do rebel groups talk international law and express some level of commitment to it?

In this paper, we tackle the puzzle of rebel commitment to international law, and argue that strong and mature rebels are more likely to commit. Most rebel groups are weaker than governments, so these international law commitments are political strategies of the weak, but among the rebel groups, strong ones get to express themselves, given the political opportunity

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<sup>1</sup> See Roberts and Sivakumaran 2012 for calling these documents as “soft” international law. For the distinction between soft and hard law, see Abbot and Snidal 2000. One contrasting example of hard law, with legal precision, detailed obligation, and much delegation to international organizations, is the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT).

<sup>2</sup> “Declarations of Adherence to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocols I and II of 1977” (African National Congress, 1997)

<sup>3</sup> “Statement of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on the Problem of Landmines” (Taliban, 1998)

<sup>4</sup> “Resolution condemning Kidnapping” (MILF, 2002)

<sup>5</sup> “Establishment of a JEM Committee for Human Rights” (JEM, 2010)

structure of having more resources at hand and more interactions with external actors. Focusing on the analysis of multiple political audiences of rebel groups in civil conflicts, we demonstrate that rebel commitments to international law are part of rebel efforts to improve their political lot. Some rebel groups use international law expressions as diplomatic tools to distinguish themselves and deliver their message. These soft law commitments are part of rebel strategies that signify the instrumental use of international law: the commitment guarantees high level of autonomy on the rebel side while conferring some diplomatic benefits. Militarily strong rebels are exactly in this position to recognize the benefits of these international law documents while mustering resources and political relationships with external actors to produce these documents. Here, the key theoretical mechanisms we hone in are competition and differentiation. While competing for political and military power against government forces and sometimes against rival rebel forces, strong rebel groups use international law as a political strategy to express their authority and as a public relations exercise.

To test our theory and to analyze rebel groups' political roots of those commitment behaviors, we utilize the historical record in the Directory of Armed Non-State Actor Humanitarian Commitments (*TheirWords*) collected by the Geneva Call, a non-governmental humanitarian organization. We first conduct text analysis, which includes visualization using word cloud as well as topic models that find association among words used by rebel groups. Scholars have studied rebel groups using interviews,<sup>7</sup> observational data,<sup>8</sup> and via the analysis of social media.<sup>9</sup> To our knowledge, our work is the first to analyze rebel groups' commitment to international law employing the tools of text analysis.<sup>10</sup> We also present logistic regression analyses to test our theoretical expectations that strong and mature rebels are more likely to commit.

We present several findings consistent with our theory. Specifically, we find that militarily strong rebel groups are more likely to make international law commitments. Strong groups might want to communicate to the government that they are the viable contenders to the power and authority. In addition to rebel strength and other group characteristics, timing appears to be important. Rebels are more likely to commit near peace talks to demonstrate that they are viable and reasonable political actors in the eyes of international audiences.

Our work mainly addresses two literatures: civil war and commitment to international law. To the civil war literature, we show a partial picture of rebel diplomacy, using international law as a political tool. Rebel groups use international law commitment to address multiple audiences, including the international community, domestic populace, government forces, and internal rank-and-file soldiers. While strong rebels can commit, weak rebels cannot.

To the literature on international agreements, we contribute by providing a logic of commitment by rebel groups- an important class of non-state actor in world politics. Many studies examine why states commit to international treaties,<sup>11</sup> less deal with why non-state actors commit themselves to soft law documents. Our work suggests that the similar reputational concerns run deep in the rebel group's calculation, but our new insight is to show how the rebel groups politically manage the relationships with multiple audiences – national governments,

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<sup>7</sup> Christia 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Non-State Actor dataset by Cunningham et al. 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Jones and Mattiacci 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Ligon et al. 2014 conducted content analysis of available ISIS documents, but it is not cross-rebel analysis.

<sup>11</sup> Simmons 2000; Simmons 2010.

international community, domestic populace, and their own soldiers. This is a new theoretical angle to the commitment theory.

What is crucially different between state and non-state actors' commitment to international law is the effect of formal institutions on the pattern of commitment. With formal mechanisms such as international negotiation, signature, and ratification processes, states' commitment generates relatively credible commitment signals to other international audiences. In contrast, such formal credibility is weak for rebel groups. What is important in explaining non-state actor commitment like rebel groups is the expressive value of commitment that grow out of their capacity and willingness to be a viable player in political arena. In competition against government forces and rival rebel groups, rebel groups apply military and political strategies to achieve their political aims. International law commitment in this respect can be viewed as one of non-violent strategies in civil war.<sup>12</sup> More broadly, international law commitment can be regarded as one form of resistance to political domination by states.<sup>13</sup>

Our research question of rebel commitment to international law is ultimately related to a broader theory of political commitment – why political actors commit, as well as the core problem of authority in world politics. Our work has policy relevance as well. Analysis of rebel commitment to international law can inform policymakers that interact with rebel groups for humanitarian goals. Analyzing what the commitment looks like on the side of rebel groups will be relevant information before policymakers consider engaging rebel groups in conflict zones around the world.

## **Theory of rebel commitment**

In this section, we develop an audience-based theory of rebel commitment to international law. Our theory is grounded on the premise that rebel groups signal to multiple audiences, including government forces, internal rank-and-file soldiers, domestic populace, international supporters, and rival rebel groups. Rebel groups produce international law related documents to establish internal and external political and military orders. We construct our theory based on the preferences and interactions of political stakeholders relevant to rebel groups. We specifically consider rebel groups' political, economic and social preferences in issuing these soft law documents, rebels' interaction with key audiences, such as national governments, international community, internal rebel members, domestic populace, and rival rebel groups.

Our starting point is to recognize that rebel groups have goals to achieve their military and political objectives, and rebels use soft law documents as expressive signals in their armed struggle. Some documents, like internal code of conduct, might confer rebel groups some military advantage, by promoting order within their ranks. However, most commitments require some restraint on the part of rebel groups – taking care not to molest civilians, not to use anti-personnel mines, and to reduce the number of child soldiers. For rebels to voluntarily give up military capability, we expect that lost military resources are offset by the political gains of using soft law documents. Rebel groups fight militarily, but political support is also important to establish its status as a viable political entity. If rebel groups care only about military battles,

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<sup>12</sup> Cunningham et al. 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Scott 1985.

there would be no need to issue soft international law documents. The political gains of commitment are the core of our answer to the puzzle of international law commitment.

The key theoretical mechanism for rebels' international law commitment will be competition for political authority and the desire for differentiation. *Competition* refers to the military and political conflict rebel groups are in vis-à-vis government forces and rival rebel groups. *Differentiation* follows from competition, referring to the desire of a group to distinguish itself from its rivals in the competition for domestic and international attention and support. Below we will suggest that the combination of rebel political goals with competition and differentiation imperatives will shape rebel groups' commitment to international law.

Building on the assumptions about civil war environment and competition-differentiation mechanisms, we argue that rebel groups commit to international law to assert their status of being viable and authoritative to these multiple audiences. We will develop an argument that strong and mature rebels can use commitment to international law as a signal of their strength, by exploring the relationship between each audience and rebel groups. Our goal will be to derive hypotheses about the possible motivations of rebel commitments to international law.

### *Government forces*

Vis-à-vis their government opponents, rebel groups want to project themselves as a viable challenger to the regime and might want to create the microcosm of an alternative state apparatus. This process of establishing legitimacy as an alternative government includes creating bureaucratic structures and political structures, as well as engaging in governance. Extending their influence to international law and demonstrating that they can participate in international governance is one way rebels can signal their viability as a contender. In this political competition over authority against government forces, rebel strength becomes highly relevant to our understanding of rebel commitment to international law for two reasons.

First, militarily strong rebel groups usually have political resources to commit to international law. Commitment requires political knowledge and capital to interact with international actors. In competition for authority vis-à-vis government forces, rebel groups can play "sovereign" by talking international law. In contrast, even if weak rebel groups want to conduct international diplomacy, they lack the necessary resources. This resource differential influences the extent to which transnational actors can access rebel groups. Compared to weak and obscure groups, strong rebel groups have more opportunities to interact with international actors, as part of their salient role in conflict. In the case of bilateral agreements with international organizations, for example, strong rebel groups will have interlocutors to conclude and disseminate these documents. Strong rebels can then use commitment to reinforce their notoriety and legitimacy.

It is important to note that rebels' expressive commitment to international law is not entirely cheap and costless. Soft law commitments might not be financially costly or inherently binding as there is no central enforcer of these commitments. But devising soft law documents incurs some costs – administrative costs or resources, usually borne by political wing of rebel groups in coordination with the rebel military wing. Some rebel groups invest significant resources as they deposit the documents with the International Committee of the Red Cross<sup>15</sup> or

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<sup>15</sup> The African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa did this in 1980 with their document "Statement on Signing Declaration."

send emissaries to foreign states to negotiate the soft documents.<sup>16</sup> These diplomatic efforts require conscious political and financial effort by rebel leadership, and strong rebels have more resources to spend on these endeavors.

In addition to the *ex ante* cost of commitment, strong rebels are more likely to internalize the *ex post* cost of commitment, compared to weak rebel groups. We mentioned the administrative costs of making those commitments (*ex ante* cost), but the real cost for rebel groups in issuing these documents may be non-material: the cost of appearing weak (*ex post* cost). Instead of inspiring fear through unconstrained violence, committing rebel groups appear politically moderate, doing away some benefits of appearing militarily fierce and uncompromising. Militarily strong groups can afford this *ex post* cost, while weak rebels face acute problems of survival and might remain non-committal. Strong groups can trade off lost strength for political viability without imperiling their operational survival. Strong groups might also expect that they can break commitments if it suits them. Therefore, strong rebels will be willing to devote resources to make international commitments, sometimes at the risk of appearing weak.

