Who Leaves and Who Stays?
Organizational Hierarchy and Rebel Fragmentation

Abstract

Rebel groups are often susceptible to schism. In this paper, we depart from preexisting group-level analyses to explain how elite members of an insurgent organization decide whether to break away from the parent organization and form a splinter group. Drawing on databases about two rebel groups - the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and the Chinese Communist Party's Red Army in early 20th-century China, we present a hierarchy-centric theory of the rebel group's split. We argue that an elite member's decisions are first shaped by her position in the organizational hierarchy. The organizational hierarchy institutionalizes the distribution of power among affiliated members. This differentiation creates incentives for elites with divergent preferences to make a bid for the leadership. The hierarchy also induces status conflicts between higher-ranked leaders and subordinates. Both mechanisms lead to leadership disputes when the control of incumbents is weakened. Individual-level variations are accounted for by the outcomes of the feuds. When there are clear winners and losers, losers break off from the parent group. On the other hand, when there is a stalemate, low-ranking elites quit and create a splinter unit.

Schism is a pervasive phenomenon for rebel organizations around the world. According to a recent paper, roughly 40% of rebel groups in a global sample had experienced at least one splintering between 1980 and 2014 (Joo, 2018). For all rebel groups that once controlled territory during the period of 1980 – 2003, one-third of them experienced organizational splits (Lidow, 2016, p.222). Similarly, about one-third of sub-Saharan Africa's rebel organizations had split at

least once between the years 1946 and 2006 (Woldemariam, 2018, pp.19-20). In fact, organizational split is one of the most common ways of the emergence of new rebel groups (Braithwaite and Cunningham, 2019). These organizational schisms among rebel groups have profound impacts on the dynamics of civil wars, including sabotaging the peace negotiation (Stedman, 1997), resulting in more violent strife (Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour, 2012), and prolonging the duration of conflicts (Pearlman and Cunningham, 2012).

For rebel groups, an organizational split occurs when a subgroup breaks off from a parent group and forms a politically distinct entity. The existing literature about rebel splintering overwhelmingly focuses on two general questions: (1) *which* types of rebel groups are more likely to experience schism, (2) *when* rebel fragmentations are more likely to occur. The first strand of studies explore the reasons why some organizations undergo splits while others do not based on group-level characteristics (Asal, Brown, and Dalton, 2012). Scholars have identified a set of group-level factors that make certain rebel organizations more liable to schisms: the pattern of access to material resources (Weinstein, 2007; Seymour, 2014), organizational niche size (Perkoski, 2019), pre-war social network (Staniland, 2014), and the rebel group's founding ideology (Kalyvas and Balcells, 2010; Gutiérrez Sanín and Wood, 2014). To explain the second question – temporal variations of rebel fragmentation, another stand of research emphasizes the role of various time-variant variables. These variables include external shocks like battlefield dynamics (Woldemariam, 2018) and shifts in external sponsors (Lidow, 2016; Tamm, 2016). The time-variant explanatory variables also include internal dynamics like the emergence of ideological differences between elites (Hafez, 2017) and shifts in internal balance of loyalties (Mosinger, 2019). Although these two bodies of literature significantly improve our understanding of organizational splits in rebel groups, they are incomplete in the sense that they do not articulate

a theory to account for *individual-level variations* – the question of *who* are more likely to break away from the parent organization and join the splinter group.

Understanding individual-level variations is crucial for us to have a comprehensive view of rebel fragmentation. After all, it is those individuals making decisions to create a politically independent unit are directly responsible for organizational schisms. Given decision-makings with regard to rebel splintering occurred at the individual-level, it is not surprising that existing studies make implicit assumptions about individual behaviors though their analytical pivots toward a higher level of analysis. However, none of the extant research has systematically examined their underlying their assumptions about individual-level variations regarding rebel split.

