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Theò Bajon  
University of Lyon, theobajon@gmail.com

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## The rebels' credibility dilemma: A new approach to the search for credibility towards the international community and the population

### Abstract

By being part into the theory of the rebels' credibility dilemma, this research takes its framework in a historical analysis of relations between rebel groups and governments, in order to better understand the mechanisms of demands and negotiations between these two actors. In this paper, we propose to test the validity of the theory of the rebels' credibility dilemma in Latin America, and to provide specific precision to this geographical area. For that, our approach proposes an historical and political study on data going from 1945 to 2019. The study is characterized by the creation of specific classifications and a relative power indicator of the rebel groups, making it possible to highlight new specificities of the rebels' credibility dilemma. The results show that globally the theory seems valid on the studied area, but that new parameters can be implemented to the initial theory, namely the search for popular and international credibility, through a general model of the rebels' credibility dilemma.

**Keywords:** *Latin America, Rebels' credibility dilemma, Game Theory, Conflict Management*

# **The Rebels' Credibility Dilemma: A New Approach to the Search for Credibility Towards the International Community and the Population**

**Theò Bajon**

The study of rebel groups, and more particularly the relationship between the dyad formed by rebel groups and governments, is a key scientific issue in conflict management and the promotion of peace around the world (Nilsson, 2010). In recent years, this field of research has benefited from many studies that gradually makes it possible to better identify the various issues of this problem while developing different approaches that are essential in the field of conflict resolution (Ishiyama & Batta, 2011; Péclard & Mechoulan, 2015; Berti, 2016).

The interactions between rebel groups and governments, and especially the study of the rebel groups' demands, are of particular interest. The rebels' credibility dilemma theory aims to better understand these interactions and especially the nature of the demands according to the power of the different rebel groups. This approach, already tested on specific geographical areas (Thomas et al., 2016), is intended to constitute a more global theory about the behavior of rebel groups within a game theory system.

While attempting to confirm the initial hypothesis of the rebels' credibility dilemma theory through new research methodologies and procedures, we sought to develop a more complex approach through further empirical and theoretical analysis. With the uptake of a relative power indicator and multiple demand categorization scales, we sought to better understand the collected data and derive results. This approach helped us to identify two new third-party actors to the original dyad: the international community and the population. It also allowed us to suggest a new model of the rebel credibility dilemma grounded in game theory.

The paper unfolds as follows: In the next section, we draw up a literary review of the subject and issues related to the question of our study and the main challenges of this academic field. In the following section, we list the different methodological phases starting with the general theoretical framework, the complete description of the method and the methodological protocol, while presenting our data. Finally, we present the empirical results obtained and theorize our results in the form of a new model of the rebels' credibility dilemma.

## Literature Review

Our study is directly part of a recent research process, which has gained prominence in recent years and opens a new area of study regarding the game theory of rebel-government negotiations (Fearon, 2013). In this area of the negotiations between rebels and governments is a more specific movement, namely the study of rebel behavior and about what these behaviors and actions can explain, always being part of the game theory and the theoretical framework of international relations, considering both groups as actors (Richardson, 1998).

The study of the factors that can lead to rebellion also offers a study of the behavior of governments facing the threat and the specific political situation at the regional or national level, allowing a real application today to the preservation of peace and conflict resolution in the world (Arena & Hardt, 2014).

In this field of study, we rely at first glance on the work done by Thomas, Reed, and Wolford (2016). The concept of a rebels' credibility dilemma is characterized by a theorized conjecture observed in a regional study over a specific period of time. This concept theorizes that the more objectively weak a rebel group is in comparison to the government, the more its own demands, directly or indirectly submitted to the government, will fall within areas of government sovereignty (Philpott, 1995), and this, in order to create some credibility in the relationship between itself and the government (Maoz & Terris, 2006). Thus, the concept of the rebels' credibility dilemma is anchored directly in a bilateral relationship between two defined actors maintaining a relationship—even if it is conflictual—and interacting together in a game theory, where the main issue here would be the credibility for the rebel group. Thus, the credibility of an actor in this context can be defined as the extent to which each actor believes in the other one statements, threats, or promises but also its ability to deliver a promised agreement (Maoz & Terris, 2006).

Starting from this fundamental notion, we first sought to demonstrate empirically the concept by relying on a different geographical area and a longer period. This is to broadly support the way in which we conduct this research, to take into account the specifics of the dilemma and the enlargement of the data. Extending the time frame of our study makes it possible to place ourselves in a more general movement of rebellions having taken place after 1945 and thus to better characterize contemporary evolutions which are associated with this period (Gurr, 1993). The focus on a new geographic area allows supporting the first study, but also to expand to a very specific area by its characteristics inherent in the rebellion processes, while considering the fact

that a globalized study is quite expensive in committed means and difficult to achieve at the risk of implementing methodological biases by omitting the particularisms of the regions studied (Wiarda, 2019).

However, certain limits to the initial concept appeared to us, which prompted us to develop a new methodology, and enabled us to identify other factors and other essential actors, which are not necessarily characteristic of the geographical area studied, but which seem to fall particularly on the period studied—from 1945 to the present day—and the geographical area studied: Latin America.

For that, it was essential to rely on another aspect of the scientific literature in order to complete the rebels' credibility dilemma theory. On the one hand, it is the search for popular credibility and all the works concerning the popular representation of governments and rebellion movements that have helped us to better understand a fundamental aspect of the area and the temporality studied (Bhavnani & Ross, 2003). On the other hand, it was also important to look at the international perception of rebel groups and how they could be dealt with in order to better understand how demands could be linked and play a role at the international level in the credibility sought by rebel groups (Arjona et al., 2015).

The specificities of the area and the multiple issues studied also prompt us to consider global work around transnational issues and particularly around the relationship between populations and international bodies. The importance of non-state actors through populations and international institutions holds a preponderant role in the work of Keck and Sikkink (1999), in particular as regards globalized states. Our study is therefore positioned within these international networks through the examination of special relations between governments and rebel groups, but also around relations between rebel groups and populations, as well as relations between rebel groups and international institutions, through these networks. In this, the study of the geographical area that constitutes Latin America seemed perfectly adapted to shed light on certain important mechanisms and thus present a new model of the rebels' credibility dilemma.

