One for All or All for One? Ideology and Cohesion in the IRA and PIRA

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Insurgent cohesion and fragmentation represent key variables in understanding the behaviour of armed groups. Only recently, academia has advanced explanations to assess why some rebel organisations present a strong cohesion despite internal or external pressures, while others fragment. Thus, scholars have evidenced how the quality and the degree of institutional strength of an organisation can account for such variation (Kenny, 2010; Staniland, 2010, 2014; Weinstein, 2007; Schubiger, 2015). Within this framework, this paper will consider that if strong institutions contribute to a higher degree of cohesion and if 'ideologies provide the blueprint for institutions' (Sanin and Wood, 2014:220) then the latter should have a role in understanding cohesion and fragmentation within an armed group. This analysis will therefore argue that the degree of ideological strength, not the presence of an ideology *per se*, is a useful lens of analysis. Using Zelina's (2016) typology of ideological strength, it will be argued that armed groups with a stronger ideological embeddedness within its institutions are expected to result in more cohesive organisations, while groups with a weaker ideological strength are expected be more prone to fragmentation. Firstly, this paper will address a necessary clarification on the concepts of cohesion and fragmentation. Secondly, it will highlight the role of armed group institutions in its understanding of cohesion and fragmentation. Thereafter, it will lay out the critical nexus between institutions and ideological strength. Finally, it will analyse the notion of ideological strength in relation to the case of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Provisional IRA (PIRA), between 1959 and 1989. The scope of the case study will be to support the theoretical argumentation and evidence how a higher level of cohesion is related to an increased ideological strength and fragmentation to a diminished ideological strength.

Defining Terms and Concepts

In delineating the conceptual framework of the analysis within this paper, cohesion will be defined as 'the creation and maintenance of cooperative efforts toward the attainment of the organization's goals' (Kenny, 2010:534). This understanding of cohesion will also encompass two other terms: 'primary cohesion', as the positive nature of horizontal and vertical bonds between group members in sharing a sense of mutual responsibility and trust; and 'secondary cohesion', 'as the extent to which individuals identify with armed group organisations as a whole' (Schubiger, 2015:8; Wood, 2009:137). Fragmentation will be narrowly defined as the split of an insurgent organisation in two or more distinct organisations (Kenny, 2010: 537; Schubiger, 2015:7; Woldemariam, 2011:35-36). These conceptualisations of cohesion and fragmentation will be considered at an organisational level. Therefore, the analysis will refer to insurgent or rebel organisations and not to groups part of an organisation. Ideology will be considered as 'a set of more or less systematic ideas that identify a constituency, the challenges the group confronts, the objectives to pursue on behalf of that group and a (perhaps vague) program of action' (Sanin and Wood, 2014:214). Finally, ideological strength will be defined as the degree of embeddedness of ideology within socialisation, discipline, political education and recruitment of a rebel organisation (Zelina, 2016). However, it is also important to bear in mind that the "strength" or "weakness" of an ideology does not refer in qualitatively terms to the type or nature of the ideology (Zelina, 2016).

Organising Rebellion: Institutions and Cohesion

Armed organisations face several challenges. They operate in an unstable context which necessarily needs

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enhanced cooperation and interdependence among its members (Sanin and Wood, 2014; Weinstein 2007). Furthermore, the efficacy of an armed group is not only weighed in terms of coordination, but also in pro-active fighting of state forces or of other competing groups, and by their interaction with the civilian population (Kenny, 2010; Schubiger, 2015; Kalyvas and Balcells, 2010). Therefore, rebel organisations have the dual necessity to foster commitment in achieving a common goal and must further maintain a structural integrity (Weinstein, 2007; Schubiger, 2015). Insurgent organisations need to promote 'shared institutional mechanisms to foster cooperation' (Weinstein, 2007:139) to minimise the divergence of preferences and the operative moral hazard (Weinstein, 2007; Shapiro, 2013). Ultimately, this is ensured through its institutions in terms of recruitment, military training, political education, socialisation and discipline (Hoover Green, 2011, 2016). Hence, to understand the causes of insurgent cohesion and fragmentation it is important to analyse the strength of the institutions that define the organisation itself.

Authors have contended that the strength and quality of such institutions is based on different influencing factors. Weinstein (2007) has argued that the availability of resources defines the internal control and resilience of an armed organisation. For example, organisations which rely on economic endowments supported by state sponsors, natural resources or other forms of financing will be more prone to indiscipline and indiscriminate violence due to a lack of control and will more likely fragment (Weinstein, 2007). Though this argument is certainly a valid explanation, some of the most cohesive organizations have relied on external support through drug trade and other forms of endowments, as in the case of the Taliban and the FARC (Staniland, 2014:4; Sanin, 2008). Alternatively, Staniland (2014:54) considers how social resources, such as horizontal and vertical ties, determine the organisational strength of an armed group. A stronger societal network will shape a more integrated armed group, also within the community, and establish a more cohesive organisation (Staniland, 2014). Although the social base of an insurgent organization may influence its institutions, it cannot represent the sole factor for its cohesiveness. Kenny (2010:551) further argues that the interaction with state forces and the effects of indiscriminate violence will influence the institutions of an organisation. Shared experiences of state repression and the unifying sense of burden sharing are conducive factors which promote organisational socialization (Kenny, 2010). Though these theoretical frameworks all represent consistent explanations, cohesion is limitedly understood in terms of primary cohesion. By evidencing how institutions are exogenously modelled, cohesion is only seen externally driven and not as internally shaped (Kenny, 2010; Weinstein, 2007; Staniland, 2014:221). Consequently, these explanations do not consider the transformative nature of institutions in defining secondary cohesion (Hoover Green, 2011; Wood, 2009; Schubiger, 2015).

