Alliance Formation in Civil Wars

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

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

FOTINI CHRISTIA

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
To my parents
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