Causes of Rebel Groups Engagement in Governance Activities: a comparative analysis of LTTE and LRA governance regimes in Africa

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Abstract

Rebel governance has existed in the saga of internal conflict, but it has not received the same attention as other aspects of civil wars. Rebel groups have been depicted as violent warlords, especially those in developing countries. Although some rebel groups suit this categorisation, the assumption is deceitful to several modern-day insurrections. This paper examines why some rebel groups participate in governance practises such as taxation, local administration, health care and education, while others do not through the lens of two insurgent groups that show clear differences, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lord's Resistance Army. This research is based on an analysis of published studies in the form of journal papers and books on civil war studies; therefore, it is primarily a literature review. This paper argues that the participation of a rebel group in governance is contingent on various aspects such as the ideological foundation, territorial control, funding sources, objectives, peacekeepers presence, and external military support. Order and stability benefit rebel groups by ensuring reliable access to food, recruits, military intelligence, and humanitarian aid. This paper contributes to the rebel governance body of knowledge by exploring aspects that determine the participation of rebel groups in governance activities.

Key words: Rebel governance, rebel groups, LTTE, LRA, civil war

1 Introduction

This paper examines why some rebel groups engage in governance activities such as taxation, local administration, healthcare, and education while others do not? Or why do some rebel groups create order in territories under their control, while others exploit and prey upon the civilian population? Rebel groups are politically motivated organisations using force to challenge the authority of an incumbent government, control territory to extract resources to finance insurrection and enhance bargaining power vis a vis the state (Rubin, 2018). Rebel governance entails the regularised taxation or extraction, enforcement of rule within a specific area, and provision of order and public goods by an insurgent group to civilians (Arjona, 2010). Rebel groups may govern by either using coercion or softer measures through persuading civilians to comply with their policies (Stevenson, 2010).

Rebel governance or rebelocracy involves the conduct of rebel and civilian ties, irrespective of good or bad treatment (Kasfir, 2002). Rebel governance occurs in places where rebel groups have some territorial control either total or partial influence and requires the formation of institutions and rules to govern civilians. There are a number of appropriate conditions that must apply before rebel governance is observed. The initial scope of these conditions is that rebels must control territory even when that control is disputable (Kasfir, 2015). The second scope is that civilians should reside in that territory controlled by rebels, and insurgent groups

must have behaved brutally or at least vowed to act as such in the territory under their control.

Besides, prior conflict relationship amid civilians and the incumbent government plays a momentous role in the development of rebel governance, as this may influence rebels to take part in the provision of public goods and services on demand (Mampilly, 2011). This is displayed by the LTTE governance projects in Jaffna from 1990 to 1995 and in Vanni from 1995 to 2009 up until the end of the war (Klem and Maunaguru, 2017). The LTTE was involved in the provision of several public services such as district courts, appeal courts and police stations (Mampilly, 2011). Arjona (2016) maintains that protracted conflicts marked by deadlocks pave way for rebel groups to concentrate resources in building civil administrations hence the formation of rebel governance institutions.

This study was based on the theory of Wartime and Social Order advanced by Arjona to understand the formation and occurrence of rebel governance. Arjona (2016) proclaim that civil wars or wartime zones are sometimes orderly and detached from mayhem, rather than disorderly and disruptive all the time. Governance helps rebels to maintain authority hence they favour order than instability in order to access resources and support. According to the theory, most rebels are anxious about the imminent results of insurrection. Therefore, they are bound to control the public and private lives of civilians so as to persuade them to collaborate in territories under their authority. For instance, rebels may arbitrate conflicts through promulgating courts to administer justice so as to consolidate power and garner legitimacy (Kalyvas, 2006). Likewise, where formerly established institutions encourage civilians to resist rebel control, insurgents divert their attention and concentrate on general aspects such as taxation (Weiss, 2011). When rebels face continuous resistance, they apparently concentrate on short-term goals which may lead to the victimisation of civilian (Arjona, 2016; Bavinck, 2014).