From this perspective, other scholars have evidenced how the type of warfare influences institutions (Kalyvas and Balcells, 2010; Schubiger, 2015). In irregular warfare, organizations are forced to develop stronger institutions to confront a militarily superior force and minimize the technological disadvantage (Kalyvas, 2005; Kalyvas and Balcells, 2010). Therefore, insurgents, in refining their strategic tactics to pursue covert and independent actions, need to maximize discipline and cohesiveness (Schubiger, 2015). Thus, these armed groups will invest more in institutions and reinforce secondary cohesion (Schubiger, 2015; Hoover Green, 2011; Kalyvas and Balcells, 2015). Still, though insurgent organizations must maintain a stronger internal control and cohesion in asymmetric conflict, not all armed groups maintain the same level of institutional strength. Therefore, if all organisations rely on institutions to socialize, indoctrinate and discipline their members, not all insurgent organisations rely on them in the same way. In this context, ideology can serve as an important complementary explanation to understand the institutional-cohesive strength of a rebel organisation.

Shaping Institutions: Ideological Strength

Ideology represents a critical lens through which individuals acquire a 'shared framework of mental models […] that provides both an interpretation of the environment' (Joost et al. 2009:309) and a normative system of 'foundational social beliefs' (Van Dijk, 2006:116). Throughout the literature, scholars have evidenced how ideology helps create a collective identity (Lichbach, 1998:92) and how it delineates the organisational structure of an armed group (Sanin and Wood 2014; Weinstein, 2007:196). In terms of cohesion, ideology can affect both primary and secondary cohesion. As aforementioned, an armed organisation relies on its institution to function and though institutions are not ideological by nature, they are influenced by the latter (Zelina, 2016). In conflict, an armed group may face losses, desertion of combatants and the necessity to recruit new members. Importantly, studies have emphasized how ideologically committed individuals have a 'higher risk tolerance' and are less prone to 'side-switching' (Oppenheim

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et al., 2015:8). The experience of state violence may also increase the number of recruits that are willing to join and the commitment of single individuals to fight, but such flow of new recruits may weaken the organisational cohesion of the armed group, intensifying the probabilities of fragmentation (Schubiger, 2015). However, ideologically strong organisations should present a more selective type of recruitment strategy and maintain internal stability, while ideologically weak groups will have a less consistent vetting process and be more prone to instability (Zelina, 2016:19). Ideologically strong groups are likewise expected to have lengthy indoctrination periods and various techniques to transform the preferences of the combatants (Oppenheim et al., 2015; Hoover Green, 2011; Zelina, 2016).

Moreover, insurgent organisation will promote socialization among members and discipline to ensure that combatants comply with the rules. In such a context, ideologically strong groups are expected to be associated with more strict and formal disciplinary measures for transgressions, than ideologically weak organisations (Hoover Green, 2011; Zelina, 2016). To account for this, studies have shown how groups with consistent political education have lower rates of opportunistic and unsanctioned violence (Hoover Green, 2011, 2016; Sanin and Wood, 2017; Wood, 2009). Ideologically strong organisations will further commit to more thorough political training as the 'formal instruction that explains specific social or political purposes of a particular conflict' and connect them 'to specific behavioural norms' (Hoover Green, 2016:625; Zelina 2016). Therefore, a group will have a strong ideological drive when educational institutions are organised by the leadership, when they involve most combatants (Hoover Green, 2011) and when its norms become institutionalised within the organisation and among its members (Sanin and Wood, 2014). As 'the experience of combat generally undermines political education' (Hoover Green 2011:43), organisations with a stronger ideology will invest consistently in political education (Zelina, 2016:10). To summarize, the ideological strength of an armed group can account for a stronger secondary cohesion and result in a more disciplined, committed and more cohesive organisation.