In this article, we develop a new theoretical framework to explain individual-level variations in organizational schism. First, we argue that organizational hierarchy serves as a "master cleavage" around which rebel elites engage in the leadership dispute that is a prerequisite for rebel fragmentation. The linkage between organizational hierarchy and leadership dispute entails two mechanisms. First, an organization's hierarchy *structures* the impact of individual-level preference divergence on internal strife. Disputes over the ultimate goal of the rebel group, the strategy of how to achieve the goal, and the distribution of resources among rebel elites are often resolved through a preexisting institutional arrangement – the organizational hierarchy – within insurgent organizations. By occupying a high-ranking position, a rebel elite can better advance her particular preferences in regard to the group's goal, military tactics, and the distribution of resource flows across various subunits. Therefore, interpersonal disagreements on a variety of organizational issues among rebel elites often escalate into internal contestations over high-ranking positions. Second, the organizational hierarchy institutionalizes status differentiation among affiliated members, which induces *status conflict* between leaders and subordinates. In an insurgent

organization, a high-ranking position is associated with high status that is universally desirable. As a result, high-status positions are particularly subject to intra-organizational power struggles. Within a rebel group, elite members who are on the lower rungs of the ladder are thus motivated to challenge high-status leaders when certain opportunities are available. In short, dissatisfaction with the preexisting organization hierarchy is a major motive for low-ranking elites to launch a leadership dispute.

When a leadership feud happens, individual-level variations regarding subsequent rebel splintering are determined by the *outcomes* of internal power struggles for top positions. Infighting leads to two different scenarios. In the first scenario, there are clear winners and losers. Losers break off from the parent organization and create a splinter entity. In the second scenario, there is a stalemate within the rebel group. Low-ranking rebel elites, namely challengers, would choose to depart and start anew. Unlike the incumbents, challengers cannot appropriate organizational legitimacy that largely benefits existing power-holders when dissatisfied rebel elites fail to alter the organizational status quo. In addition, if challengers choose to stay in the parent group, they are vulnerable to potential deadly retaliations by incumbents.

It should be noted that we restrict our theory to examine variations at the *elite* level rather than at the rank-and-file level. In other words, we focus on political leaders and/or commanders of rebel organizations rather than ordinary soldiers and low-and mid-level officers. Non-elite rebels usually choose to desert if they are discontent with the organizational status quo (McLauchlin, 2015; Oppenheim et al., 2015), but only rebel elites can initiate leadership dispute by leveraging their advantaged organizational positions to launch a collective action that is directed against incumbents.

To test our above arguments, we draw on unique databases of two cases, the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (IMPRP) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s Red Army in the early 20th-century China. Based on a number of primary and secondary sources, we compile a collection of biographies of rebel elites of these two insurgent groups. We also collect information about internal hierarchy structures before and after the critical junctures when these two rebel groups experienced splits. Since insurgent groups have strong incentives to misinform their internal leadership structures for strategic purposes and they rarely left detailed records of internal organizational hierarchy, there is a paucity of data about wartime command structures of rebel groups (Woldemariam, 2018, p.27; Mosinger, 2019, p.947). Our datasets allow us to take advantage of a rare opportunity to divulge individual-level variations in forming a splinter entity among rebel elites.

This paper proceeds as follows. In the first, we present our theory about individual-level variations in rebel fragmentations in more detail. Then, we present case studies of two insurgent groups in the early 20th-century China to evaluate the explanatory power of our argument. That is, a rebel elite's position in the hierarchy account for her motive to initiate a leadership feud and the outcomes of the power struggles determines individual-level variations of breaking away from the parent organization and start anew. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings and avenues for future research.

A Hierarchy-centric Theory of Organizational Split

Preference Divergence and Organizational Hierarchy

A majority of extant studies tends to conceive the individual-level variations in organizational split are contingent on an array of *ad hoc* factors that are hard to generalize (Woldemariam, 2018,

pp.42-43). According to this view, since the issue in contention that triggers splintering vary across different circumstances, it is difficult if not impossible to propose a general theory about individual-level variations in rebel fragmentation. By contrast, when existing studies do attempt to account for individual-level differences of rebel splintering, they focus on how rebel leaders' personal disposition affects their propensities to break away from the parent organization. Different rebel elites have incompatible preferences with regard to the goal of the insurgent organization, military tactics, and distribution of resources across subgroups. The rebel elites' divergent preferences result in disagreements about a number of organizational issues that eventually result in fragmentations. Put simply, preference divergence is the direct reason of rebel split. Furthermore, differences in *personal disposition* at the individual level cause preference divergence. Stated otherwise, rebel leaders who are different in ethnicity, social class, ideology, and other individual characteristics exhibit dissimilar opinions about organizational issues, which inexorably leads to fragmentations.