After the cold war, intrastate conflicts became commonplace virtually in every part of the world, with Africa dominating as compared to other regions (Pearlman, 2011). While the concept of violence in civil wars is widely recognised, the concept of rebel governance is still underestimated. Rebel groups are known for prompting violence and disorder whereas many rebel organisations have been involved in governance activities in territories under their monopoly. This paper examines why some rebel groups participate in governance activities in territories they control while others do not through the prism of two insurgent groups that portray clear variations in governance, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. The LTTE established governance mechanisms which provided a wide range of public services to civilians whereas these features have not existed in the LRA.

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2. Causes of Rebel Groups Engagement in Governance Activities

This section presents the causes of rebel groups engagement in governance activities. Some of the causes covered include the following; ideological foundation, funding sources of rebel groups, territorial control, peacekeepers presence, organisational characteristics and external military support.

2.1 Ideological foundation

The organisation's ideological foundation of the insurgent group affects the extent to which it engages in rebelocracy (Mampilly, 2011). Marxist orientated rebel groups are more likely to embrace civilian mobilisation and inclusivity whereas radical insurgencies may incite violence to gain support. Rebel groups following the Maoist philosophical ideals which stresses the involvement of rural civilians are likely to refrain from civilian oppression and resort to comprehensive service provision activities (Mampilly, 2011; Arjona, 2016). While rebels founded on radical philosophies like Islamic fundamentalism are more likely to induce violence to compel resistant civilians to support them (Strachota, 2015). Turning to our case studies of the LRA and LTTE. The LRA exhibited radical characteristics towards civilians because of its ideological foundation that was hinged upon the holy spirit of the lord. They believed that they were directed by God to overthrow the Ugandan government, hence everyone resisting their rule was liable to torture or extermination.

This is completely a different scenario for the LTTE in Sri Lanka. The LTTE emerged as a result of the rebel's attempt to protect marginalised civilians. Stewart (2018) posit that secessionist insurgent groups presumably deliver public services and goods to the civilians based on their need to prove their capability for governance both to the locals and the international community. Their (rebel) involvement in rebelocracy shows locals that they do not just care but also can deliver for them, whereas to the international community proves the capability to form an effective government (Staniland, 2014; Stewart, 2018). The LTTE leadership travelled around the world explaining their political philosophy and justifying that their struggle was worth doing. Their actions signalled a somewhat democratic machinery ostensibly engrossed in rebel governance, driven by ideology as they wanted to achieve long-term goals meaning international and domestic support was indispensable for their success.

2.2 Funding sources of rebel groups

The degree to which rebel groups depend on natural resources as their funding source determines their decision regarding the establishment of a social contract with the civilian population. An insurgent's funding source denotes the financial means of the rebel organisation to carry out its war initiatives. The literature on civil war presents two main sources of funding that is natural resources strategies and non-natural resources strategies (Piazza, 2018). Natural resources funding include revenue from natural deposits profits such as gold, diamonds, timber, cocaine, and opium. While non-natural resources avenues entail international aid, diaspora community funding, sponsorships, extortion and trafficking of people or body part. The extent to which civilian manpower and collaboration is vital determines whether rebel organisations engage in rebelocracy or not (Kasfir, 2002). The exploitation of natural resources requires more human resource for labour. Therefore, rebels tend to cooperate with civilians so that they can gain cheap labour to use in mines or cocoa

plantations. For example, the LTTE of Sri Lanka during its elementary phase relied on community support for food, information, and shelter. This explains why the rebel group was serious about meeting civilian expectations. In return, civilians supported the rebel group through providing food and shelter and some civilians even voluntarily joined the insurgent.