We thus wish to corroborate not only the initial hypothesis of rebels' credibility dilemma, but also through our results and our methodology, that of the existence of significant interconnections between all these actors, seeking to influence each other around central challenges in a globalized world, especially in Latin America due to the specificities of this area.

## **Methodology**

### **Theoretical Frame**

It seems important to clarify the general theoretical framework in which our initial methodology fits, to better understand how we built our own methodology to meet specific needs.

The first theoretical assumption in which we must inscribe is materialized in the fact that we envisage that relations between rebel groups and governments can be described as relations between two actors (Krasner, 1984) who each represent their wills and interests within the demands expressed. These relations can lead to two solutions: a peace agreement (or at least a ceasefire); or the beginning of a bellicose process between the two actors (Jenne et al., 2007).

This game between state and non-state actors is a game whose information seems to be asymmetrical both on the side of rebel groups and on the side of governments (Butler & Gates, 2009). Thus, when one of the actors makes a demand—whether or not it is directly addressed to the other actor—it is very difficult for the one to anticipate the reaction of the other actor. In addition to the own and inherent composition of the two actors, we can identify two other types of actors that influence the two actors of the dyad and that we highlight in the fourth section of our study: the population and the international community (Philpott, 2001).

The study of this game as such is very interesting to describe, as did Thomas, Reed, and Wolford (2016) in their work. As an initial baseline study, we decided to base ourselves on the conclusions drawn by the authors in order to verify the hypotheses and conclusions of the theory, while complementing the theory through the results obtained.

The rebel credibility dilemma, as theorized and analyzed in the initial reference work, introduces the hypothesis of general credibility that would be of some importance to rebel groups. Indeed, it seems that credibility, and more specifically the quest for credibility, can influence the demands made and their importance when they are issued (Sobel, 1985). The initial theory also posits the principle that rebels seem to make demands – no matter how large the demands are – only when the rebel group is sufficiently optimistic about its chances of facing the government in the event of a commitment to direct conflict. It is important to clarify the notion of credibility in the sense of the original study to better understand the evolution that we are driving at within this initial concept. Indeed, in their work, Thomas, Reed, and Wolford understand the concept of credibility as an attractiveness of the continuation of the fighting from the point of view of rebel groups in opposition to a threat to fight for governments if the demands of rebel groups are not

met. We therefore wish to develop the notion of credibility within our theorization and model, in order to limit it to the mere threat and attraction of combat (Gibbs, 2017). The rebels' credibility dilemma is a dilemma in the sense that the rebels seek to give weight to their action and therefore indirectly to gain recognition as a specific actor (Huang, 2016). The dilemma therefore arises through the initial hypothesis put forward. To gain credibility in general, a rebel group will be tempted to make more important demands than what it is theoretically capable of asking in a negotiation process with regard to its power, in order to appear, through its demands, more credible and therefore stronger. The dilemma therefore stands out with the hypothesis of an illusion of power through the idea that a weaker rebel group will make greater demands.

All of this seems to contrast the initial theoretical choice of considering both governments and rebel groups as actors, which would seem rational (Moore, 1995). As a result, it would also appear that the likelihood of rebel groups making at least a request for government sovereignty—which is, likely to alter state sovereignty in any way (Thomson, 1995)—would increase in proportion to the importance of the military capabilities of rebel groups.

The anchor point of our study lies in the latest theoretical and empirical result presented, namely the fact that strong and weak rebel groups are both more likely to make strong demands relative to government sovereignty than rebel groups with average general power.

This predominant explanation lies at the very heart of the rebels' credibility dilemma. This initial empirical and theoretical evidence is justified by the fact that weak groups would be looking for credibility and would issue extremely important demands in order to gain credibility. When rebel groups become more powerful, the question of credibility seems to deviate from their main objectives and demands made should be more moderate. Then finally, when the groups are sufficiently powerful, the importance of the demands would be explained by the fact that the question of credibility is completely discarded and that the demands carried out – even important – come more from a will to realize (Bénabou & Tirole, 2004). Thus, the notion of credibility, in our work, must be understood as the need to be taken seriously by the authorities and therefore to be heard as a fully-fledged and high-level actor in the negotiation processes, not just as a threat or an attraction to engage in or continue fighting (Azad, 2019).

Just as it is important to anchor the notion of credibility in the general framework of international relations and more particularly in peace studies, it is important to define the concept of power and in particular the introduction that we have decided to make of the concept of relative

power, out of step with the initial study of the rebels' credibility dilemma. The notion of power of rebel groups is quite difficult to estimate and its comparative measurement is something delicate (Krause, 2017). If the study from which we decided to start our research measures the power of the rebel groups through absolute real capacities only, we decided to couple with these last data another relative factor that we decided to attach to the national framework of each movement. If this choice seems rather delicate and carries a methodological bias, it seems that specifically in relation to the geographical space studied, this relative focus in relation to the states is justified, in particular regarding the organization and the national presence of rebel groups. In addition, this relative indicator allows us to rule out another methodological bias of comparison with framing on the relationship between governments and rebels, knowing that each state does not have the same means vis-à-vis rebel groups (Aronson & Huth, 2017).

## **Methods**

First, it seems essential to better understand how we selected the rebel groups and all the data about them that were useful in our study. Using the non-state actors in civil wars database (Cunningham et al., 2013) and supplementing them extensively with existing historical studies, national archives from countries of the area and press releases, we have established a list of 48 rebel groups over a period from 1945 to 2019. Our main selection criterion is conceptual and temporal to minimal. Indeed, we chose to select the rebel groups that had a duration of action of more than one month, in order to avoid relationships that were too short and left few negotiations, as can be the case in a coup d'état. In addition, our definition of a rebel group is characterized by its opposition to a government or to a conventional regional authority, as may be the case sometimes (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012).

One of our main notions in the initial hypothesis refers directly to the notion of rebel group power. It therefore seemed essential to better introduce this concept which must be palpable and quantifiable to compare the different groups with each other through their claims and their relative power. However, this concept of power requires relative implementation vis-à-vis the governments and countries in which they are, knowing that we first study behaviors within a relationship in the form of a complex dyad. For that, we extracted important variables built on the existing work of the non-state actors in civil wars database (Cunningham et al., 2013), in order to group together the most significant and important variables in the context of establishing a measure, in the form of relative power  $P(r)$ .