In other words, strong groups make commitments, not only because they can and have some resources to spare, but also because they know they can renege on the promise easily. By contrast, weak rebel groups, without much resource to credibly commit to international law with its weak internal organization, might not be able to engage in commitment behavior even though they might be willing to do so.

Gathering these observations, our theory of rebel commitment leads us to the following hypothesis about rebel strength.

Hypothesis 1 (rebel strength): Militarily strong rebels are more likely to commit to international law than militarily weak rebel groups.

In competition for political authority, capability is not everything. International law diplomacy requires political will. Rebels' political will depends on their political aims. Rebel aims are diverse: from regime-change, autonomy-seeking, to secessionist aims. The imperative for expressing themselves using international law is especially strong for groups that aspire to be new political entity, such as secessionist groups or autonomy-seeking ones. Once rebels take over the regime as a whole, regime-changing rebels automatically assumes international character. This is not the case for rebel groups that seek their own statehood or their own controlled territory. The imperative to establish their political authority and legitimacy may be more immediate and strong for secessionist groups than regime-changing counterparts. Based on this reasoning we propose the following hypothesis on rebel aims and international law commitment.

Hypothesis 2 (rebel aims): Secessionist rebels are more likely to commit to international law than non-secessionist rebel groups.

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<sup>16</sup> The Heaven's Door Accord (Acuerdo de la Puerto del Cielo, in Spanish) signed by the National Liberation Army (ELN), a rebel group in Colombia, in 1998 is one example. ELN sent delegates to Germany to sign this document with the representatives of civil society under the auspices of the Catholic Church. See Jaramillo 2001.

### *Domestic populace*

In competing over authority against government forces, domestic support and social base is important to rebel groups, too, to sustain their rebellion and eventually win the civil conflict politically.<sup>17</sup> Rebel groups want to signal that they care about the circumstances of ordinary civilians, and the documents aim to enhance their image vis-à-vis civilians, their potential political and economic capital. Not all rebels have opportunities to govern a civilian population, however.

Rebel groups with territorial control have unique opportunities to establish their own rule and sometimes rebel governance over a given population. Territorial control is an opportunity to exercise their political authority dealing with domestic populace as well as international actors in their rebel-held territories. Furthermore, rebel strength and territorial control are correlated, but the two are not equivalent. Hypothesis 3 summarizes this expectation:

Hypothesis 3 (territorial control): Rebel groups with territorial control are more likely to commit to international law than those without territorial control.

### *Rival rebel groups*

Government forces are not the only competitor of rebel groups. Rival rebel groups are important competitors as well. In this context, rebels compete with other rebel groups for material and political support. . The benefit of talking international law may be larger given competition for resources or contested viability between opposition groups. Thus, rebels can use international law commitments to distinguish themselves from an otherwise crowded field of opposition to the state.

Vis-à-vis rival rebel groups or breakaway factions, rebel groups want to demonstrate that they merit engagement as a viable political authority that will establish political order during wartime. Most civil wars have 4-5 distinct rebel groups, making intra-rebel competition a key part of rebel's commitment to international law. Few rebel groups monopolize opposition to the state, and so must compete with other groups.

Commit to international law is therefore a signal rebel groups use to distinguish themselves to the international community. Therefore, we hypothesize that the larger number of opposition groups increases the probability of rebels' international law commitment. In a single rebel group environment, rebel groups will have less of an incentive to produce commitment soft documents, as they face less competition for political and material resources. Separating signals as a means of outbidding requires competition, and makes commitments to international law more valuable. This competition logic is summed up below.

Hypothesis 4 (rival rebels): Rebel groups in competitive environments with many other rebel groups in civil wars are more likely to commit to international law.

### *International audience*

Rebel groups compete for international attention against government and rival rebel groups, and want to signal their strength to potential supporters Rebel groups can garner

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<sup>17</sup> Sarbahi 2014; Parkinson 2013.



humanitarian aid or eventual recognition from international actors. To international observers, rebels will strive to present themselves “not as a rag-tag band of guerillas, but as a well-disciplined rebel army.”<sup>18</sup> As recent literature on rebel diplomacy shows,<sup>19</sup> many rebel groups rely on international support. International supporters include foreign sponsors, humanitarian organizations or diaspora population.

Rebel groups can reinforce existing international support or gain new supporters by using international law commitments to create favorable perceptions abroad. Some transnational actors such as humanitarian organizations emphasize human rights, and many of these actors can also serve as mediators or provide aid. Rebels that can promise restraint in warfighting increase their chances of being treated as a legitimate partner of international actors- enhancing their international and domestic legitimacy and their chances of a favorable conflict settlement.

Hypothesis 5 (non-military transnational support): Rebel groups that rely on international non-military transnational support are likely to commit to international law than those groups without such support.

#### *Internal rank-and-file soldiers*

Rebel group leaders also must establish internal control and regulate the actions of members of their organization. International law related documents are a means for leaders to establish internal control. Establishing codes of conduct can help motivate rebel soldiers and bring order to rebel ranks, providing a means for leadership to ensure their goals are being met. Not all rebel groups are able to discipline their soldiers and ensure that the actions of soldiers conform to leaders’ goals. Groups with strong command and control do have this control, and they can use international law to reinforce centralization of authority. Absent strong command and control, leaders cannot ensure their commitments will be implemented, and such weakness could preclude commitment entirely as a group bears the costs of commitment and renegeing. We therefore expect that rebel groups with strong central command and control structures are likely to use external commitments to reinforce an internal code of conduct.

Hypothesis 6 (central control strength): Rebel groups with strong command and control are more likely to commit to international law than those with weak command and control.

#### *Timing and group maturity*

Our theoretical mechanism of political competition also generates expectations about when a rebel group might make commitments as their organization matures. Entering peace talks, rebel groups might be more willing to project themselves as a viable political entity that could participate in mediation with international actors, and signaling moderation to governments. The key trade off rebels make here is “appearing weak” and “appearing viable” – near peace talks, “appearing viable” is more important than “appearing weak.” Appearing viable

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<sup>18</sup> Jaramillo 2001, 192.

<sup>19</sup> Recent research on rebel diplomacy is showing rebel groups have multiple audiences, signaling to governments (Gleditsch et al. 2016); to international audiences (Huang 2016; Jones and Mattiaci forthcoming); to domestic constituencies (Coggins 2015; Kaplan 2013).

to domestic and international audience makes rebels more likely to realize their goals through negotiation, as they can be treated as a legitimate partner, rather than mere bandits.

National governments usually discuss international law related issues near peace talks, what to do with political prisoners, whether to issue amnesty, or concessions to rebel groups. To national governments, signals of rebel groups' concessionary motivation are important, as it implies they won't have to bear all the costs of peace. It would be a meaningful signal to national governments if rebel groups make international commitments near peace talks, as they can serve as a conciliatory diplomatic signal.

Hypothesis 7 (timing): Rebel groups are more likely to make commitments to international law near peace talks than rebel groups in other phase of conflicts.

Incentives to talk international law will be larger for mature groups than nascent groups, as long-running groups have more opportunities and exposure to human rights matters. Repeated interactions with NGOs and other members of the international community increase opportunities for commitment.

Hypothesis 8 (group age): Older rebel groups are more likely to make commitments to international law than younger rebel groups.

In summary, we expect that strong and mature rebel groups with resources to gain knowledge and opportunities to interact with transnational actors are more likely to commit to international law. Strong rebel groups who expect to win in competition environment are more likely to "talk international law." In contrast, weak rebel groups do not commit because they do not have requisite resources or political relations to make such commitment incidences happen. In terms of timing, rebel groups are likely to commit to international law near peace talks and when they are mature. We test these three hypotheses in the subsequent section.

The relative importance of these multiple audiences will depend on rebel groups' political motivations, objectives and their resource base. To most groups, national governments will be the key audience,<sup>20</sup> but their weight of importance will vary. To some groups, rebel soldiers will be their utmost focus. To others, it will be domestic populace that they rely on for support and logistics. To the rest, it may be the combination of various audiences. For example, if a rebel group's focus is internal discipline to carry out effective fighting, strong command and control will be reinforced by internal codes of conduct. Also, if a rebel group heavily relies on transnational non-military funding for its survival and continuation, that external funder is going to be important. In this vein, we submit that there is not going to be a necessary and definitive hierarchy of these audiences of rebel groups, and turn our focus towards determining which motivations are most important using empirical analysis of rebel commitments.

### *Alternative explanations*

There are several alternative explanations to the question of rebel commitment to international law, aside from our audience-based story. We discuss those alternative explanations in this section. Some are complementary to our explanation, while others are competing or

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<sup>20</sup> As modeled in Gleditsch et al. 2017.

contrasting potential explanations. The below discussion will help us situate our theory in a broader context of theories of political commitments, or explanations as to why political actors commit.

One competing explanation of why rebels commit to international law might be that these are weak commitments without much enforcement mechanisms. The argument can go: “rebels commit because these commitments are weak and non-enforceable. Therefore, it is cheap for rebels to commit.” This argument certainly has a value in that it is well known that commitment problems are ubiquitous in civil war,<sup>21</sup> and it can be well argued that commitment to international law may be costless cheap talk. However, we do not think this is a complete explanation. By this logic, every rebel group should commit to a costless policy and we would expect every group, not some group, to produce these documents. But not every rebel group commits to international law and there is much heterogeneity in terms of patterns of commitment. Commitment is not costless, and only some groups have the capacity to bear the costs.