However, rebel groups which rely on non-natural resources for funding are most likely to victimise civilians as there is slight need for establishing close ties between them (rebels) and the people. The LRA in Uganda is a good example, the group ill-treated civilians as it relied on criminal activities for funding such as elephant poaching and child trafficking (Hennigan, 2019). On the same note, funding sources affect the duration of civil wars. Civil wars fought by rebel groups that rely on natural resources last longer than where non-natural resources are sources of funding. The reason being that revenue from the exploitation of resources such as gold and diamonds may compromise ceasefire negations as rebels might prefer to continue with the war to benefit from looting. Charles Taylor of Liberia is a typical illustration. He earned 10 million United States dollars per month from the Liberian Mineral Company for iron ore deals with corporations operating in the territory under his control (Reno, 1999). Therefore, rebel groups that rely on natural resources engage in governance to have access to labour whereas rebel groups getting funding from international aid or the diaspora are less concerned about the local population. For example, the LTTE which sought help from civilians engaged in governance activities as opposed to the LRA which was on record of violating civilians as its funding came largely from criminal activities.

2.3 Territorial control

Territorial control which denotes the area under the monopoly of a rebel group is another important component that explains why some rebel groups engage in rebelocracy and other not. Civil war theories of territorial control allude that if rebel organisations depend on civilians for survival, they are inclined to establish some form of institutions to ensure the provision of public services and goods (Mampilly, 2011). Arguing for this case, Stewart (2018) postulates that insurgent groups apply the logic of territorial control to garner support and the hearts of the general populace. Arjona (2016) expanded the claim by adding that, territorial control is strengthened through the setting up of rebel administrations and ensuring civilians participation in those organisations. Evidence also highlights that territorial control by rebel groups is a clear way of an insurgent's ability to challenge the incumbent government and increase the insurgent's institutional capability, increasing its endowments and constructing its likely conscription base (Kasfir, 2002).

Territorial control facilitates the rebel's ability to gain from pay-offs such as natural resources and non-natural resources, information, infrastructure, ideological and political support (Arjona, 2016). Drawing evidence from the LTTE in Sri Lanka, it is apparent that the rebel organisation managed to set up judiciary systems, courts, and police stations in areas under its control such as Vanni and Jaffna. Through these institutions, the LTTE provided a variety of public service ranging from dispute resolution mechanisms and justice systems to civilians. However, with the case of the LRA, the rebel group did not manage to set up such institutions to address the needs of the civilian population. This explains why the LRA was unable to

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overthrow the Uganda government because of the lack of civilian participation, supporting the claim made by Mao (1978) that the success and survival of insurgent groups are contingent on the level of support it secures from civilians.

2.4 Peacekeepers presence

Despite the fact that peacekeepers contain conflict and ensure truce, their presence can lead rebel groups to exercise control over the territories they occupy (Fortna *et al.,* 2018). Peacekeepers, such as the United Nations Peacekeeping Task Forces, maintain peace in the territories manned by rebels to pacify violence between incumbent governments and insurgent groups. Explaining the effect of peacekeeping missions on rebelocracy, Beardsley *et al.* (2015) posit that peacekeepers may allow insurgent groups to garner legitimacy and power which can be a big threat to the incumbent government in the future. Temporary termination of the war between rebels and incumbent governments or rather the stalemate period when warring parties are at ease, facilitate rebels to divert attention and resources to the provision of public services and goods. As the incumbent government will be unable to gain access to the territory insulated by peacekeepers to prevent conflict, rebels may also be given the opportunity to remobilise and gather resources needed to continue the war (Weinstein, 2007). Mampilly (2011) argues that the presents of peacekeepers especially when insurgent groups fail to reach an agreement with the incumbent government, increases the likelihood of prolonged conflict as rebels would have gained more power and resources during the break. Between 1987 and 1990 the presence of the Indian Peace Keeping force in Sri Lanka to end the war amid the LTTE and the Sri Lanka military reflect the consequences of the presence of peacekeepers. The accord did little to maintain peace instead it leveraged the legitimacy of the LTTE rebel group which subsequently expanded its monopoly.