With these variables we came to form a relative power indicator  $P(r)$   $\{P(r) \in \mathbb{R}, 0,4 \leq P(r) < 1\}$

$$P(r) = \sum_{i=1}^n \left( \frac{n(r)}{p(n)} \cdot 10^3 \right) + \rho(r) + \gamma(r) + \alpha(r) + \varphi(r)$$

where  $n(r)$  is the estimate number of rebel group members. The value  $p(n)$  corresponds to the total population of the country where the rebel group is acting in relative value to the period of the rebel group activity. The variable  $\rho(r)$  corresponds to the general estimate rebel group's strength against the government of which it composes the dyad (three possible values: *much weaker* = 0.1 ; *weaker* = 0.2 ; *moderate* = 0.3). The variables  $\gamma(r)$ ,  $\alpha(r)$  and  $\varphi(r)$  respectively correspond to the mobilization capacity, the arming capacity and the combat capacity of the rebel groups relatively to their respective dyads (three possible values for each variable: *very low* = 0.1 ; *low* = 0.15 ; *moderate* = 0.2).

Thus, we have a tool for measuring the relative power  $P(r)$  of each rebel group, which helps us to better match the entire list of demands specific to each rebel group. The measure of the relative power that we propose through the indicator  $P(r)$  differs quite broadly from the single measure of the real absolute capacities of the rebel groups in that it absorbs the capacities by nuancing the latter in the face of the different governments making up the dyad. This measure has certain limits, in particular with regard to its possible transposition into other geographical areas. Indeed, there is the possibility of bias through potential identification and the possibility of problems inferential to the use of a relative measure of power (Keith, 2019). However, we believe that with regard to the area studied, such a consideration of the relative power is necessary in order to avoid a comparison bias, as we have advanced in the theoretical framework.

In this way, our methodological protocol is based on the notion of power and its comparison with the demands of each rebel group for which we have created categorization scales to better treat the data retrieved through the various sources cited.

### **Scales of Categorization of Demands**

In order to test the general hypothesis of the rebel credibility dilemma theory, it is important to return to the initial categorization (Thomas et al., 2016). This first categorization takes in our study the name of **Scale No. 1**, considered as our first base of analysis to offer a first reading of the recovered data and especially to verify for the case of Latin America, the results obtained on the African area. This **Scale No. 1** allows us to classify the various claims and demands of rebel groups

around their degree of threat on the sovereignty of the dyad governments. **G** groups demands that could *undermine the sovereignty of the government in place directly or indirectly* and **NG** groups demands that *cannot undermine the sovereignty of the government in place*. We consider that a demand that undermines the sovereignty of government is a demand that questions the institutional and ideological organization of the government, as defined by Stewart (2018). This classification allows us to test the initial hypothesis of Thomas, Reed, and Wolford's work on the rebels' credibility dilemma. This first scale can be called scale of importance of demands.

The other two scales that we have undertaken to formalize are based on observations of the data that we have collected, but also on a process of classification by type of requests in order to better understand the nature of the demands and especially how demands can be part of a search for credibility not only with the government making up the dyad, but also with populations and international community.

**Scale No. 2** proposes a primary classification to our approach in order to create three blocks to generically classify our data by areas of interest to which the demands of the rebels refer. **P** groups all the requests related to the field of *politics*, including the whole domain in the scientific meaning (Palonen, 2003). **E** groups all the requests related directly or indirectly to the field of the *economy*. Finally, **S** groups all *social and societal issues* outside the political and economic spheres. This scale is representative of the areas of the expression of demands that can be made by rebel groups.

**Scale No. 3** is intended as a tool for more accurate analysis of the demands of rebel groups, through an axis centred around themes rather than domains. This last scale of analysis includes 18 themes that we have established according to their relevance to the data exploited and the empirical needs of our research. The purpose of this classification is not only to adapt to the data, to present the data and to serve as the basis for further demand and claim analysis studies. These themes therefore cover all of the data recovered and make it possible to classify each of the requests made in one of the categories of this classification scale. **ED** groups demands about *education* in general, from literacy to university applications. **PH** brings together demands about *public health*, from campaigning against endemic diseases to creating social security. **IR** brings together demands about *international relations*, from stopping some diplomatic relations of the government of the dyad to the withdrawal of foreign troops on national ground. **W** groups demands about *work and working conditions*, from the reduction of weekly working hours to the introduction of policies about unemployment. **SV** groups demands about *state violence*, from the government's cessation

of torture to the repeal of state of emergency laws. *I* groups demands about *purely ideological claims*, from the establishment of a political ideology to religious ideology. *SM* groups demands about *social misery*, from increased purchasing power to famine. *ECO* groups demands relating to *ecology* in general, from global environmental protection to the implementation of new autonomous energy policies. *APP* groups demands about the *abuse of political power*, from stopping electoral fraud to stopping corruption. *RG* groups demands directly *related to rebel groups*, from the release of political prisoners to the conclusion of a ceasefire. *EM* groups demands about *ethnic, cultural, political or social minorities*, from the creation of an autonomous region to the preservation of indigenous rights. *M* groups demands about *moral* questions, from the adoption of a state religion to the prohibition of marital infidelity. *NES* groups demands about the *national economic system*, from nationalization of companies to state economic planning. *T* groups demands about *taxation* in general, from lower taxes to a VAT application only for luxury goods. *Y* groups demands for *youth*, from the extension of voting rights from 18 years old to the construction of orphanages. *SSI* groups demands about *state structures and institutions*, from the end of the current regime to the modernization of state institutions. *GF* groups demands about *general freedoms*, whether individual or collective, from the right to demonstrate to the liberation of women. Finally, *TA* groups demands for *technological advances*, from the development of a technological industry to the modernization of agricultural production.

This last scale seems to be the most important in the final scope of our study. Indeed, it allows us to compartmentalize the different demands and to extract essential components in our methodological protocol through our basic data. This **Scale No. 3** may be called the thematic scale of the claims.

### **Methodological Protocol and Basic Data**

Our study is therefore based on data we collected from a large sample of rebel groups in Latin America from 1945 to 2019.