The second alternative explanation hinges on reciprocity – one of the central concepts in the workings of the laws of war.<sup>22</sup> The argument can go: “rebels commit to international law because it expects governments to do the same.” Recent research by Gleditsch et al. (2017) showed that the interdependencies with government forces explain the rebel groups’ signaling of international law. Our competition logic is a complementary explanation to reciprocity logic in that both explanations emphasize the relations with government forces and that we are also mindful of strategic context of civil wars. A key difference exists when we broadly consider multiple audiences in rebels’ signaling environments and political interactions, with domestic populace, international organizations, and other rival rebel groups – to arrive at our main argument about strong and mature rebels.<sup>23</sup>

The third potentially complementing explanation is socialization story. Theories of commitment has long recognized the importance of external socialization.<sup>24</sup> Our audience-based theory considered socialization with transnational actors. Strong rebels usually have more opportunities to interact with external actors, compared to weaker ones. The socialization story therefore is consistent with our expectation that the interaction with transnational non-state actors features large in understanding rebel commitment to international law.

All the aforementioned theories of political commitments give analytical leverage to our explanation for rebel commitment to international law. What is important to us is the recognition of the civil war context and rebel strategies that give rise to the political impetus to commit on the part of militarily strong rebels, and relative impotence of weak groups to express their willingness to conduct rebel diplomacy. Our theory hinging on the (in)ability to commit has empirical and policy implication for why and when to engage different types of rebel groups in civil wars around the globe.

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<sup>21</sup> Fearon 1995.

<sup>22</sup> Morrow 2007.

<sup>23</sup> It is also notable that Gleditsch et al. 2017 also finds that strong rebels commit to the Deeds of Commitment, one form of commitments.

<sup>24</sup> Simmons 2009 (book) finds that external socialization is a strong explanation for states’ commitment to international law, in the context of human rights treaties.

## Empirical analysis of rebel commitment to international law

What do rebel groups say and why do they do it? We uncover data patterns of rebel commitment using text analysis and then test our rebel commitment hypotheses with regression analysis. In the text analysis, we use text data, the collection of documents related to rebel groups' commitment to international law. In the regression analysis, we use numeric data, the collection of variables related to rebel groups' international law commitment as well as rebel group characteristics.

### *Text analysis*

Text analysis is the process of converting text data into inferences behind the data generating process of the text. Here, our goal is to understand the contents of rebel group commitment based on the lexical analysis examining word frequency distributions, pattern recognition, association analysis, and visualization. We employ text analysis not as the hypothesis testing tool but to demonstrate the data patterns in relation to our theory of rebel commitment.

The corpus we use is from the *TheirWords* database; the Directory of Armed Non-State Actor Humanitarian Commitments. The archive was made by the Geneva Call, a non-governmental organization specializing in humanitarian affairs. The directory covers 1928 up to 2014. The database was constructed based on primary and secondary sources in a comprehensive fashion. The primary sources include the archive of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Deeds of Commitments the Geneva Call themselves concluded, as well as peace agreements that contain humanitarian clauses. The secondary sources include scholarly articles as well as historical sources, etc.<sup>25</sup> Based on the collection methods, we cannot say the directory is exhaustive but fairly representative.<sup>26</sup> The thematic areas covered in the database include international humanitarian issues, such as “children in armed conflicts”, “landmines” and “sexual violence.” Human rights issues are also in the thematic category (e.g. torture).

We first construct the word cloud to see the text data visually. To begin, we collected each rebel commitment document from *TheirWords* directory. Text analysis requires plain text documents for the most valid inferences, so we hand-coded each (usually .pdf) document to plain text. We used Python to assist in basic file architecture, arranging documents by continent, year, and collapsing them all together. The corpus of text data features about 500 documents produced by about 60 rebel groups.<sup>27</sup> The list of groups and their primary locations provides some

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<sup>25</sup> Personal correspondence with Pascal Bongard, the director of the *TheirWords* program, May 2015.

<sup>26</sup> In particular, we think that any missing commitments are random with respect to rebel groups. The Geneva Call operates in about 35 countries – almost all the civil wars in the world, and the organization attempts to contact all the non-state actors operating in those countries. The thematic area of anti-personnel mines might be over-represented because of the organization had a specialty in the anti-personnel mines issue.

<sup>27</sup> These are Taliban (Afghanistan), Palipehutu-FNL (Burundi), MDJT (Chad), Ninjas (Congo), ONLF (Ethiopia), MPCJ (Cote d'Ivoire), MPIGO (Cote d'Ivoire), MJP (Cote d'Ivoire), FARC (Colombia), ELN (Colombia), MLC (DRC), RCD (DRC), RCD-ML (DRC), FMLN (El Salvador), URNG (Guatemala), EZLN (Mexico), LTTE (Sri Lanka), PLA (India), PKK/Kadec (Turkey), GAM (Indonesia), CPN-M (Nepal), NPFL, Renamo (Mozambique), MRTA (Peru), ASG (Philippines), MILF (Philippines), FPR (Rwanda), RUF (Sierra Leone), LRA (Uganda), SRRC (Somalia), UTO (Tajikistan), SLM/A (Sudan),

preliminary support for our hypotheses 1-2. Many of the groups are relatively militarily strong and they are usually clustered in the multiple-rebel group environment in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Philippines, and Sudan.

Each world cloud is a visual representation of the abbreviated forms of the words in each document. In generating the data, we follow standard text analysis procedures: the punctuation from each document is removed, the so-called “stop words” (conjunctions, impersonal pronouns, articles, et cetera) are removed, and we “stem” the words to their most base form.<sup>28</sup> Specifically, we collapse all rebel commitment documents, contained within each year, into a single Corpus, using the R package tm.<sup>29</sup> The data are further transformed into a Document-Term-Matrix, the basic structure of text as data. We then use the R package Wordcloud to generate a word cloud of the frequency of the word stems within each year. For a word to appear in the word cloud, it must be within the most 10% of words used (by frequency), and no more than 20% of the word stems in any year are allowed to be plotted (allowing for ties between frequencies).

The term frequencies are also generated from the Document-Term-Matrix. Here, we collapse certain stem words into dimensions relevant to our research. The civilian dimension, for instance, includes stems citizen, civilia, and civilian. The population dimension includes popul. The children dimension is both child and children. The humanitarian dimension is human, humanit, humanitair, and humanitarian. The victim dimension is simply victim. The people dimension is peop and people. The woman dimension is woman and women. The rights dimension is right. The public dimension is public. The force dimension is forc. The arms dimension is arm and armi. The military dimension is milit, milita, militar, and militari.

We present the word cloud of the *TheirWords* corpus in Figure 1. This is for all years, 1928-2014 in *TheirWords* database and we treat the data as the bag of words. “Forc” “nation” and “govern” are most frequent stem-words, the basic word form that produces various related words. So, “govern” could form various words like “governance”, “government”, or just the verb “govern.” In addition to these words as the by-products of civil war situations, we also see the words related to international humanitarian law, such as “humanitarian” “respect” “children” and “women” in rebel groups’ vocabulary. From the word cloud, we see that rebellions are about political demands to challenge existing political order and authority, but we also see that rebellions are also about international norms.

[Figure 1 about here]

We also use topic models to examine the contents of rebel groups’ expression of international law. Topic models are non-parametric computing methods to uncover the cluster of topics in the big data texts.<sup>30</sup> In the most basic topic model, the documents themselves have a most probable “topic” associated with them – a latent topic not directly observed by the analyst. The words within the documents and their associations across documents are empirical signals of the latent topics contained within the corpus of text data. For us, a topic model is useful because it uncovers the “topic” that generates each of the rebel commitments to international law.

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JEM (Sudan), SPLM (Sudan), SLM/A-Unity (Sudan), Croatian irregulars (Yugoslavia), and UCK (Yugoslavia).

<sup>28</sup> Grimmer 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Feinerer, Hornik, and Meyer 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Blei 2012.

Further, because words are empirical signals of topics, the model helps us identify which words are the most commonly associated with the individual “topics” across the documents. Accordingly, we fit a five-topic model (suggested by model fit) to the corpus of rebel commitments. We report the topics, their most common words, and the number of documents with each individual topic as its most probable subject in Table 1. As a note, the “number” assigned to each topic [Topic 1, Topic 2, etc.] is unrelated to its importance in the corpus.

[Table 1 about here]

Several clear themes emerge from Topic 1 and Topic 5, in particular. The theme of Topic 1 is, we call, “political demands related,” and the theme of Topic 5 is, we call, “international humanitarian law (IHL)-related” or “rights-related.” IHL and human rights are different research fields but they are increasingly blended together in the context of civil conflicts.<sup>31</sup> We also term Topic 2 as war-related words and Topic 3 as peace-related words. Topic 4 is the rest of the words, mostly articles. Two topics – IHL-related words as well as political demands – are dominant topics that emerge from the data. We also see the largest number of documents, 114 of them, mention IHL-related words. The topic model does a good job uncovering the data pattern, as the top topics emerge again when we ask topic model to uncover three themes or ten themes. The model brings us the IHL-related topic regardless of the number of topics considered by the topic model.

We also examine the trend over time in Figure 2. We isolate IHL-related words (Topic 5) and political demands (Topic 1) and overlay the frequency of words’ appearance. The two topics are chosen because they are the most illustrative of rebel groups’ attempt at signaling commitment to the objectives outlined in Hypotheses 1-3. We see IHL-related words (e.g. “right” “children” “people” “human”) are increasing, while rebels’ political demands related words (e.g. “nation” “govern”) are decreasing. This trend gives some confirmation about rebel groups’ knowledge about international law commitment and that rebel international-law-talk is increasingly in their minds.

[Figure 2 about here]

In addition, we plot the topics for some rebel groups. Figure 3 features an example of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), frequently called as “Tamil Tigers.” We want to highlight that proportion of commitments near peace talks – 1995 and 2006 – was dominated by IHL-related topics.<sup>32</sup> This pattern provides some support for Hypothesis 7 that links rebel IHL commitment and peace talks.