Ideology, social class, and ethnicity are three widely recognized causes of preference divergence among rebel elites. One common type of ideology-based fissure is with regard to the use of more extreme means against the government between hard-liners and centrists. One example is the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA)'s split from the Provisional IRA (PIRA) in Northern Ireland. A subgroup of hard-liners that was dissatisfied with the PIRA's compromise with the British government broke away from the parent group to become a politically independent organization in 1998 (Perkoski, 2019, pp.883-884). Sometimes ideological conflicts are between radicals and conservatives who have incompatible political goals because they come from different strata of society. For example, between 1940s and 1975, the Kurdistan Democracy Party (KDP), a major Kurdish rebel group in Iraq, was an alliance between two subgroups with irreconcilable ideological

agendas. The right-wing of the KDP was led by rural elites while the more radical wing was largely comprised of urban intellectuals (Mclauchlin and Pearlman, 2012, p.46). These two factions hold incongruous attitudes toward land reform. In other words, the internal division of the KDP was driven by an ostensible ideological cleavage that actually reflects socioeconomic differences among rebel leaders.

In addition to ideology and social class, rebel groups undergo splits because rebel elites from different ethnic groups may have distinct preferences toward an array of issues (Gates, 2002). Co-ethnics are more likely to possess similar preferences, which facilitates the formation of a more integrated organization (Hechter, 1988; Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999). Consequently, ethnically heterogeneous insurgent organizations might suffer more intensive internal strife because they face more ethnicity-based disputes over the group's political goals, military tactics, and resources allocations among elite members. Like ethnicity, localism or subnational identity is another common basis of group solidity within military organizations that are ethnically homogeneous (Bearman, 1991; McLauchlin, 2015). In ethnically homogeneous rebel groups, localisms can pull together members from the same region and creates fissures among co-ethnics. For instance, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lankan experienced the most serious split in its history when a senior command Karuna broke away from the LTTE in 2004. Karuna's social base was in the Eastern Province of the Sri Lanka while "the LTTE command elite was primarily northern" (Staniland, 2012b, p.34).

Although above discussions about personal disposition and the associated preference divergence serve as a useful starting point for conceptualizing the reasons of rebel fragmentation, this line of reasoning encounters two crucial difficulties. First, empirically, it is a daunting task to depict preferences of rebel elites *ex ante*. For instance, for ethnically heterogeneous insurgent groups,

outside researchers tend to infer a rebel elite's preferences based on her ascriptive identities like ethnicity. However, such inference may be misleading under many circumstances. In the case of SPLA-Nasir's splintering from the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), observers often view it as a split caused by ethnic animosity among rebel leaders. This purported ethnicity-based split was regarded as a dispute between the incumbent Garang, who was a SPLA's leader from Dinka, and the challenger Machar, who was from a different ethnic group – Nuer. However, Seymour (2014) shows that this organizational splintering was not mainly caused by ethnic differences between Garang and Machar. For ideologically-driven insurgent organizations, the wining faction often rewrites the history to "construct 'official' or 'authorized' narratives that swept the dirty laundry of factional infighting under the rug" (Woldemariam, 2018, p.29). The alleged ideological conflict between competing factions may be a product of reinventions of history *ex post*. For example, the power struggle between Mao Zedong and Zhang Guotao discussed in the following section was later officially described as a conflict between contrasting party lines whereas both Mao and Zhang shared similar ideologies before the occurrence of the split (Yang, 1990, p.129).

Second, theoretically and more importantly, preference divergence only becomes a proximate cause of split when it is directly relevant to power struggle – namely, internal contestation over leadership positions in the rebel group. By definition, the organizational hierarchy grants more power to elites who are at the top rung of the ladder. To fulfill one's preferences towards certain issues, the individual strives to have access to top positions to possess the ultimate decision-making authority. Put differently, regardless the specific type of preference divergence, such disagreement becomes politically relevant only when rebel elites contest for the supreme power. Here, it is analytically useful to make an analogy between organizational splintering and ethnic civil war. As Andreas Wimmer (2012) indicates, it is not ethnic demography *per se* but politically relevant

ethnic-power-relations – the group's access to government power – profoundly affects the risk of ethnic violence. Likewise, for rebel split, it is not preference divergence *per se* but a power struggle that directly results in splintering.

