

Government pressures and coercion cause fragmentation and splintering, leading to outbidding in extremism and escalation.

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General Description of the Literature:

Government pressure has long been linked to fragmentation of VEOs. One of the most prominent arguments is that the increased costs of producing violence forces VEOs to adopt less discriminate attacks, which polarizes factions within the VEO and leads the more moderate elements to split (Bell 1998, Zirakzadeh 2002). Zirakzadeh (2002) finds strong evidence for this in a controlled comparison between ETA in Spain and Sendero Luminoso in Peru, although the degree of competition between the subsequent VEOs varied between the cases. In a separate dynamic, some VEOs may see intense security pressure as an opportunity to eliminate their rivals and consolidate power. Bloom's (2005) qualitative analysis of the Tamil VEOs links the violent elimination and outbidding behaviors of the LTTE to the repressive actions of the Sri Lankan security forces. In a meta-analysis of studies examining VEO's adoption of decentralized structures in the face of counterterrorism pressure across several geographic, ideological, and temporal contexts, Laitin and Shapiro (2008) finds that such groups tend to produce more, but less well funded and coordinated attacks. However, Furtado (2007) finds that government pressure may have the opposite effect: it can increase cooperative relationships between VEOs.

Detailed Analyses

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Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Overall, this hypothesis is only very weakly supported by the empirical literature. The linkage between government pressure and fragmentation is largely anecdotal, whereas the linkage between fragmentation and escalation is somewhat more empirically developed, but mixed. In Zirakzadeh's (2002) study, both VEOs shared similar antecedent conditions and organizational trajectories, but ETA splintered into multiple groups while Sendero Luminoso's renunciation of violence produced only a single successor VEO. While Bloom (2005) focuses on the outbidding effect, the long-term implications of Sri Lankan security pressure in the 1980s was not fragmentation of the Tamil paramilitaries, but consolidation by the LTTE. Similarly, Furtado (2007), using both formal models and qualitative analysis of South Asian VEOs, finds that VEOs tended to adopt more cooperative relationships with each other, assuming they were capable of making credible commitments. Nevertheless, other studies, including Laitin and Shapiro's (2008) meta-analysis, Bloom's (2005) Palestinian case study, and Sawyer's (2010) Northern Ireland case study, highlight that the outbidding effect is a significant consequence of VEO competition, irrespective of government pressure.

Empirical Support Score: 2 = Multiple qualitative and/or quantitative studies with mixed results (i.e., some in favor, some against the hypothesis) but more negative than positive findings

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: The secondary effect of counterterrorism pressure on the unity and behavior of VEOs is directly applicable. If correct, intense pressure may result in increased violence.



Applicability Score: Direct: At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs.

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