Forging political entrepreneurs: Civil war effects on post-conflict politics in Italy[☆]

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ABSTRACT

How does violent mobilization affect post-conflict elections? This article studies the impact that violent collective mobilization has on local electoral behavior after domestic conflict. We argue that post-conflict democratic politics at the local level can be dramatically affected by local experience of civil war. The use of violence during the war and especially local political entrepreneurs who have emerged from the conflict can influence post-violent politics. We use as case-study the civil war that took place in Italy during the last phase of World War II. Using new spatially disaggregated data on armed groups' location and violent episodes, we assess the impact of the violent mobilization on the 1946 elections, which took place after the conflict. We find that partisans' mobilization and, more weakly, Nazi-Fascist violent acts influenced local politics, shifting votes towards more radical positions. Our findings hold across numerous robustness checks.

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Previous empirical studies show that political representation and institutional settings affect civil war onset (Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates, & Gleditsch, 2001). Political exclusion and marginalization increase the risk of violent mobilization (Cederman, Weidmann, & Gleditsch, 2011), but how do violent mobilization and violence affect post-conflict politics? Put differently, does bullet-experience affect ballot-behavior? Civil wars have been studied thoroughly; however, only a few studies have investigated the effects of civil war on politics, when citizens go back to "normal" politics after armed conflict. We still lack a clear framework and additional empirical studies on politics when bullets change to ballots, and how the bullets experience affects the ballots. In this study we examine how non-violent political competition in a democratic framework can be affected by previously local violent politics. We

provide a theoretical framework where we explain how local collective mobilization during a civil war triggers a two-stage selection mechanism for future local political entrepreneurs that can, eventually, provide an effectively organized party, which is able to influence the local political market in times of "normal" politics. The few existing studies on this topic have shown that violence resulting from civil war influences the level of political participation (Bellows & Miguel, 2009; Blattman, 2009) and that individuals reject the political identities associated with the perpetrators of violence (Balcells, 2012). Instead of dealing with the individual reactions to past violence, our research focuses on how local vote choice is affected by the transformation of armed groups in political parties. In order to evaluate our theory, we study the first parliamentary elections that took place in Italy in 1946, after the collapse of the Fascist regime and a civil war. Thanks to the presence of democratic elections both before and after the conflict and the availability of detailed historical data, the case of Italy is appropriate for testing our argument. A recent wave of empirical studies tested their hypotheses using historical cases of civil wars because these cases often provide a larger and more detailed amount of information than is usually available for recent or ongoing conflicts (e.g. Balcells, 2012; Grandi, 2013; Kalyvas, 2006). These data derive from multiple sources and have been thoroughly double checked by different scholars. In addition, fine-grained data are coupled with many careful historical accounts, memoirs and autobiographies that allow political scientists to acquire a "thick" knowledge

of the case. Thus, we present a new geographically disaggregated dataset on elections, violent events, and underground mobilization during the Italian civil war. We constructed this from multiple sources, especially the archives of the Italian national statistical institute (ISTAT). We control for past electoral behavior and use Coarsened Exact Matching (Iacus, King, & Porro, 2012) to compare areas with common features influencing the emergence of armed bands, the actual presence of the partisans being the treatment. We find that the local collective mobilization of partisans against Nazi and Fascist troops influenced voting choice in the post-conflict setting. Political parties that derived from the armed bands manage to mobilize electoral support in their favor in the areas where they actively fought during the war, thanks to the action of the former combatants who became the backbone of party organizations after the conflict. Moreover, areas that experienced acts of violence against civilians perpetrated by Nazis and Fascists had more radical political positions. The article is structured as follows: first, we situate our approach within the contemporary literature on civil wars and post-war politics. Second, we elaborate our theoretical framework. Third, we introduce our case study — Italy between 1943 and 1946 — and draw up testable hypotheses. In the second half of our article, we present our research design and finally we discuss the findings of our empirical analysis.