Organizational Hierarchy as a Master Cleavage

To account for individual-level variations in terms of whether to depart and establish a splinter group, we develop a theory that pays specific attention to a particular type of intra-organizational relations – organizational hierarchy. By the term "intra-organizational relations," we mean social linkages between different individuals within the insurgent organization. According to Parkinson and Zaks (2018, p.274), relations "define the nature, centralization, and hierarchy of the organization." Organizational hierarchy serves as "rules of the game" that "assign decision-making authority to various internal actors" (Mclauchlin and Pearlman, 2012, p.44).

Organizational hierarchy appears to be a universal feature of social organization (Fiske, 2010). Such hierarchical differentiation is imperative for organizations to function effectively. First, it provides a *status solution* to the well-known collective action problem that is fatal to all forms of organizations. Hierarchy automatically leads to differentiation with regard to social status. As Ball et al. (2001) indicates, status is "a ranking in a hierarchy that is socially recognized." Recent studies show that status processes is closely associated with the provision of public goods (Willer, 2009; Simpson, Willer, and Ridgeway, 2012). Individuals "who contributed more to group efforts were subsequently accorded higher status by their group members. This higher status, in turn, increased their later contributions to the group via enhanced progroup motivation" (Simpson and Willer, 2015, p.51). Put differently, hierarchy rewards group members who make more contributions to the group by giving them higher status. This incentive in return motivates high-status members to invest more resources in the group. Second, studies show that benefits of hierarchy are most

pronounced when group members are highly interdependent to accomplish a task (Ronay et al., 2012). Hierarchy improves the efficiency of an organization by creating a division of labor. Rebel groups are complex organizations since they require "participation and contributions from most if not all the members of a group" (Halevy, Chou, and Galinsky, 2011, p.40). As Woldemariam (2018, p.39) states, "no organization – particularly military organization – can function without the full delegation of decision-making authority to a set of leaders." In a nutshell, without a clear hierarchical structure according to which members can follow a top-down flow of orders and thereby maintaining a division of labor, a rebel group would be quickly dysfunctional. When a chain of commands does not work and subordinates disobey their superiors, a rebel organization can be easily defeated and subsequently comes apart.

Although the omnipresence of organizational hierarchy in rebel groups, it is also a "master cleavage" around which rebel elites engage in leadership dispute. There are two specific mechanisms involved. First, leadership positions are scarce resources that serve as an indispensable means to achieve desirable ends that satisfy distinctive policy preferences of rebel elites. In other words, a bid for high-ranking position rather than the existence of preference divergence *per se* is a fundamental cause of internal discord. A rebel group is an organization instead of a nebulous collective of individual fighters. If rebel split is organizational in nature, an approach that exclusively focuses on differences in personal disposition is insufficient. The organizational hierarchy articulates a clear authority structure according to which members can follow a top-down flow of orders. In other words, this arrangement entails an imperative that lower-ranking members must obey decisions made by their higher-ranking leaders. Without such an institutional arrangement, a rebel group would be quickly dysfunctional. Meanwhile, organizational hierarchy grants more power to higher-ranked leaders and thereby offering them

more resources – authority, reputation, revenue etc., which are necessary for leaders to implement policies reflecting their priorities. Given the ubiquitous divergent preferences among rebel elites, they have strong incentives to contest for higher positions in the hierarchy to advance an agenda that better fits their own particular preferences. When occupying top positions, these elites can either issue orders to require other subordinates to follow dictates or use side payments as an exchange of the latter's compliance.