[Figure 3 about here]

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone is another example that is consistent with our theoretical story. RUF issued nine commitment documents but such international law commitment behavior is intriguing because the group is known to be brutal with many instances of maiming and killing.<sup>33</sup> The nine documents are: 1) “Eight Codes of

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<sup>31</sup> Alston and Goodman 2012.

<sup>32</sup> See Weiss 2012 for the history of Sri Lankan civil war.

<sup>33</sup> See Scheffer 2013 for the description of RUF’s behavior during the Sierra Leone civil war.

Conduct” 2) “Lomé Peace Accord” 3) “ Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone” 4) “Agreement on Ceasefire” 5) “Ceasefire Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and RUF” 6) “Statement by the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone on the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance in Sierra Leone” 7) “Statement by the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone on the Release of Prisoners of War and Non-Combatants” 8) “Lasting Peace in Sierra Leone: The Revolutionary United Front Sierra Leone (RUF/SL) perspective and Vision” and 9) “ Footpath to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone.” As the titles of documents suggest, those commitments are made near peace time, which is consistent with our theoretical story as outlined in Hypothesis 7.

### *Regression analysis*

In addition to the analysis of text data, we engage in additional analysis of rebel commitment to test our eight hypotheses. To do this, we constructed a separate dataset of rebel commitment data. Building on non-state actor (NSA) dataset<sup>34</sup>, we merged information on rebel commitment from the Geneva Call’s *TheirWords* database<sup>35</sup> and added other control variables that are not included in the NSA dataset. The time frame is 1974-2011, with 372 active rebel groups.<sup>36</sup> The unit of observation is rebel group-year. Some rebel groups exist only for a year; others more than 10 years.

The dependent variable is *Rebel Commitment*, a binary indicator that is coded as 1 if a rebel group made any commitment in a given year and 0 otherwise. Commitment text data extracted from the Geneva Call’s database presents whether or not a rebel group announced commitments in a given year for each of the nine categories of international law issues: anti-personnel mines, child protection, civilian protection, peace agreement, action plan, human rights & other humanitarian commitments, unilateral declaration and statements, agreements, and internal rules and regulations. If a rebel group was committed to any of the nine categories in a given year, then *Rebel Commitment* counts a rebel group-year observation as “commitment” and “no commitment” otherwise. According to our data, 55 groups out of 372 have committed in one form or the other. 71 documents are unaccounted for as the definition of rebel groups in the NSA data is restricted to those groups that have generated at least 25 battle deaths. These are weak and obscure groups that do not enter conventional rebel group datasets.<sup>37</sup>

Since we hypothesized that the likelihood of rebel group commitment is associated with group characteristics, our empirical models include a number of proxies for rebel group characteristics as predictors of rebel commitment. The first predictor is *Rebel Strength*, a five-

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<sup>34</sup> Cunningham et al. 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Directory of Armed Non-State Actor Humanitarian Commitments. Available at <http://theirwords.org/>

<sup>36</sup> Our time frame starts in 1975 due to our reliance on Harbom et al. 2006 peace agreement data. Although NSA dataset covers 1945 to 2011, our temporal scope is restricted because of the availability of one of our variables.

<sup>37</sup> For example, some opposition groups in Myanmar, Chin National Front or Karenni national Progressive Party, do not appear in the dataset from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) or NSA dataset.

scale ordinal measure of rebel group's military strength relative to government forces.<sup>38</sup> The categories are 1) much weaker, 2) weaker, 3) parity, 4) stronger, and 5) much stronger. Most rebel groups are much weaker or weaker than the government forces, but about 13% of rebels are parity or stronger.

*Secessionist* is a dichotomous variable that is coded as 1 if a rebel group pursued secession or autonomy in a given civil conflict and 0 otherwise. 91 groups out of 372 were counted as secessionist or autonomy-seeking groups. *Territorial Control* is a binary indicator of whether a rebel group has its own territory over which it exercises effective control. Approximately one third of rebel groups appear to have their own territories. *Number of Rivals* is the number of rival rebel groups in a country at a particular year. The number ranges from 0 to 20. Rebel groups sometimes face only the government, but long running civil wars (in DRC for example) involve many rebel groups due to splits or durable rebel groups.

*Non-military support by NSA* is a dichotomous indicator for whether a rebel group received non-military support from transnational non-state actors (NSA), such as international organizations, militant outfits, religious/ideological groups, racial and ethnic/diaspora movements. *Central Control Strength* represents the extent to which a rebel group exercises central command over its constituents. This is four-point scale ordinal measure that labels each rebel group as 1) no central command, 2) low central command, 3) moderate central command, and 4) high central command. *Age of Rebel Group* counts the number of years for which a rebel group has kept the civil conflict with the government.<sup>39</sup> *Near Peace Talks* is a binary proxy for whether peace agreement between a rebel group and the government was signed within two years. Using the data on peace agreement provided by Harbom et al. (2006), we coded the variable as 1 for the previous year as well as the given year in which a rebel group signed any peace agreement, because we assume that it generally takes 1 or 2 years for warring parties to start negotiations and finally sign a peace agreement. Except for *Near Peace Talks*, all of the predictors are from the NSA dataset.

The empirical models also included multiple control variables that could impact the likelihood of rebel commitment to international law. First, we accounted for whether transnational non-state actors provided a rebel group with any military aid, apart from non-military support, using a dichotomous variable (*Military support by NSA*). In addition, a rebel group's military camp located outside of the host country might be related to transnational support and rebel commitment. To control for this possibility, the models included a nominal variable, *Extraterritorial Bases*. The nominal indicator represents the existence of extraterritorial bases where a rebel group stays in foreign countries and is composed of three categories: 1) no base, 2) some bases, and 3) extensive bases. In the analyses, "no base" category was used as a reference category.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, we also accounted for the possibility that support from foreign state sponsors might be correlated to any support by transnational non-state actors and a rebel group's motivation to express commitments to international law. Two dummy variables, *Non-military support by foreign government* and *Military support by foreign government*, were

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<sup>38</sup> Using multiple component measures of rebels' military capability such as mobilization capacity, ability to procure arms, and fighting capability, Cunningham et al. 2013 made the composite ordinal measure that captures a rebel group's relative military strength with respect to government forces.

<sup>39</sup> Precisely, this variable captures the number of years for which a rebel group has appeared in the NSA dataset.

<sup>40</sup> The results, including the coefficients on other variables, did not greatly change when this variable was counted as a 3-point scale ordinal measure in the models.



included in the models, in which cases the base category was “no support by foreign government.”

Lastly, domestic political environment may involve the link between a rebel group’s characteristics and its commitment to international law. For example, an authoritarian government could block the access of international actors to a rebel group by constraining its political activities, which may in turn affect the likelihood of its making a commitment to IL. To account for this possibility, we added two dichotomous variables for a rebel group’s political party. *Unauthorized wings* identifies rebel groups that form its own political party but that party is not recognized by the government, whereas *Legal wings* indicate a rebel group with a legal political party. In the analyses, the base category is a rebel group without a political party. In addition to a rebel group’s political party, we controlled for the regime types of host countries. Using the data on regime types provided by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014), we constructed a binary indicator for democracy.<sup>41</sup>

Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, we estimated the likelihood of rebel commitment to international law using logistic regression models with two different approaches, pooling and random effects analyses. Pooled logit models estimate a common intercept across rebel groups. Random effects (i.e. partial pooling or varying intercept) logit models allow us to account for unobserved heterogeneity among rebel groups without imposing a group-specific intercept term.<sup>42</sup> For the pooled logit models, standard errors are clustered by rebel groups. The results of logistic regression models are presented in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

All four models test the logic and assumptions in our audience-based story of rebel commitment to international law. Models 1 and 2 are pooled logit, and Models 3 and 4 are random effects logit. Models 1 and 3 include only key explanatory variables, whereas Models 2 and 4 present full specification with control variables.

The results of logit regression analyses lend strong support for the Hypothesis 1 (rebel strength). The coefficients on *Rebel Strength* are positive and statistically significant at least at the 90% level. Besides, as presented in Figure 4, the predicted probability of a rebel group’s commitment to international law increases as its military strength gets stronger, holding

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<sup>41</sup> The GWF autocratic regime dataset defines a democracy as “a regime in which the executive achieved power through a direct competitive election”.

<sup>42</sup> To account for unobserved heterogeneity among rebel groups, we might consider to use a fixed effects model. Given that most key predictors of our models are time-invariant proxies, however, using a fixed effects model is not appropriate. More importantly, as Beck and Katz 2001 pointed out, employing fixed effects for binary time-series cross-section data where outcome variable has many zeros (i.e. “no rebel commitment” in this paper) may bring severely biased estimates for parameters. This is because the fixed-effects model assumes that “no commitment” is a result of not-modeled idiosyncratic feature of the cluster (rebel group), and thus substantive independent variables for the cluster (rebel group) become irrelevant to explaining “no commitment.” Thus, following King’s (2001) suggestion, we used random effects models, which are called partial pooling or varying intercept approach as well. Partial pooling approach can improve estimates for the mean of each cluster by simultaneously considering both a common intercept among clusters and variation between clusters within the data rather than taking a simple average across the clusters.

covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample.<sup>43</sup> The results of estimating first-difference with respect to *Rebel Strength*, as summarized in Table 3, are similar. If a rebel group's military strength decreases from "Parity" to "Much weaker", then the predicted probability of rebel commitment to international law decreases by about 5 percentage points. But the probability that a rebel group whose military strength is parity to the government would commit to international law increases by about 9 percentage points once it has "much stronger" military power than the government. All of these results indicate that stronger rebels are more likely to make the international law commitments.

[Figure 4 about here]

[Table 3 about here]

When we account for unobserved heterogeneity among rebel groups as well as multiple control variables in Model 4, the negative coefficient on *Secessionist* is statistically significant at the 90% levels. In other models (Models 1-3), the association cannot be distinguished from zero, which signifies that there is little empirical evidence for Hypothesis 2.