This choice is justified by the quantitative importance of the data in this geographical area and for this given period, which will allow us to avoid a quantitative bias. In addition, the area studied seemed particularly conducive to the study of the rebels' credibility dilemma, in order to offer a comparison with the African study already carried out, especially since the extended period that we have chosen corresponds to a new area of claims, battles, and rebellions in Latin America (Flores & Rosaldo, 2009). The choice of the extension until 2019 allows to include new rebel

groups and especially the most recent requests of the rebel groups still in activity. It also allows us to partially eliminate the geographic and temporal bias with the importance of Marxist groups, and to include a number of indigenous rebel groups, more numerous since the start of the 21st century (Cleary, 2000). Our analysis sample includes 48 rebel groups (Table 1) in 19 Latin American countries<sup>1</sup>, with a total of 828 requests. This distribution allows us to have a wide range of rebel groups facing various governments depending on the periods of activity.

The heterogeneity of our data is characterized by the values of the different relative powers  $P(r)$ , ranging from 0.4016 to 0.9958, as well as in the great diversity of demands made by rebel groups during their existence.

It should also be noted that the total quantity of demands issued by each rebel group differs, but however, the distribution as a function of the relative power is fairly homogeneous, which avoids this methodological bias of first order.

Our methodological protocol is based initially on the objective study of each rebel group of our sample as well as the government to which it is opposed, in order to extract the essential data to calculate the relative power  $P(r)$ . To do this, it was necessary to build on the work already done on non-state actors in civil conflicts (Cunningham et al., 2013), while providing sufficient material and research through a thorough study of relations between rebel groups and governments, thanks in particular to the historical sources and the national archives of the various states.

On the other hand, it was necessary to conduct a background study on all the demands made by the rebel groups in our sample on their period of activity as a rebel group opposed to a government. This research was carried out through various press releases and manifestos issued by rebel groups to governments, as well as to the people and the international community. In addition, we also studied the various archives available and declassified in order to take into account the demands

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<sup>1</sup> Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guadeloupe (France), Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname & Uruguay.

**Table 1***List of studied rebel groups*

Ação Libertadora Nacional (BR)	Alliance révolutionnaire caraïbe (FR)	Comandos Ernesto Rojas (CO)
Comision Nestor Paz Zamora (BO)	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (CO)	Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Bolivia (BO)
Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo (PY)	Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (GT)	Ejército Guerrillero Túpac Katari (BO)
Ejército Popular de Liberación (CO)	Ejército Popular Revolucionario (MX)	Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (AR)
Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (SV)	Ejército Revolucionario Guevarista (CO)	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (MX)
Frente Nacionalista Patria y Libertad (CL)	Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (CL)	Frente Patriótico Morazanista (HN)
Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (NI)	Frente Unido de Liberación Nacional (PY)	Front pour la libération et la reconstruction nationales (HT)
Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas (AR)	Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (GT)	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (CO)
Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Indígenas del Pacífico (CO)	Fuerzas Populares de Liberación "Farabundo Martí" (SV)	Grupo Popular Guerrillero (MX)
Grupos de Combatientes Populares (EC)	Jungle Commando (SR)	Montoneros (AR)
Movimento Revolucionário Oito de Outubro (BR)	Movimiento 19 de Abril (CO)	Movimiento 26 de Julio (CU)
Movimiento Armado Quintin Lame (CO)	Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (CL)	Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (PE)
Movimiento Juvenil Lautaro (CL)	Movimiento Nacionalista Tacuara (AR)	Movimiento Revolucionario 13 Noviembre (GT)
Movimiento Revolucionario 14 de Junio (DO)	Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (PE)	Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas (GT)
Partido de los Pobres (MX)	Resistencia Ancestral Mapuche (AR)	Resistencia Nacional (SV)
Sendero Luminoso (PE)	Tupamaros (UY)	Vanguardia Armada Revolucionária Palmares (BR)

that could be emitted during negotiations between rebel group and government. Thus, we consulted all the national archives of the countries concerned in order to recover the documents of negotiations, declassified analyses, the manifestos and the declarations—often public—of the rebel groups, in order to recover all the demands and claims. Thereafter, we categorized each request according to the three categorization scales to obtain the data that we present in this study. It seems that some documents are not completely declassified, and we have not been able to recover all the documents from certain countries. However, this characteristic does not necessarily

induce a bias in our data since the rebel groups in Latin America seem to be extremely communicative regarding their demands and claims, especially for the rebel groups closest in time (Cortina Orero, 2018).

Once these data were collected, we tried to transcribe the various classification scales that we theorized previously to establish a better readability of the raw data.

Finally, our study focused on the verification of initial hypotheses, through a similar but differentiated methodology, and the release of further results towards the formalization of a new theory of the rebels' credibility dilemma.

The use of simple linear regression seems to be the best way to test the stated hypotheses in a clear and specific manner and thus obtain results according to the intensity of the requests and the  $P(r)$  indicator. The use of multiple linear regression through the different constituent indices of  $P(r)$  does not provide more information and does not allow us to take into account the relativity of the power of the rebel groups according to governments making up the dyad.