Cohesion and Ideological Strength: The IRA and the PIRA

Historically, the IRA has undergone several fragmentations, but has also demonstrated high levels of cohesiveness. In 1959, the IRA was a small voluntarist army-like organisation, loosely controlled, with little structure and low community support (Kenny, 2010:539; Dingley, 2012:155). Nonetheless, numerically, the membership of the organisation steadily expanded from about 657 volunteers in 1962 to 1,039 in 1966 (Shanahan 2009:22). Additionally, in the attempt to re-structure the organisation after the failed "Border Campaign", the IRA had tried to include political educational lectures as part of the military training, but the results of the latter had not been successful (Treacy, 2013:74). Consequently, the IRA leadership looked outside the organisation to shape an ideological intelligentsia, but in doing so failed to create Gramscian (1971) "organic intellectuals" among its ranks (Treacy, 2013:96). Despite explicit instructions from the leadership to prohibit any violent action, scattered episodes of violence still occurred (Kenny, 2010; Feeney, 2002:241). Such loose discipline was not welcomed and 'members were frustrated by the reluctance of the leadership to sanction actions' (Treacy 2013:109). Furthermore, members of the IRA shared different backgrounds: 'much of the rest of the IRA Army council in Dublin did not share the same experience of Protestant pogroms in the Catholic ghettoes of the North, there was a strong feeling that the Army Council no longer represented the interests of the people' (Kenny, 2010:539). The fragmentation of the IRA between 1969 and 1970 represented 'a battle among political entrepreneurs for control of the flood of potential new recruits' and the fragmentation of an existing organisation (Kenny, 2010:539). Though the IRA was 'filled with ideologues' (Kenny 2010:550), the lack of strong secondary cohesion, as a weak ideological strength in terms of political education, indoctrination and recruitment of members, led to its fragmentation. The IRA 'only thought they had a Movement', but failed to create one in which its members coherently identified (Goulding in Treacy, 2013:146).

From this fragmentation, the PIRA was formed and following the establishment of the Northern Ireland Government in 1971 and the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972, its members increased rapidly (Dingley, 2012). New recruits joined with different preferences 'motivated by their everyday experience of British tanks and soldiers', yet they did not share the ideology of the traditional Republicans (Kenny, 2010:544). The PIRA undertook a campaign to "bomb the Brits out" and initially maintained high levels of cohesion, emerging from a sentiment of solidarity among individuals bonded by familiar and kindred ties, rather than from a strong identification with the PIRA (Kenny, 2010). Yet, there was no clear strategy, no form of political education and training was rudimentary. Many volunteers were self-taught

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from US militia manuals and 'operations were conducted on the spur of the moment' (Dingley, 2012:156). Consequently, by the end of the 1970s, the organisation was becoming disintegrative. A new leadership recompiled the organisation and promoted a cohesive strategy for the "Long War" (Dingley, 2012). Being part of the PIRA became a full-time commitment (Kenny, 2010) and this resulted in a highly selective recruitment process (Bloom, 2016). The PIRA realised that cohesion could not be solely obtained by sharing a common goal and providing military training: its constituents had to feel as active participants of the organisation. Therefore, 'new members were inculcated with a sense of loyalty to the leadership and to the PIRA' (Kenny, 2010:545). The organisation also relied on its youth wing, *Na Fianna Eirann*, to screen, recruit and socialise young volunteers (Gill and Horgan, 2013). Additionally, socialisation and identification with the organisation was enhanced by the common experiences in prison, a space in which PIRA members would educate and politicise themselves (Kenny, 2010:545; Mac Innorachtaigh 2013). A "Green Book" was provided to the members and the new recruits, a *vademecum* stating the organisation's constitution and code of conduct (Dingley, 2012). The PIRA sought to promote itself as the *locus* of Republicanism, by enforcing group norms, introducing disciplinary mechanisms and increasing socialisation and political education. Investing in these institutions enabled the PIRA to maintain high levels of cohesion until the minor split in 1989.

In sum, both the cases of the IRA and then PIRA show how internal institutions are central in maintaining a strong relationship between the organisation and its members. Both highlight how moments of ideological strength were correlated with high levels of secondary cohesion and ideological weakness with low levels of secondary cohesion, which may then lead to fragmentation.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this paper has outlined how ideology can represent a competitive explanation for insurgent cohesion and fragmentation. Firstly, this analysis has engaged with the literature and evidenced how institutions are central elements in understanding the behaviour and the structural integrity of an organisation. The concept of ideology has been advanced as an alternative explanation in understanding institutional strength and its role for the cohesion of an organisation. Thus, this paper has argued that the degree of cohesion of an armed group can be understood through the degree of ideological strength of an organisation. The theoretical analysis has been supported with indicative empirical evidence through the case of IRA/PIRA to highlight a correlation between a high degree of ideological strength and a stronger cohesion compared to a weaker ideological strength and fragmentation. The case of the IRA/PIRA has evidenced how ideological strength is not a given condition, and therefore is not related to a specific or single ideology, but to its embeddedness in the institutions. However, this analysis recognises that such an explanation does present some caveats and that external factors to rebel organisations can also be determining and that context represents an important variable. This paper recognises that the presence of ideological strength does not imply an unquestioned devotion to the organisation and that internal tensions may always be present. Ultimately, this analysis has tried to contribute to the growing literature in the re-evaluation of the importance of ideology in understanding armed organisations.

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One for All or All for One? Ideology and Cohesion in the IRA and PIRA
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One for All or All for One? Ideology and Cohesion in the IRA and PIRA
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