As expected in our Hypothesis 3 (territorial control), rebel groups that have control over their territories are more likely to make commitments to international law than those without territorial control. Specifically, territorial control increases the probability of rebels' committing to international law by three percentage points, which is statistically significant at the 90% levels.<sup>44</sup> Although we predicted in the Hypothesis 4 (rival rebels) that rebel groups in competition for power with many other rebel groups are more likely to commit to international law, we fail to reject the null hypothesis in this case.

Expressing international law commitments would lead to favorable perceptions of the rebel group abroad, thereby bolstering existing transnational support or attracting new international supporters. Results are consistent with this expectation: while the predicted probability of rebel commitment to international law is about 10 percent as the rebel group receives non-military support from transnational non-state actors, the probability goes down to about 4 percent if the rebel group does not have such a transnational non-military support.<sup>45</sup>

Positive coefficients on *Central Control Strength* across all models indicate that our expectation in the Hypothesis 6 (internal control) has some empirical support. The relationship between a rebel group's central command and control structure and its commitment to international law is strongest in Model 4. Estimation of substantive effects gives us more detailed and clear evidence. The predicted probability that rebel groups with "low" level of central command strength make a commitment to international law is 1.3 percentage points greater than that of rebel groups without any central command structure committing to international law. The probability of rebel commitment to international law increases by about six percentage points as

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<sup>43</sup> To compute quantities of interest in this paper, we follow the suggestion by Hanmer and Kalkan 2013, called "observed case" approach. "Observed case" approach refers to the strategy of holding covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample when calculating the relevant quantities of interest, and then averaging the results over all the observations. This method allows us to avoid obtaining substantively meaningless results from "average case" approach, the common practice to hold the other covariates at their mean while varying the variable of interest.

<sup>44</sup> Results reported in Appendix Table A1.

<sup>45</sup> Results reported in Appendix Figure A2.

the rebel group's central command strength shifts from "low" to "high."<sup>46</sup> The results imply that that rebel groups with strong central command and control structures are likely to make international law commitments to reinforce an internal code of conduct.

Regarding the timing of commitment, we found that rebel groups are more likely to commit to international law near peace talks, compared to other phase of conflicts. Specifically, peace talk periods increase the predicted probability of rebel commitment to international law by about thirteen percentage points.<sup>47</sup> This implies that rebel groups have strong incentives to signal that they are more conciliatory types than before, when entering peace talks, even though making international law commitment may lead them to appear weak. Because some commitments include peace agreements, there might be a concern for endogeneity. To check this, we examined the number of peace-agreements relative to the number of non-peace-agreements, near peace talks. 57 out of 127 commitments near peace talks are non-peace-agreements. This amounts to a half of commitments made near peace talks are non-peace-agreements, indicating that a substantial amount of non-peace-agreement commitments are made near peace talks.

The results of empirical analysis also present that longer running rebel groups are more likely to announce international law related commitment expressively than nascent groups. The predicted probability of commitment by a rebel group that has engaged in civil conflicts for 10 years is almost twice as much as the probability of commitment by a rebel group that has lasted in civil conflicts only for 3 years. If a rebel group has lasted longer than 40 years in civil wars, then the probability of its expressing international law commitment almost reaches 50 percent.<sup>48</sup>

The results altogether point to an interesting pattern about the hierarchy of rebel audiences. It appears that national governments, rank-and-file soldiers, and non-military outside supporters matter, but domestic populace and rival rebels do not, at least with regard to issuing soft international law documents. The covariates related to national governments (*Rebel Strength* – rebel military strength relative to government), rank-and-file soldiers (*Command and Control Strength*), and non-military outside supporters (*Non-military Transnational Support*) are significant, whereas the covariates related to domestic populace (*Territorial Control*) and rival rebels (*Number of Rival Rebel Groups*) do not turn out to be significant in statistical models. This is an indication, although not a definite evidence of hierarchy among rebel audiences. Nonetheless, the finding that rebel groups might privilege their relations with their key opponent (i.e. national governments) relative to rival rebel groups, for example, is indicative of the hierarchy of rebel audiences that we would not have otherwise discover without above analysis.

## Conclusion

Our analysis reveals that rebel groups in civil wars use soft law documents as political tools to manage relationships with their multiple audiences. These are international-law related documents, but they serve domestic political purposes, while acting as signals of viability and strength to the international community and opposition government. These soft law documents sometimes become foundational documents leading to peace agreements. In this process, rebel groups work with international actors and at the same time, signal to national governments with aims to have better bargains.

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<sup>46</sup> Results reported in Table A1 and Figure A3 in the appendix.

<sup>47</sup> Results reported in Appendix Figure A4.

<sup>48</sup> Results reported in Appendix Figure A5.

We conclude with several observations. We analyzed rebel groups' "words" and not "deeds." What rebel groups say do not necessarily reflect what they do, and the linkage between acts and deeds demand careful attention from both scholars and practitioners.<sup>49</sup> But the theoretical logic suggests that "words" can be powerful communicative signals with some political values, so we think that these commitments deserve much scholarly attention. Whether these rebel words are empty promises should be further researched.

Our analysis also addresses the question of whether encouraging rebel groups into soft laws would be a good idea as a matter of policy.<sup>50</sup> If these soft law instruments are the tools of strong rebel groups, the international community should perhaps try pay more attention to engage weaker groups in civil conflicts. As the data show, strong rebel groups are more likely to utilize the opportunities for international law participation than weak groups. This might mean that sometimes the international community might end up alienating weaker groups despite their potential willingness to engage in rebel diplomacy.

There are also implications for theoretical development in international law and organization. We find the logic of commitment in the case of state actors is also present for rebel groups. We have shown that competitive pressure and reputational concerns operate to rebel groups as well as to states.<sup>51</sup> The balancing logic of military necessity and civilian protection is also found in how rebel groups deal with the issue of looking as "viable political actor" while appearing "strong." The difference lies in the uncertain and less-institutionalized environment rebel groups are in, with multiple audiences and less binding commitments, compared to more-institutionalized environment states are in, with firm law-making authority and established treaty-ratification processes. Research scope for international law commitment should be broadened beyond state actors, as many important contemporary actors in international relations are not states. Our work has implications for civil war literature as well. We see strong desire to conduct diplomacy among rebel groups, consistent with the literature on rebel diplomacy. International law commitment is clearly part of rebel groups' political arsenal. It is the weapon of the weak, although only strong groups among the pack appear to exploit the political benefit.

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<sup>49</sup> Even though words and deeds don't match, cheap talk can be still valuable. See Tingley and Walter 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Roberts and Sivakumaran 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Simmons 2010; Von Stein 2010; Simmons 2000.

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## Tables and Figures

**Table 1. Five Topics from Rebels' Words**

	Most frequent stem-words appearing	Number of documents	Emerging topic
Topic 1	“nation” “govern” “parti” “transit” “polit” “law” “constitut”	32	Political demands
Topic 2	“parti” “agreement” “forc” “military”	79	War-related
Topic 3	“republ” “peac” “secur”	23	Peace-related
Topic 4	“group” “act” “dan” “sur”	18	Extras
Topic 5	“right” “children” “people” “human” “will”	114	International humanitarian norms

A topic model fit to *TheirWords*. Here, there are 5 topics. Each topic is illustrated with its top-most frequent words.



**Table 2. Who Commits and When?**  
*Logit analysis of rebel commitment to international law*

	Model 1 Pooled Logit	Model 2 Pooled Logit with Controls	Model 3 Random Effects	Model 4 Random Effects with Controls
Rebel Strength	0.444* (0.251)	0.491* (0.251)	0.787** (0.308)	0.583** (0.281)
Secessionist	-0.175 (0.554)	-0.387 (0.418)	-0.937 (0.598)	-0.927* (0.537)
Territorial Control	0.309 (0.468)	0.687* (0.369)	0.640 (0.470)	0.830* (0.448)
Number of Rivals	-0.269* (0.138)	-0.182 (0.126)	-0.172 (0.125)	-0.141 (0.120)
Non-military Support by NSA	0.903** (0.386)	1.130** (0.503)	0.910* (0.487)	1.341*** (0.514)
Central Control Strength	0.202 (0.208)	0.411** (0.210)	0.625* (0.331)	0.802** (0.316)
Near Peace Talks	1.933*** (0.338)	1.916*** (0.383)	2.183*** (0.318)	2.250*** (0.316)
Age of Rebel group	0.070*** (0.014)	0.093*** (0.021)	0.132*** (0.023)	0.139*** (0.022)
Military Support by NSA		-0.085 (0.521)		0.050 (0.515)
Democracy		0.115 (0.401)		-0.296 (0.406)
Extraterritorial Bases				
Some		0.725 (0.469)		0.278 (0.542)
Extensive		0.348 (0.512)		-0.446 (0.623)
Support by Foreign Government				
Non-military		-2.031*** (0.641)		-1.806** (0.909)
Military		-0.571 (0.409)		-0.313 (0.488)
Political Wings				
Unauthorized Wings		-1.700*** (0.634)		-2.215*** (0.647)
Legal Wings		0.251 (0.355)		-0.019 (0.541)
Constant	-4.480*** (0.715)	-5.355*** (0.745)	-7.568*** (1.128)	-7.037*** (1.087)
Variance (Rebel Group)			3.827** (1.309)	2.096*** (0.804)
Observations	1844	1773	1844	1773
AIC	736.728	665.703	653.485	625.164
Number of Groups			317	306

Clustered standard errors (by rebel groups) in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Table 3. First-difference in Predicted Probability of Rebel Commitment across *Rebel Strength***

Rebel Strength	Difference in predicted probability of rebel commitment	Confidence interval (95%)
Parity to Much Weaker	-0.048	[-0.137, -0.001]
Parity to Weaker	-0.029	[-0.081, -0.001]
Parity to Stronger	0.040	[0.001, 0.115]
Parity to Much Stronger	0.092	[0.001, 0.268]

Note: This table reports changes in predicted probabilities of commitment as rebel groups' military strength shifts from Parity to each level of strength. Using the estimates from Model 4 in Table 2, we calculated the differences in predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law as rebel groups' military strength changes, holding the other covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample.