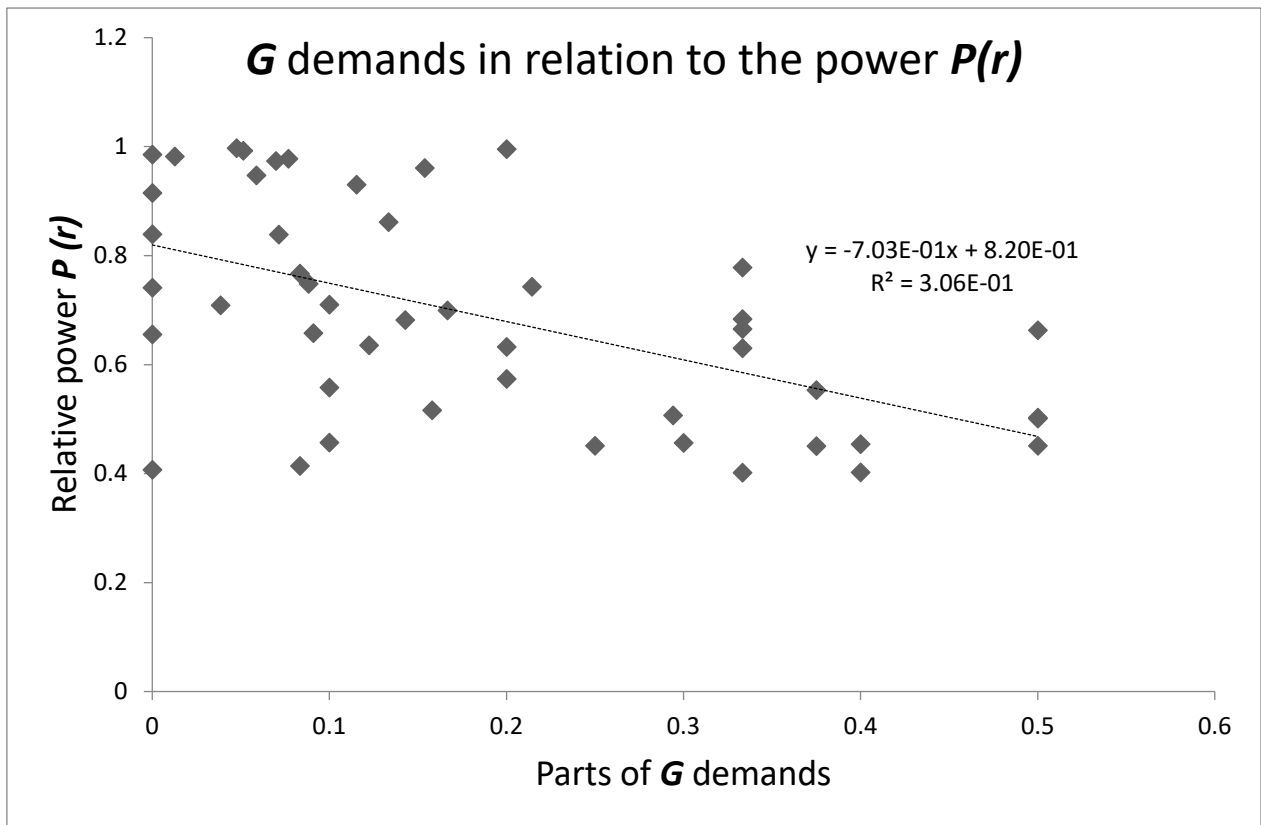
## **Results and Critical Review**

### **The Search for Basic Credibility**

When we try to get a better understanding of the distribution of requests, we realize that, in general,  $G$  demands represent only a small part of the total claims, accounting for 18.63% of total demands. This small proportion seems to be general and is not limited to  $P(r)$ . That is to say that in general, rebel groups make fewer  $G$ -type demands. However, in order to better characterize the general distribution of these demands, according to the relative power of the rebel groups, it is essential to compare these different parts of  $G$  and  $NG$  demands with our relative power indicator  $P(r)$  (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1**

*G demands in relation to the power  $P(r)$*



The results of our study seem to show quite distinctly that there is an important relationship between the relative power  $P(r)$  of rebel groups and the demands of rebel groups in a dyad relationship with governments over the time and space geographically studied. Thus, in a global manner, rebel groups would tend to issue a higher number of **G** demands when their relative power against a government would be too weak, with the primary aim of finding credibility in the negotiation process. This quest for credibility with governments and through **G** demands seems to be lost as rebel groups gain relative power  $P(r)$  in relation to the power of governments. This trend can be seen in a small part of **G** demands or rather an exclusivity of **NG** demands.

Contrary to the initial observation of the theory of the rebels' credibility dilemma, our sample shows that groups with the highest relative power emit very few **G** demands. However, the general trend initially proposed seems to be verified through our sample and this allows us to characterize, in certain proportions, the behavior of rebel groups and their search for initial credibility, as we defined it.

These results of our sample do not seem to be influenced by the different possible outcomes of the conflicts when they are over. Similarly, there seems to be no prior relationship between these results and the types of ideology of rebel groups and those of different governments. There also seems to be no geographical trend, which allows us to see a global phenomenon throughout the region, or by extension to all rebel groups, but it is impossible to broadly extend these results empirically for all rebel groups. The difficulty of a global analysis raises the question of the importance of regional particularities in our analysis. Indeed, regarding our sample, it seems that the initial trend is verified, but we cannot extend these results without global data concerning the demands of rebel groups.

It is possible to discuss this first advanced result, in particular on the effects of this relationship, in order to know if the search for credibility is at the heart of the demands of rebel groups. We can also discuss the reliability of the indicator  $P(r)$  which not only categorizes the groups according to absolute real capacities, invariably making them fit into boxes which sometimes are not sufficiently revealing of the rebel groups' power, but also the more we can question the importance of the relativity of this measure. Indeed, the relativity of power has been measured through the relationship between rebel groups and governments. Regarding the area studied, the majority of rebel groups acted and placed themselves within a national framework and therefore could be compared to national governments. However, transnational or local rebel groups located in sub-state bodies therefore form an important methodological bias which should be taken into account in other geographical or temporal areas (Arslan, 2018). In addition, the low share of  $G$  demands allows us to question the reality and the tangibility of these requests within the negotiation process, even if the trend seems confirmed on the studied sample.

Beyond the explanation we offer through the theory of the rebels' credibility and the importance of this credibility, other works allow us to put these results in perspective through a double-explanatory mechanism. Indeed, the demands of rebel groups tend to be a lever for negotiation with government authorities and the perception of power is a primary issue for rebel groups (Jenne et al., 2007). However, it would seem that the perception of power pushes rebel groups, in an opposite logic, to make more extreme demands (Ayres, 2000), and that these demands are notably motivated by brutal changes in negotiation situations (Toft, 2006).



Thus, during our research, we found that other factors and relationships were consistent with the search for other credibilities, and that it did not focus solely on a search for a general credibility, or rather a unique credibility with governments.