The second mechanism is pertinent to status conflict. Status conflicts are "disputes over people's relative status positions in their group's social hierarchy" (Bendersky and Hays, 2012, p.323). By definition, an organizational hierarchy gives rise to high-status members and low-status members. As a result, an organizational hierarchy inevitably leads to status conflicts in groups. According to this mechanism, a leadership position is not a means to an end. Instead, the position itself becomes an end. As recent psychological studies reveal, from an evolutionary perspective, "those higher in the social order tend to have more access to scarce resources; receive more social support; and enjoy better physical health, a longer life span, and better reproductive success" (Anderson and Kilduff, 2009, p.295). Given the significant benefits related to higher status, it is not surprising that the pursuit of status is a universal human motive (Heffetz and Frank, 2011; Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland, 2015). In fact, psychological experiments demonstrate that status is "not only a means to end but also an end in itself" (Huberman, Loch, and Önçüler, 2004, p.103). Because status is a valued resource, group members are motivated to strive to achieve higher status. Since status is a positional good, the competition over this type of resource is therefore a "zero-sum" game (Frank, 1985). Recent scholarship on organizational life shows that such striving for status is endemic to organizational members (Bendersky and Hays, 2012). For the second mechanism,

rebel elites contest for top positions because the associated higher status is intrinsically valuable (Huberman, Loch, and Önçüler, 2004).

Individual-level Variations of Organizational Split

Although low-ranking rebel elites have a strong motive to initiate the leadership dispute, it often emerges only when the control of rebel leaders has been weakened due to exogenous shocks. Organizational hierarchy tends to be self-reinforced because these institutionalized arrangements "can dispense rewards and punishments to prevent challenges to that authority" (Mclauchlin and Pearlman, 2012, p.44). Because hierarchy grants more resources to high-ranking members in the group, incumbents can leverage this advantage to reward low-power individuals who conform to hierarchy-based expectations and backlash against potential challengers. As a consequence, disparities in distributed resources across ranks contribute to the reinforcement of the preexisting hierarchy. Despite the persistence of hierarchy-driven fissures between high-ranking leaders and dissatisfied subordinates, these discontents seldom produce organizational splits when top leaders can exert effective control over resources. However, "when groups or organizations experience a dynamic environment, or an external shock, hierarchies can change substantially" (Magee and Galinsky, 2008, p.379). The odds of a leadership feud increases considerably when there is a dramatic reduction in the amounts of resources controlled by incumbents. The crisis is often a result of an exogenous shock such as battlefield losses or shifts in foreign sponsorship (Tamm, 2016; Woldemariam, 2018). Under this circumstance, top leaders are out of adequate resources to employ both rewards and punishments to disciple subordinates, which provides an opportunity for low-ranking members to launch a leadership dispute.

It is worth pointing out that our hierarchy-centric theory aims at accounting for individual-level variations rather than temporal variations. In other words, we do not expect hierarchy-driven

fissures can predict the *timing* of organizational splintering. Instead, our theory focuses on who are more likely to break away from the parent group to become politically independent given the condition that a split occurs. Because we argue that rebel splintering is essentially a consequence of leadership dispute, our theory contends that the contestation is mainly between high-ranking leaders and low-ranking rebel elites. Furthermore, the outcome of such dispute determines who are more likely to exit and join a splinter group.

In theory, it is difficult to make an *ex ante* prediction about which side – the incumbents or the challengers – will prevail during the leadership feud without context-specific information. Although challengers may suffer from structural disadvantages in general, they are able to leverage certain opportunities when incumbents have been greatly weakened due to exogenous shocks (e.g., a battlefield loss). However, our theory can suggest who are more likely to break away from the parent group if we know the outcome of leadership quarrel. There are two general possible scenarios. For the first scenarios, there are clear winners and losers. If challengers successfully overthrow the rule of the current leadership and subsequently seize the power, it generate resentment among recently disenfranchised former leaders (Petersen, 2001). These once-powerful individuals therefore have a deep-seated motive to restore their previous high status. Because they cannot preserve their privileged status after a failed infighting, they tend to break off from the parent group. On the other hand, if challengers lose the bid for leadership, they will anticipate that they will be severely punished by their rivals and therefore have a strong desire to create a splinter group. In short, losers of the power struggle will choose fragmentation. For the second scenario, there is a stalemate between the incumbents and challengers. Under this circumstance, from the perspective of challengers – low-ranking rebel elites, they cannot reverse unfavorable organizational hierarchy. Consequently, there are no benefits for them to stay in the parent group.

Meanwhile, there are potential costs if they choose not to depart – they would certainly face immediate retaliations by their rivalries in the rebel group. As a result, low-ranking officers will exit from the parent organization and start anew.