Figure 2. Rebels' Words in Two Topics

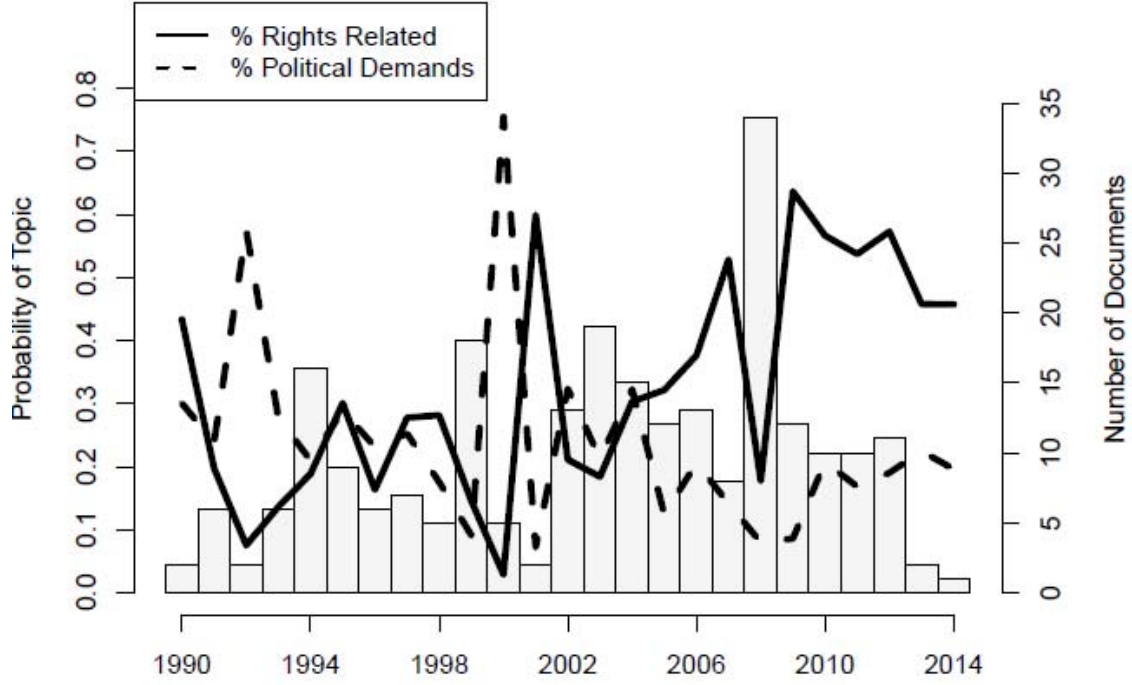
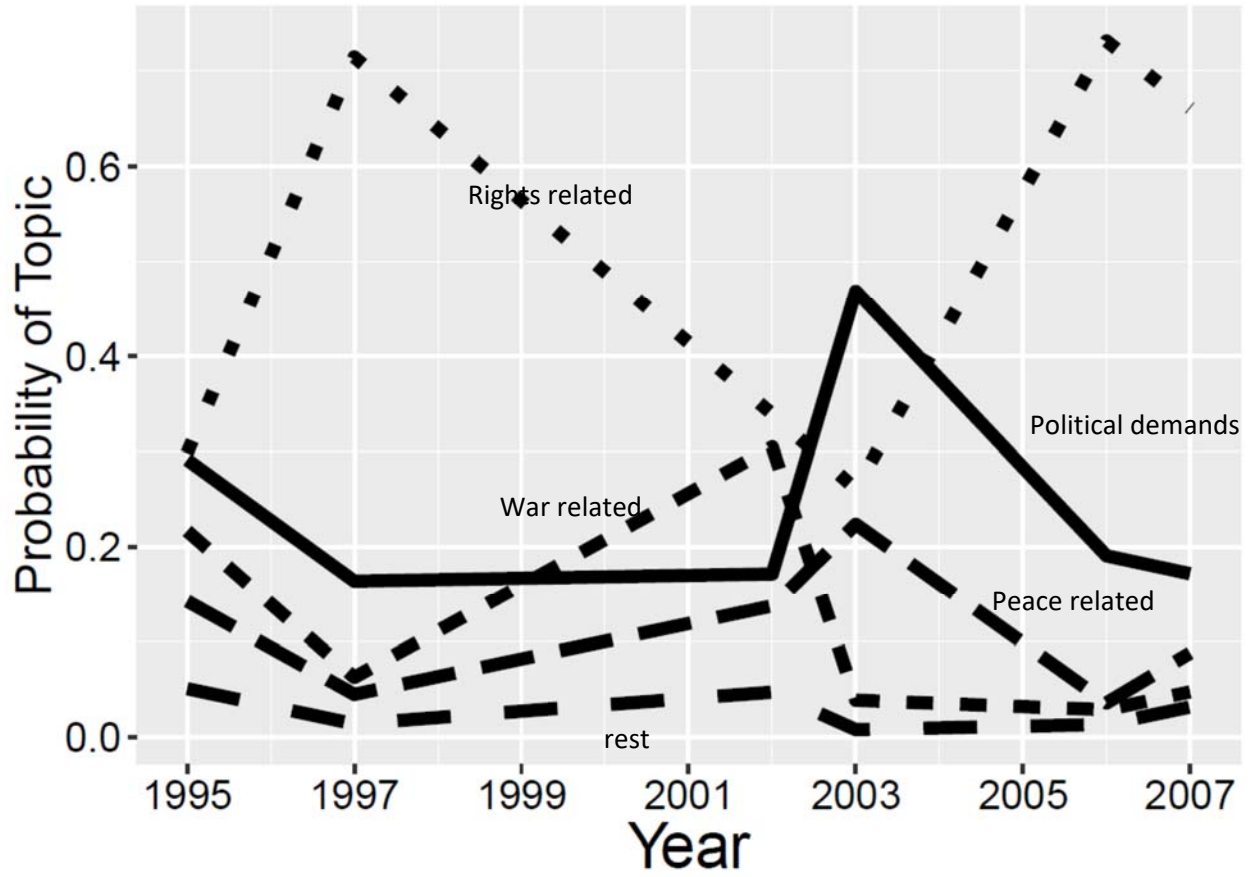
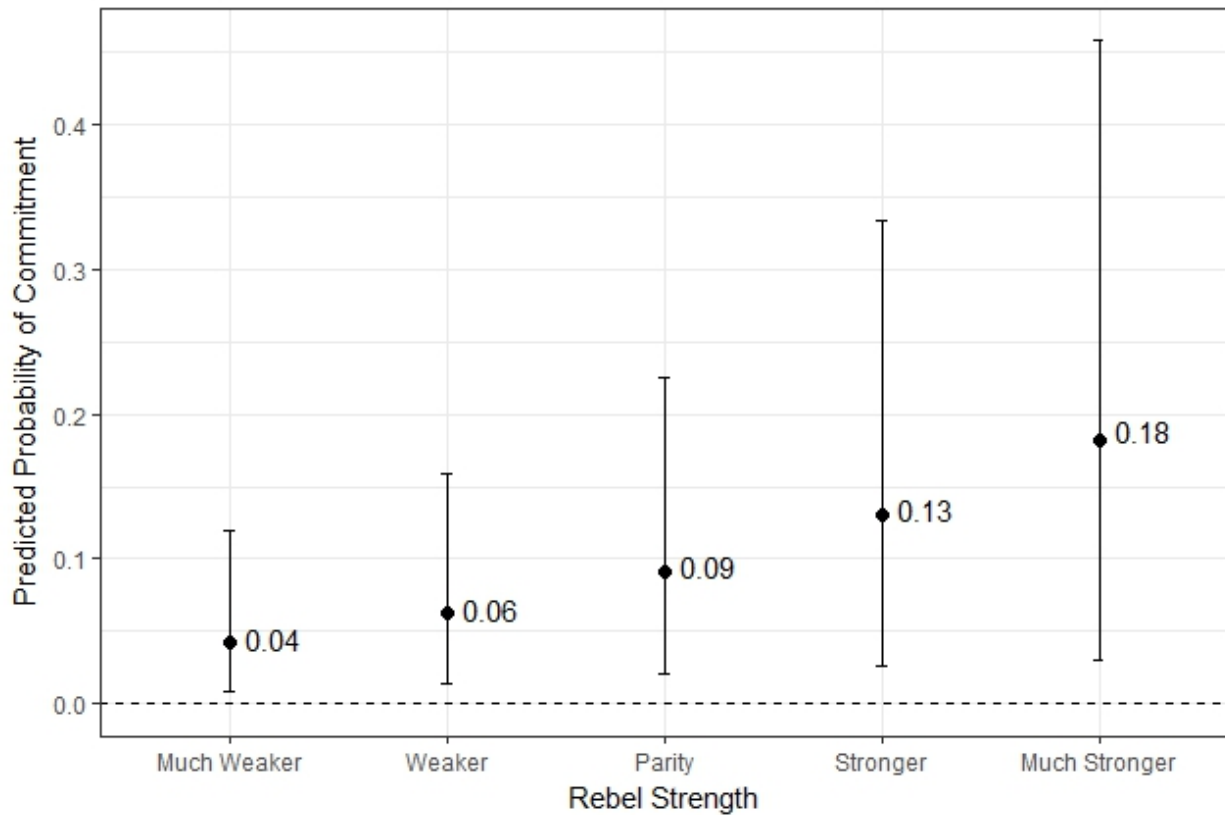


Figure 3. Tamil Tigers' Words



**Figure 4. Predicted Probabilities of Rebel Commitment  
According to *Rebel Strength***



Note: This Figure presents the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law (vertical axis) across the levels of rebel groups' military strength, *Rebel Strength* variable (horizontal axis). Using the estimates from Model 4 in Table 2, we calculated the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law, holding covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample. Black circles are point estimates and black bars represent 95% confidence intervals of those point estimates.