### **International and Popular Credibility**

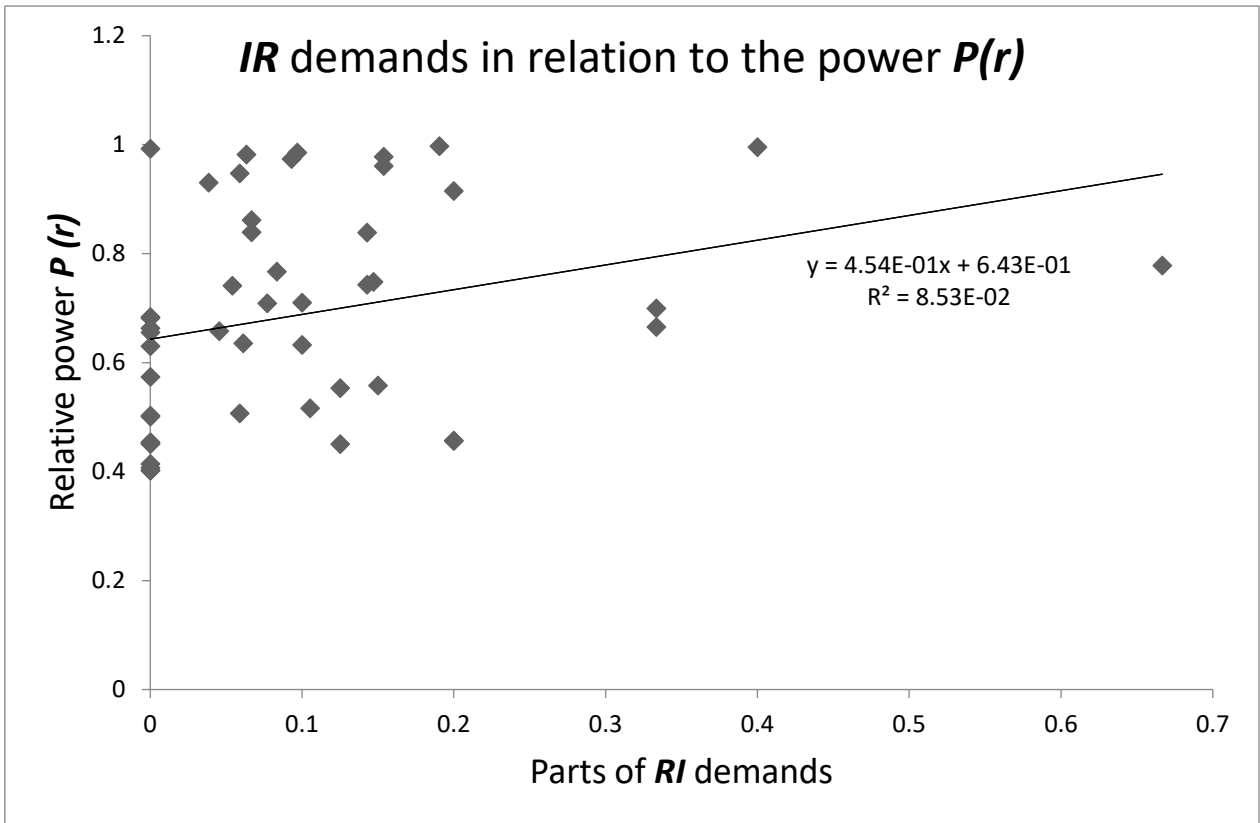
The addition to the classification **Scale No. 3** of the demands of a group indexing the **IR** demands about international relations allowed us to draw a rather interesting trend concerning the search for credibility of the rebel groups (Fig. 2).

A relation therefore seems to be established between the relative power  $P(r)$  and the part of **IR** demands. This tendency is observed in the sense that the more a rebel group has a relative power  $P(r)$ , the more it seems to be inclined to perform at least one **IR** demand. However, we note that in general, the place of **IR** demands is not preponderant despite the fact that the trend seems quite clear. This small proportion can be interpreted as marking the fact that for the area studied, the preponderance of the state and societal framework does not offer a sufficiently important place to international bodies over the period given (Legler, 2013).

These results pave the way for a further degree of analysis in understanding the phenomenon of the rebels' search for credibility. Indeed, we are now able to consider the search for international credibility as an additional phase of credibility research with a third party to the original dyad between rebel group and government. This third actor which can be interpreted as the whole of the international scene, is particularly noticeable in the content of **IR** demands, and in the importance of these demands for rebel groups with an important relative power  $P(r)$ .

**Figure 2**

*IR demands in relation to the power  $P(r)$*



The vision of a new phase is indicative of a search for credibility completed, facing a new dimension of the search for credibility for larger rebel groups.

However, the results seem to show that the search for international credibility is not a constant depending on the power of the rebel groups, prompting us to recognize that there is a search for significant international credibility on the part of the rebel groups, but that this is not necessarily proportional to its relative power. We find the importance of this international dimension of rebel groups in numerous works, and our results further highlight the importance of this international dimension (Harbom & Wallensteen, 2005). Putting this search for credibility into perspective leads us to think that, given the data on the area studied, the rebel groups are increasingly seeking to gain credibility and recognition from the international community, which has become a central actor, nowadays, in negotiations and peacekeeping processes in particular (Jo, 2015).

Alongside this third actor, is another actor outside of the original dyad. Indeed, it seems that there is a search for popular credibility through important social, economic, and political demands

in favor of the populations. To better understand this, we sought to gather its various demands through the **Scale No. 3** categorization of demands, gathering *ED, PH, W, SV, SM, ECO, APP, EM, T, Y, GF* demands (Fig. 3). The grouping of these categories is interpreted as an attempt to mobilize popular demands, which can be shared with a large segment of the population, or more generally which are established for the populations to improve their conditions in particular. We thus find there the requests relating to education; public health; working conditions; state violence; social misery; ecology; potential abuse of political power; minorities ethnic; taxes; youth; and general freedoms.

The results seem to show that there is no relationship between the relative power  $P(r)$  and the popular demands, which suggests that the search for popular credibility would be permanent or steady for all rebel groups.