Civil war and post-war politics

The empirical literature on civil wars has dramatically expanded in the last ten years, mainly focusing on the reasons and the conditions that lead to these conflicts (e.g. Fearon & Laitin, 2003) and subsequently on the ways violence is used during the conflicts (e.g. Kalyvas, 2006). Though with some notable exceptions (Collier, 1999; Gates, Hegre, Nygard, & Strand, 2012), the consequences of civil wars are by contrast rather understudied. So far, several studies have investigated the impact of conflicts on the creation of subsequent national institutions. However, if institutions represent the rules that govern the game of politics, violent conflict also influences the ways politics works within the same institutional framework once the actual use of force is over. This article neither deals with the action—reaction dynamic of electoral violence (Höglund, 2009), nor with the relationship between different types of elections and the outbreak of civil wars (Cederman, Gleditsch, & Hug, 2012). It concurs instead to explain the overall impact civil wars can have on the politics of democratic states that emerge from those conflicts. In other words, we do not evaluate the effectiveness of an explicit or implicit bargaining process that implies the possible use of armed force, but how the past experience of armed civil conflict can change subsequent local vote choice. Since the features of civil wars can show remarkable spatial variation within the same country (Buhaug & Gates, 2002), this type of armed conflict can exert different influences on the non-violent politics that develop afterwards in different areas. As a consequence, a disaggregated approach is needed in order to fully appreciate the phenomenon.

Shifting from considering the relationship between civil wars and the following institutional design to the relationship between civil wars and subsequent actual politics and vote choice, we argue that previous violent conflict can affect post-war democratic politics in two ways. On the one hand, violent conflict can alter individual preferences, which represent the demand side of the political market, since the post-conflict change is within the electorate. On the other hand, previous conflict can influence the organization and the activities of the political parties that emerge from the war and are more or less related to the armed groups. The parties represent the supply side of the political market, as they provide alternative answers to the political demands of citizens.

Hence, civil wars can lead to political change in conflict-ridden democratizing states in three ways: acting on the rules of the game, i.e. affecting the institutional framework; affecting the political preferences of individuals; influencing the organization and the strategies of the parties that come out of the war. The two latter processes affect the political society, the arena within which the polity arranges itself to contest the legitimate right to exercise control over public power (Linz & Stepan, 1996). The political society is an essential component of democratic transitions and consolidations. While the change in the rules involves the whole territory in the same way, the change in the supply and demand aspects of the political market is subject to subnational variation, according to the features of the civil war.

Recent contributions have studied the impact of intrastate conflict on subsequent politics, but focusing only on the demand side, at the individual level. In fact, these studies consider the political behavior of individuals who were directly or indirectly exposed to violence. Investigating the consequences of conflict in North Caucasus, Bakke, O'Loughlin, and Ward (2009) find that personal experiences of violence have a strong negative effect on the propensity to forgive. Forgiveness and reconciliation are key to implement conflict resolution processes effectively and sustain non-violent politics. Bellows and Miguel (2009) study the consequences of violence and war-related displacement on civic and political participation in Sierra Leone, and they find that people are more likely to participate in local political groups and vote in postwar elections in areas that were plagued by the most severe violence. Blattman (2009) investigates the effects of forced conscription through abduction on the attitude of people towards politics in Uganda. He finds that former combatants who experienced violence after their abduction are more likely to vote and be involved in politics and that a similar mechanism exists if their family suffered from violence. Balcells (2012) investigates the long-term effects of violence on the political identities of the victims after the Spanish Civil War. The author finds empirical evidence confirming the hypothesis that the victims of violence tend to reject the political identity of the perpetrators and support the opposing political alignment.

Shaping post-conflict politics from the supply side

Our research does not deal with the level of political participation in post-civil war countries (Bellows & Miguel, 2009; Blattman, 2009), and it differs from that of Balcells (2012) since it does not focus on the demand side of the political market, i.e. on the ways individuals change or confirm their political preferences after being exposed to episodes of violence during a civil war. Rather, our aim is to study the effects of civil war on the subsequent vote choice mainly considering the supply side of the political market, which is no less important than the demand side. We intend to stress the role of parties, which are essential bodies linking institutions to individuals but which are not neutral transmission belts. Quite the contrary, they can actually shape politics. Classic work on voting behavior has highlighted how the supply side (the parties) influences vote choice (Schattschneider, 1975). Moreover, recent studies on developed democracies have empirically shown that not only changes in the demand side (electorate characteristics), but also changes in the supply side crucially influence voting choices (Evans & Tilley, 2012).

The organizational forms and the strategies of parties are heavily influenced by the context and historical setting in which they emerge. The environment in which the parties begin to operate shapes the type of effective party through precise incentives (van Biezen, 2005). If the armed groups that fought the civil war could not count on readily available natural resources or