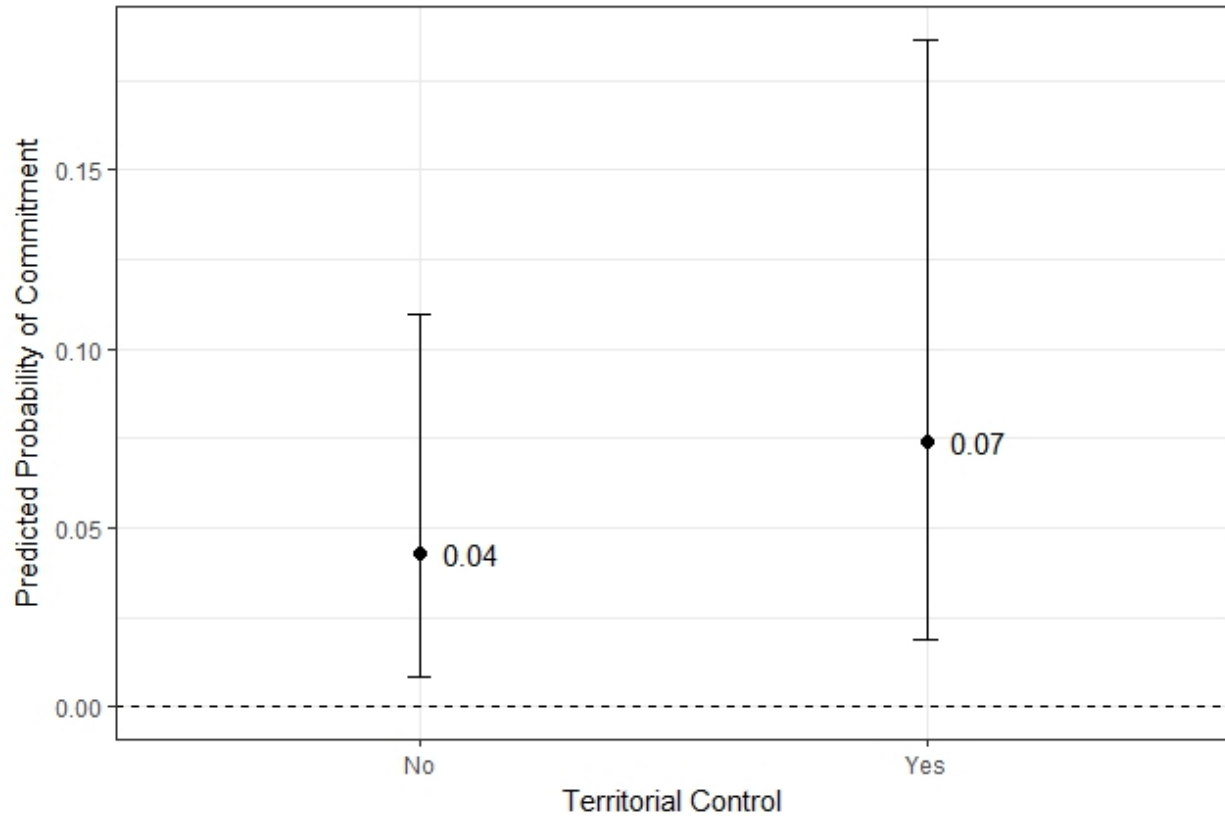
## Appendix

**Table A1. First-difference in Predicted Probability of Rebel Commitment across *Central Control Strength***

Central Control Strength	Difference in predicted probability of rebel commitment	Confidence interval (95%)
Low to No command	-0.013	[-0.035, -0.002]
Low to Moderate	0.022	[0.003, 0.057]
Low to High	0.058	[0.006, 0.147]

Note: This Table reports changes in predicted probabilities of commitment as rebel groups' central command strength shifts from Low to each level of strength. Using the estimates from Model 4 in Table 2, we calculated the differences in predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to IL as rebel groups' central control strength changes, holding the other covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample.

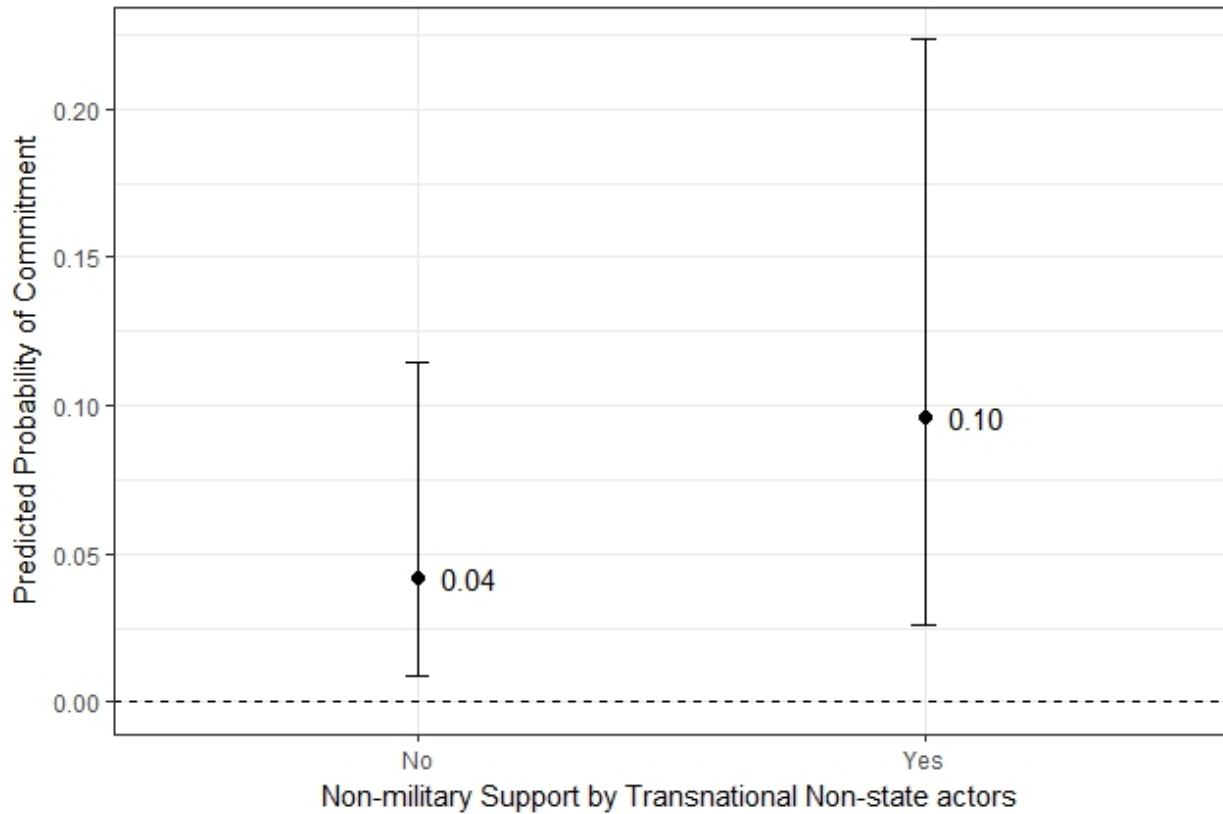
**Figure A1. Predicted Probabilities of Rebel Commitment  
According to *Territorial Control***



Note: This Figure presents the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law (vertical axis) across rebel groups' *Territorial Control* (horizontal axis). Using the estimates from Model 4 in Table 2, we calculated the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law, holding covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample. Black circles are point estimates and black bars represent 95% confidence intervals of those point estimates.