Two Illustrations: Rebel Fragmentation in China

To illustrate our theoretical arguments, we choose two rebel groups varying in an array of organizational predispositions and contextual circumstances. Of course, two case alone cannot provide an exhaustive examination of all rebel groups. However, the case studies offer a rare opportunity that allows researchers to analyze variations at the individual level. This micro-oriented approach thus complements the existing literature that overwhelmingly focuses on group-level variations. Moreover, these two cases represent two different types of insurgent organizations across the spectrum of splintering risk.

The first insurgent group is the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (IMPRP), a nationalist organization aimed at self-determination for all Mongols in the Republican Era of China. The second rebel group is the Red Army, the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which orchestrated a Communist Revolution in China during the 1920s and 1930s. Despite the fact that Soviet Union was a major foreign sponsor of both groups, these two organizations exhibited contrasting different ideological, structural, and institutional characteristics. First, although the Red Army was strictly organized along Marxist lines, the IMPRP committed to a nationalist cause that strived for national liberation. The ideological differences between the two groups manifest in their relative size of organizational niche (Perkoski, 2019). One the one hand, the Red Army tended to attract members with similar policy preferences given the CCP's emphasis on class struggle at that time (Huang, 2011). The CCP mainly appealed to poor peasants in its revolutionary base areas and limited local landed elites' access to political power and military

recruitment (Zarrow, 2006, pp.271-288; Opper, 2020, pp.36-64). On the other hand, the IMPRP was based on a more heterogeneous population. The group was a fragile coalition of wealthy aristocrats, grass-roots vigilante organizations, and peripheral Mongolian intellectuals from poor families. (Atwood, 2002, pp.77-320) These individuals with distinct social backgrounds formed a united front under the umbrella of national liberation (Atwood, 1992, pp.8-9). In other words, the IMPRP's niche size is much larger than the CCP's. Perkoski (2019) argues that the groups with larger niches are more likely to experience defection and infighting.

Second, the two groups devoted different levels of resources for combatant socialization. The CCP actively used Marxist precepts to indoctrinate Red Army soldiers (Sun, 2006). The CCP had institutionalized propaganda teams such as drama troupes within the Red Army since the establishment of the Army (DeMare, 2015, pp.25-51). In contrast, the IMPRP did not enforce political education among its troops. Atwood (2002, pp.63-66) shows that the IMPRP's military strength largely lied in vigilante leaders from western Inner Mongolia. The IMPRP's top leadership provided Soviet-Union-sponsored rifles to these vigilante leaders as an exchange for the latter's military support. Vigilante leaders were never fully socialized by the IMPRP's pan-Mongolian program (Atwood, 1992). Combatant socialization is important for insurgent cohesion. The indoctrination reshapes the brief system of involved group members and make them more committed to the cause of the armed group (Gutiérrez Sanín and Wood, 2014). Therefore, committed values can enhance group cohesion though these ideological commitments (Leader Maynard, 2019). Indeed, Kalyvas and Balcells (2010) suggest that communist rebels are better at suppressing internal discord. Hoover Green (2016) also finds that communist rebels are inclined to commit lower levels of sex violence against civilians than non-communist rebel organizations because of the former's greater efforts to conduct political training.

Third, the social base of the IMPRP was significantly different from the one of the Red Army. Staniland (2012a, p.142) argues that "the structure of the preexisting social networks upon which an armed group is built determines the organizational integration or fragmentation of the group." In the case of the IMPRP, there was a lack of strong horizontal social ties between party members from different regions of Inner Mongolia. In fact, members of IMPRP "had in common only the fact that they were living in Beijing and were dissatisfied with the state of Inner Mongolia" (Atwood, 1992, p.5). The IMPRP suffered from regionally-based factionalism or localism since the founding time and the organizational unity could only be sustained by material aids by the Soviet Union (Atwood, 2000, pp.82-83). By contrast, the Red Army was created by a cadre-based political party – the CCP. The Party combined both horizontal ties connecting party members and vertical connections linking the Party and local communities. The Party pulled together young intellectuals across localities through a control of several universities in major cities (Smith, 2000). In addition, the Soviet Union enrolled hundreds of radical Chinese students and sent them to Moscow, which provided another important platform for creating social connections between party members (Pantsov, 2000). In terms of the vertical integration, the Party especially focused on primary school teachers in the villages as recruitment targets. In the language of the Chinese Communist Party itself, these teachers "are the natural leaders of the villages" (Perry, 2019, p.8) and thus served as a crucial linkage bridging the CCP and rural communities. In short, the IMPRP's social base was significantly weaker than the Red Army. Staniland's theory suggests that IMPRP would be more likely to suffer from fragmentation than the Red Army.

