

A Leap of Faith: Explaining Ex-Combatant Violence

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After disarming and demobilizing, why do some ex-combatants re-engage in organized violence, while others do not? Even though former fighters have been identified as a major source of insecurity in post-civil war societies due to their military know-how, there have been few efforts to systematically examine this puzzle. This article fills this research gap by comparing the presence or absence of organized violence in different *ex-combatant communities* – all the former fighters that used to belong to the same armed faction and who share a common, horizontal identity based on shared war- and peacetime experiences. It does so by analyzing six ex-combatant communities in two countries: ex-Cobra, Cocoye and Ninja in the Republic of Congo and ex-AFRC, CDF and RUF in Sierra Leone. Contrary to assumptions found in the literature on disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating (DDR) ex-combatants, this article finds that structural factors, such as the availability of small arms and lack of economic opportunities or personal security, have little explanatory value in themselves. Instead, ex-combatant violence is rather the result of interaction between *entrepreneurs of violence, relationships* and *intermediaries*. It argues, more specifically, that former fighters only take to arms when they have access to entrepreneurs of violence – political, military, religious or business elites who have the will, capacity and ability to coordinate organized violence in a post-conflict setting. By utilizing relationships based on selective incentives and social networks, these actors are able to generate the needed enticements and feelings of affinity and trust, to convince ex-combatants to resort to arms. However, as entrepreneurs have limited access to former fighters, they are dependent on second-tier individuals – such as former mid-level commanders – who can act as intermediaries between the two.