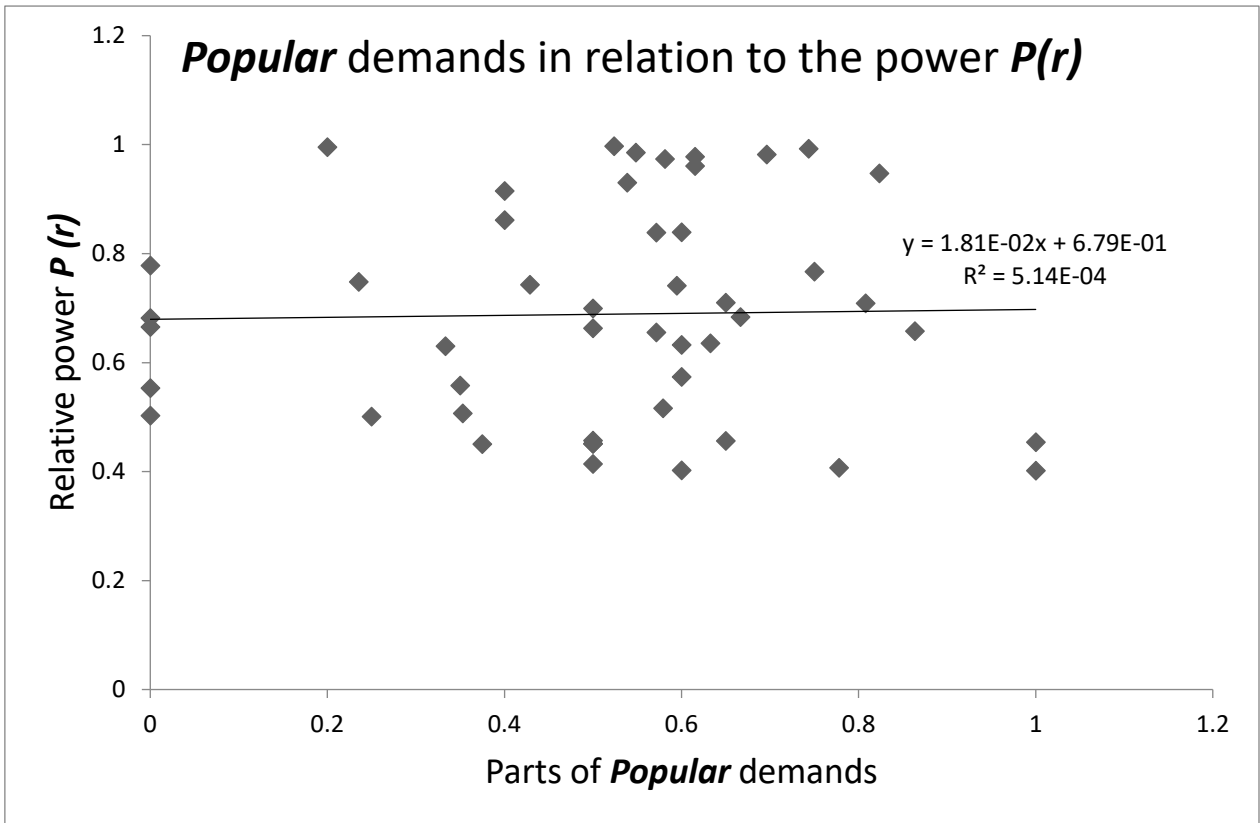
These results allow us to further broaden the spectrum of analysis that is the theory of the rebels' credibility dilemma and to better understand the mechanisms of reflection and action in terms of game theory in this kind of conflict situation. However, the results presented are open to discussion and it would seem that this precise study on a geographical area such as Latin America may have some biases. These biases could appear, first of all, through the representation of Marxist-communist ideology as a prominent sub-category of rebel group in the area and the studied duration (67% of the sample). Similarly, it is possible to discuss the different types of conflicts, including conflicts that have benefited from external assistance, both for rebel groups and for governments, and the impacts of such external assistance on demands, relative power of rebel groups, and ultimately their search for credibility.

Nevertheless, the whole point of research in the field now lies in taking into account these two third-party actors, namely the international community and the populations, in order to better understand the influences of these actors on the search for credibility of rebel groups.

This accounting of the third-party actors has already taken place through various research works on transnationalism (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). However, all the contributions of the results that we have just provided is to consider these aspects through the search for credibility of rebel groups in order to better understand their behavioral logic.

**Figure 3**

*Popular demands in relation to the power  $P(r)$*



The results that we advance here are operable with regard to the temporal period and the geographic space of Latin America and therefore the specificities of this space as much as of the period studied. However, a series of historical, political, and social studies would make it possible to confirm, refute or corroborate all of these results, over different periods and spaces, but also by implementing different methodologies and data.

In addition, the mechanisms and dynamics of these interactions and these relations of influence seem more than interesting for in-depth study, in particular from a psychological point of view through the didactic logic of the psychosociological study of conflicts and multiple negotiations.

We can also discuss the use of scales, whose completeness seems full for the area studied, but which might not be for other areas and other temporality. In addition, despite the definitions we have given, it seems that certain requests are at the borders of several categories, which also poses a problem in the methodology as we have established it.

## **Modelling the Credibility Dilemma with Four Actors**

The results that we obtained thanks to our sample allow us to set up a new model of the dilemma. We were able to confirm, on our sample, that the hypotheses of the dilemma had an influence on the relations of the initial dyad, through demands made by the rebel groups. In addition, we have extracted demands relating to international issues and societal issues by assuming that they did not only have their source in the relations of the dyad.

Thus, we left the dyad to consider the demands of the rebel groups as directed not only towards the government, but also towards the international community and towards the people.