In short, we can conceive the IMPRP as a case of rebel groups that are more vulnerable to splintering while the Red Army as a case of insurgent organizations that are less liable to split.

Confidence in our theory is increased if we can show that organizational hierarchy affects individual-level variations across the two different types of groups.

The Split of IMPRP, 1927

The transformation of the Imperial China from empire to nation-state gave rise to modern Mongolian nationalist movements. Mongols were key allies of the Qing Empire (1644 - 1911). The Qing's Manchu rulers divided Mongolia into two parts: Inner Mongolia and Outer Mongolia. After the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the establishment of a Han Chinese republic in China, nobles in Outer Mongolia immediately declared independence under the sponsorship of Russians. After the early 1910s, the rise of warlordism throughout China greatly worsened the relations between Mongols and the Han Chinese in Inner Mongolia. For a purpose of financing warfare, Han Chinese warlords who controlled parts of Inner Mongolia promoted more radical land cultivation projects that attracted more Han Chinese immigrants. The increasing inflow of Han Chinese immigrants into lands hitherto exclusively reserved for the Mongols led to more intense competitions over local resources between new-coming Han Chinese settlers and Mongols (Wang, 2015, pp.1672-1676). The collective grievances widely felt among Mongols were exacerbated given a more tightened political centralization under the rule of Han Chinese warlords that stripped the precedent regional autonomy of Mongol nobles (Wang, 2015, pp.1669-1672).

The year of 1925 was a watershed of Inner Mongolia's nationalist movement. In that year, a group of Inner Mongolian nationalists formed the so-called **"**Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party**" (**IMPRP**)**, which was an unprecedented form of political organization - it was the first political organization that explicitly aimed at self-determination for all Mongols in Inner Mongolia. The IMPRP encompassed a number of individuals who were different in a variety of ways. First, this nascent party was composed of a set of subgroups that came from different

regions – Eastern Mongolian intellectuals mostly from Kharachin of Josotu, the Eastern Border People's Party (EBPP) from Hulun Buir,[1] and the *duguiliang* activists from Yekhe Juu[2] (Atwood, 2002, pp.77-242). As we will show, these three regions varied considerably in terms of their socioeconomic circumstances. Second, the IMPRP was compose of Mongolian nationalists from different social classes. On the one hand, there were party members like Erkhimbatu and Fumingtai who came from wealthy ruling-class families. On the other hand, the party also recruited Mongols who were from marginal families. For example, the Kharachin Bai Haifeng "had to leave the Normal School and return to Kharachin because his family could not pay the fees" (Atwood, 2002, p.280). Third, there were clearly ideological divisions within the IMPRP. Eastern Inner Mongolian intellectuals viewed the national revolution as a struggle to liberate all Mongols while Western Mongolian *duguiliang* leaders concentrated their attention on parochial issues that were specific to their own banners[3] (Atwood, 1992). The ideological differences are partially related to their age. Although the duguiliang leaders were mostly born before 1880, a significant proportion of party members was born after 1900. The younger generation was deeply exposed to the influence of modern education while the older generation was not. Furthermore, the youngest Mongolian generation of the IMPRP were more sympathetic to left-wing ideologies and more likely to support class struggle than their older comrades (Atwood, 2002, pp.278-279).

[1] The EBPP was a nationalist organization that was first founded by the members of the Hulun Buir Students Association in 1923/1924 or earlier (Atwood, 2002, p.161) and later it merged with the IMPRP in the fall of 1925 (Atwood, 2002, p.271).

[2] According to Atwood, the term *duguiliang* literally means "circles." These organizations were community-based grass-roots viailante groups that came from "their custom of sitting in a circle when they met … When signing their names they also signed them in a circle. By doing so no leader could be singled out for punishment by the authorities" (Atwood, 1992, pp.1-2).