2.5 Organisational characteristics

The internal characteristics of the insurgency, that is whether the group is fragmented or unified, can influence engagement in governance activities. Empirical evidence from civil conflict and non-state actors' studies has shown that unified rebel groups presumably have a tendency of engaging in rebelocracy as compared to fragmented insurgent groups. Fragmented rebel organisations lack institutions, leadership, and collective purpose to organise the provision of public services (Pearlman, 2011). Due to incessant rivalries, the likelihood of divided insurgent groups to abandon civilian expectations and focus on their immediate goals of acquiring power is high, hence such rebels' groups are more violent than unified rebel organisation facing less if no internal competition. A typical fragmented rebel group is the LRA in Uganda. The rebel group coerced civilians to maintain its hegemony against the Uganda government.

The LRA faced internal competition equally from the government of Uganda and sister rebel groups. For instance, the group had to fight against troops deployed by the DRC to support the Uganda military to control the northern part of Uganda. Constant infights could explain why the rebel organisation was unable to focus on governance as it was concentrating on

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power politics. When there is less tension among rebels and existing governments, insurgent groups may consider establishing governance institutions and participate in providing services to the local population. Mampilly (2011) second this notion by stressing that fragmentation adversely impacts rebelocracy as rebels cannot set up well-organised institutions of governance. Thus, the makeup of rebel organisations plays a crucial role in how insurgency aspire to venture into rebelocracy in areas under their domain.

2.6 External military support

Military support is an essential variable when it comes to rebel groups' governance. External military assistance also influences the time horizon that is, the extent to which rebels weigh future outcomes more heavily than present ones of the civil conflict (Florea, 2019). Military support can be unveiled in numerous forms like small arms, military personnel, experienced trainers, communication technologies, military hardware, and logistics (Byman, 2005). Therefore, military assistance provided to insurgents by foreign sponsors may go a long way in necessitating the rebel groups to establish institutions for governance to uphold a lucrative reputation to funders that it is capability to care for civilians (Klem and Maunaguru, 2017). At the same time, external support may be a double-edged sword in that it can curb the need for insurgents to provide governance.

In addition, the accessibility of foreign resources can condense insurgent's time horizons thereby reducing incentives for governance (Beardsley and McQuinn, 2009). This is similar to a scenario when rebel groups have access to natural resources that are lootable such as gold and diamonds, they tend to focus on immediate goals (looting) than long term goals (overturning the incumbent government), hence ignoring the grievances of civilians (Florea, 2019). The connection between foreign military support and rebel governance can be deduced from the case of the LTTE around the 1980s when the insurgent secured arms and military training from India (Hashim, 2013). External funding enabled the insurgent to consolidate power, nonetheless it also prevented the group to engage in governance activities during that period. This highlights that external assistance may propel rebels to subjugate civilians and focus only on their immediate goals as civilian collaboration will be of less significance.

3. Conclusion

Rebel groups are organisations motivated by the intention to establish political control. To achieve their goals rebel groups can be involved in various governance activities to gain civilian support and legitimacy both domestically and internationally. Rebel organisations with long-term objectives tend to address the expectations of civilians than rebel groups focusing on immediate goals. Rebel groups relying on natural resources for funding are most likely to concentrate on immediate goals (such as looting) than providing governance services. Whereas rebel groups which depend on non-natural resources such as diaspora support are more likely to participate in rebelocracy as a way of proving that they do not just care for the people but can also provide for them. For instance, the LRA did not engage in governance activities while the LTTE provided services and goods to the civilians as it had long-term objectives of overturning the incumbent government. Fragmented insurgent groups

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may resort to violence due to internal competition whereas unitary rebel organisations may focus less on infighting hence diverting resources to governance activities. From being seen as complete agents of violence, this paper has shown that rebel groups can bring order as a way to achieve their long-term objectives through securing support and resources from civilians. Finally, the variation in rebel governance, that is why other rebel groups engage in rebelocracy and others not, is a broad question that is answered by numerous aspects which include funding sources, organisational traits, ideology, external military support and the presence of peacekeepers. The LTTE and LRA, two rebel groups with different goals and organisational characteristics highlight the dynamics associated with the variance in rebel governance. The LTTE was strongly involved in civilian affairs while the LRA did not engage in rebel governance demonstrating that undeniably variables like ideology, organisational attributes influence rebel governance.

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