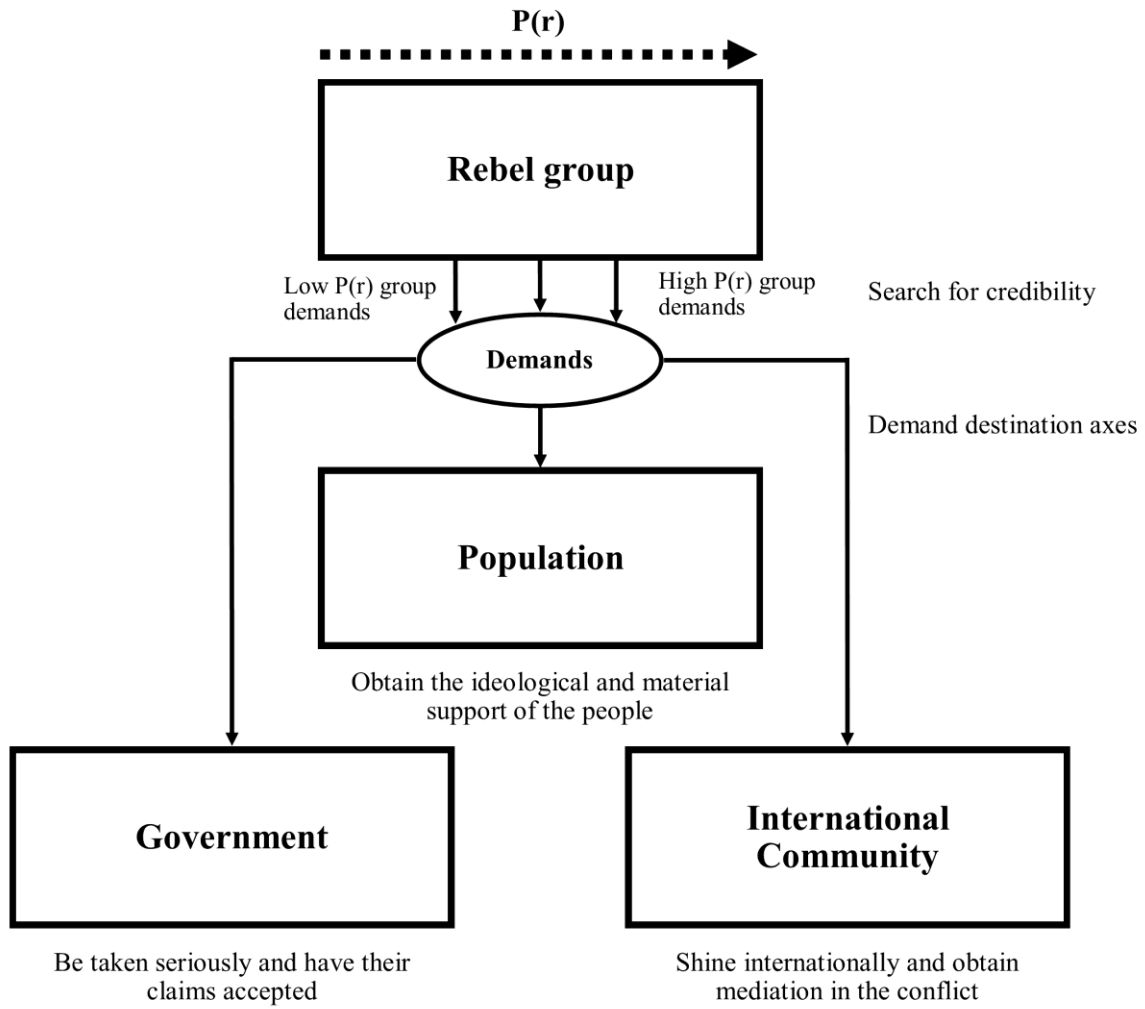
From these basic hypotheses, we have developed a model of the rebels' credibility dilemma with four actors, trying to understand through theoretical and empirical hypotheses the objectives of these demands as a function of the relative power of the rebel groups (Fig. 4).

Our general model of the rebels' credibility dilemma assumes that all rebel groups – regardless of relative power – issue popular demands to the people. We also assume that the more powerful a rebel group is, compared to a government, the more international demands it will make to the international community, and the weaker a rebel group is, compared to a government, the more it will make demands that jeopardize the sovereignty of the government.

The search for popular credibility of the rebel groups seems to be an objective at all times, knowing that the vast majority of the rebel groups studied claim to be part of the people, their sufferings, and their problems (Eck, 2014). This search for credibility seems to have the ultimate objective of obtaining not only moral and ideological support from the people, but also their material support in the event that fighting can take place (Wood, 2013). This search for support does not seem to be characterized by the power of rebel groups and, on the contrary, seems to be central in the negotiation process, especially in the public communication of requests (Larson & Lewis, 2018).

The search for credibility with governments through strong and important demands affecting the sovereignty of these governments is an important issue for rebel groups seeking to assert themselves and to give credibility to claims that are more important to them (Buhaug, 2006). Our explanatory hypotheses relate to the fact that the rebel groups seek to appear more important and powerful than they really are when there is a need for them to do so, for example to have certain requests accepted or to make an act of presence and pressure (Jetten & Hornsey, 2011).

**Figure 4**  
*The credibility dilemma model*



Finally, the search for international credibility is an objective that we could classify as secondary or even tertiary in the objectives of the rebel groups through their requests. In fact, these requests come after popular and governmental requests, and constitute a search for credibility that we could qualify as final credibility, through international institutions. This research manifests itself notably through international standards and international dialogue, giving an echo to the rebel group through its credibility (Mueller, 2014). In addition, rebel groups may be willing to find a third player in the international community who could act as a mediator in relations between the rebels and the government (Duursma, 2014). Finally, the whole dynamic of transnational rebellions seems to carry a very interesting example which allows us to get out of the simple

relationship of dyads and to undertake the international community as a primordial stake of the initial dilemma through the demands of rebel groups (Salehyan, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

Thus, we presented a new approach to the theory of the rebels' credibility dilemma. Thanks to the use of new data on a geographical area and a specific period, we sought to confirm the already existing results in the discipline. We have also introduced two new concepts to the theory of the rebels' credibility dilemma by conceptualizing two new actors to whom rebel groups are seeking credibility: the international community and the people.

We have shown that weaker rebel groups tend to make larger demands for the purpose of seeking credibility. We have distinguished this search for credibility by specifying it as intended for governments. We have shown that the strongest rebel groups tend to make more demands on international affairs in order to seek credibility with the international community. We have shown that all rebel groups seem to make a number of popular demands in order to gain credibility with the population. Finally, we have conceptualized through our hypothesis, a new model of rebels' credibility dilemma with four actors.

The confirmation of all these results must involve studies on other geographical areas and other time periods. It would be interesting to seek a better understanding of the relations between the rebel groups and these new actors, as well as the relations between the governments and these new actors in the context of the dyadic relationship with the rebel groups. It would also be interesting to study more specifically the search for credibility among the populations in order to better understand the importance of this search for credibility for geographical areas other than Latin America.

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