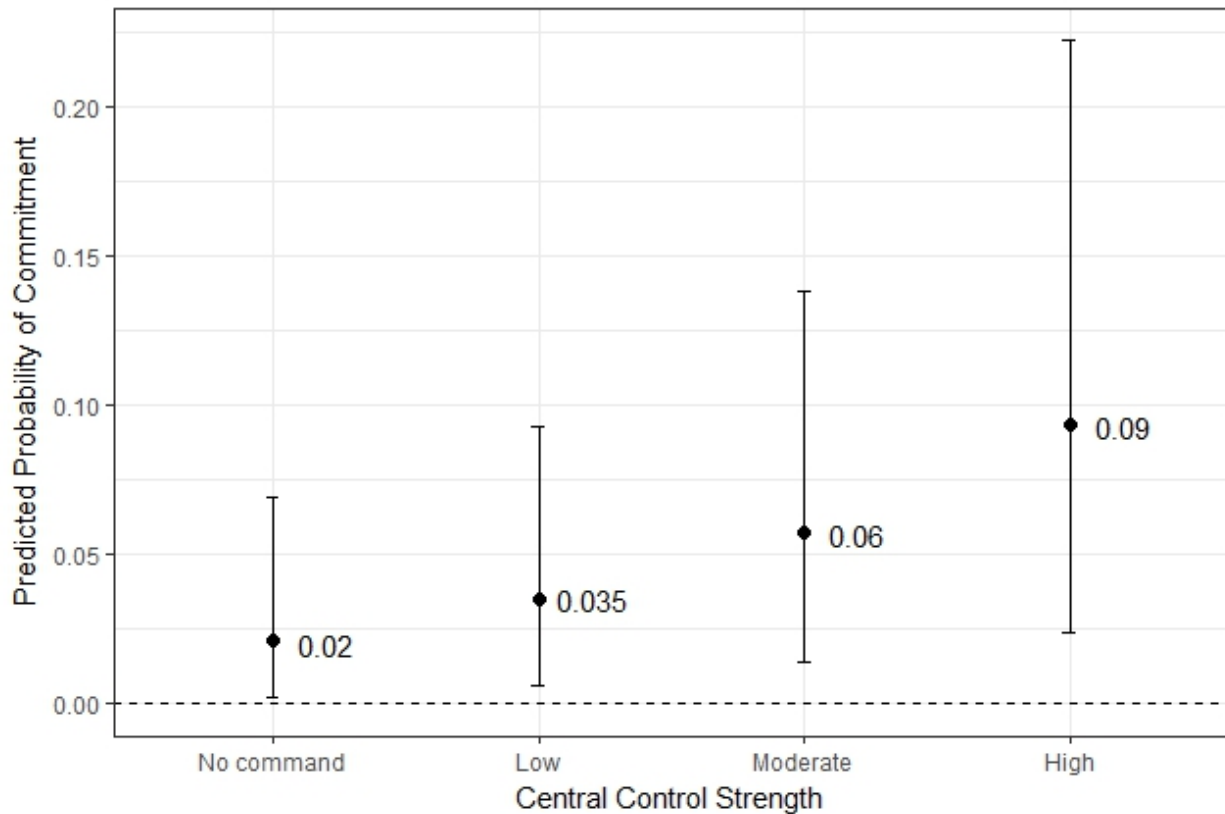


**Figure A2. Predicted Probabilities of Rebel Commitment  
According to *Non-military Support by Transnational Non-state Actors***



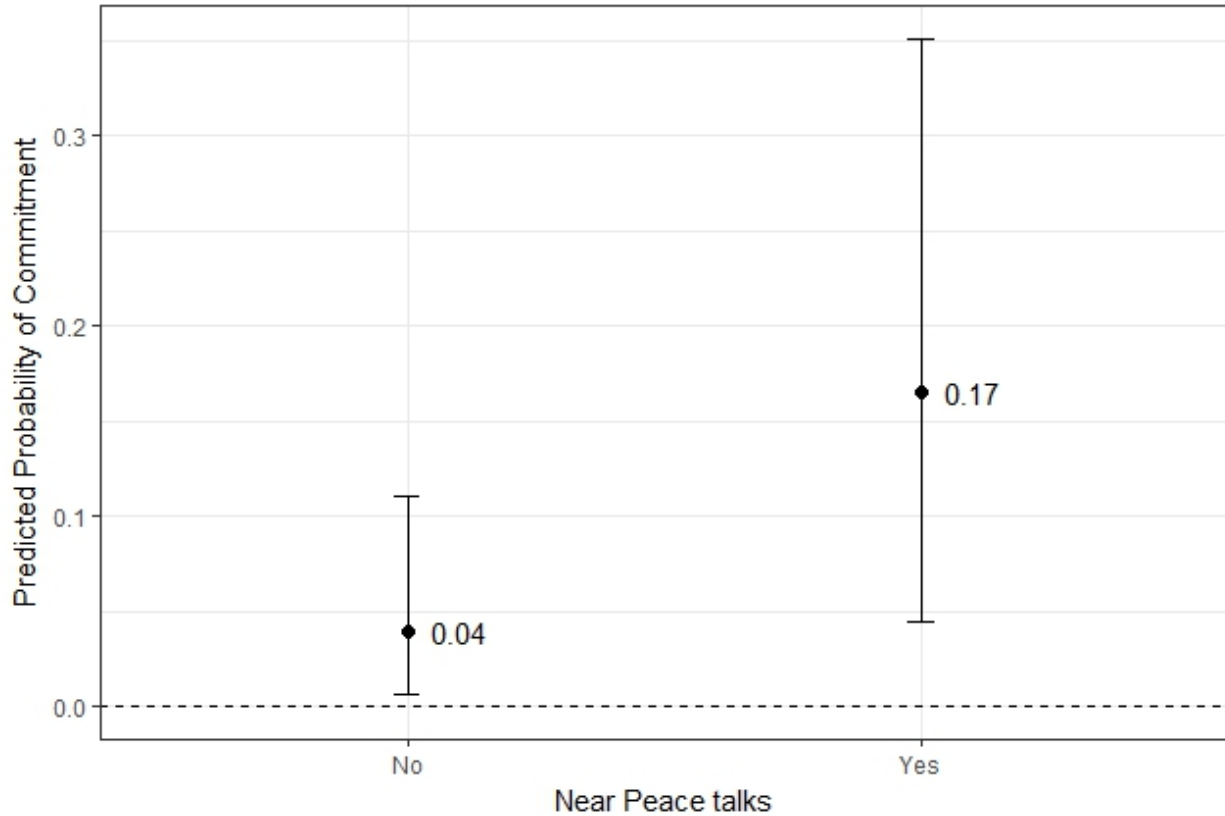
Note: This Figure presents the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law (vertical axis) across *Non-military Support from International Non-state Actors* (horizontal axis). Using the estimates from Model 4 in Table 2, we calculated the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to IL, holding covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample. Black circles are point estimates and black bars represent 95% confidence intervals of those point estimates.

**Figure A3. Predicted Probabilities of Rebel Commitment  
According to *Central Control Strength***



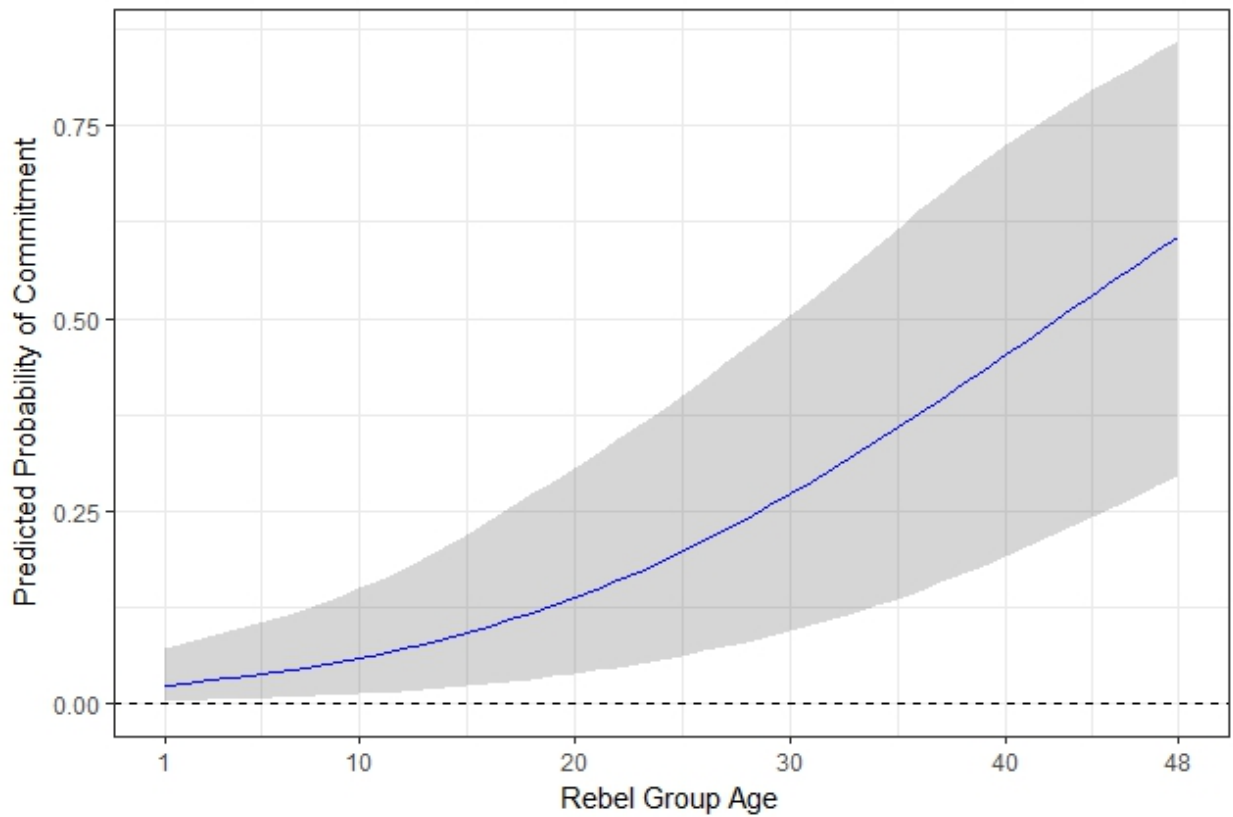
Note: This Figure presents the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law (vertical axis) across the levels of *Central Control Strength* (horizontal axis). Using the estimates from Model 4 in Table 2, we calculated the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law, holding covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample. Black circles are point estimates and black bars represent 95% confidence intervals of those point estimates.

**Figure A4. Predicted Probabilities of Rebel Commitment  
According to *Near Peace Talks***



Note: This Figure presents the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law (vertical axis) across *Near Peace Talks* variable (horizontal axis). Using the estimates from Model 4 in Table 2, we calculated the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law, holding covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample. Black circles are point estimates and black bars represent 95% confidence intervals of those point estimates.

**Figure A5. Predicted Probabilities of Rebel Commitment  
According to Age of Rebel Group**



Note: This Figure presents the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law (vertical axis) across ages of rebel group (horizontal axis). Using the estimates from Model 4 in Table 2, we calculated the predicted probabilities of rebel commitment to international law, holding covariates at the observed values for each observation in the sample. Blue lines are point estimates and shaded region represents 95% confidence intervals of those point estimates.