[3] The Qing Empire established a complex administrative system to control Inner Mongolia, which is called the "banner/league" institution. A banner combined civilian and military functions. According to Atwood, "Inner Mongolian banners averaged about 3000-8000 members in the high steppe, and 15,000-25,000 near to China proper, and their territory covered hundreds of square miles" (Atwood, 2002, p.24). There were 49 banners in Inner Mongolia and adjacent banners were organized into a league.

Despite aforementioned differences, these Mongols with distinct backgrounds were able to form a unified political organization thanks to the financial and organizational aid of the Soviet Union. To break the blockade on the eastside of its territory, during the early 1920s, the nascent Soviet state invested a large amount of resources to build an alliance with a variety of political actors in Mongolia and China. The allies of the Soviet Union included the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party in Outer Mongolia, the Kuomintang (KMT) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in China, and the warlord Feng Yuxiang in the western part of Inner Mongolia (Isaacs, 2009). Under the sponsorship of the Soviets,[4] a broad coalition of Inner Mongolian nationalists formed the IMPRP and later built up a military force (Atwood, 2002, pp.503-532). The short-term goal of this alliance was to drive the army of the warlord Zhang Zuolin out of Inner Mongolia. Zhang was regarded as a prominent threat to the Soviet's strategic interests in Northeastern Asia (McCormack, 1977). However, the anti-Zhang alliance experienced a series of battlefield losses between 1926 and 1927. The failure of the military operations led to a dispute within the IMPRP's leadership about the usefulness of alliance with Feng Yuxiang. The dispute immediately escalated into an infighting between the faction led by Bai Yunti, the chairman of the IMPRP's Central Committee, and his internal rivals headed by Merse, the secretary of the IMPRP's Central Committee (Atwood, 2002, pp.663-725). Although Bai was the top leader of the IMPRP at that time, his leadership was attacked by an opposition faction that was largely composed of low-ranking elites who were mostly from less privileged classes (Atwood, 2002, pp.278-322). As the foreign sponsor of the IMPRP, Moscow chose to support then the less-powerful faction whose preferences they believed to be better aligned with their own. In August 1927, at a Special Congress in Outer Mongolia's capital, the Comintern representative Amugayev "got an almost

[4] The alliance was coordinated by the Communist International (Comintern).

entirely new left-wing Central Committee elected" (Atwood, 1992, p.17) and Bai Yunti escaped back to Inner Mongolia and built up a splinter group that was mostly composed of previously high-ranking IMPRP elites who were Bai's political allies. This organizational split significantly weakened the IMPRP and contributed to the eventual dissolution of the party afterward.

Statistical Analysis of the Split of IMPRP

The unit of analysis of the first case study is each elite member of the IMPRP. A list of 52 individuals is taken from the canonical book titled *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades* by a leading historian of the modern Inner Mongolia (Atwood, 2002).[5] We choose this list of elite members of the IMPRP as a sample for statistical analyses because these individuals constituted the core leadership group of the organization. In short, this sample includes all IMPRP elite members between 1925 and 1928 (Atwood, 2002, pp.1008 - 1058). We employ logit models to test our arguments about rebel schisms.

The dependent variable is binary, indicating whether an IMPRP elite member left the party and joined a splinter group led by Bai Yunti, who was then top leader of the IMPRP. The required information for coding the dependent variable is drawn from *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades*. To construct the explanatory variable, we code the formal organizational ranks as an ordinal variable: "1" represents the non-leadership roles, "2" denotes members of the Central Committee – the IMPRP's leadership group, and "3" indicates the status as a member of the presidium – the top decision-making body of the Central Committee. Put otherwise, all IMPRP elites in the sample can been ranked as a three-level hierarchy. Note that we use the ranks of these individual *prior to* the occurrence of the organizational split in August 1927.

[5] More specifically, the list includes "all presidium members and all known Central Committee members of the PRPIM (1924-1928) with their … guards regiments commanders, all known EBPP presidium members and secretaries, all PRPIM and EBPP representatives to the MPRP, the major Youth Party leaders … and the major party and military leaders in those banners where the party held power for a significant period of time" (Atwood, 2002).

With regard to other control variables, we collect the flowing information for each of 52 IMPRP elite members: age, league of birth, socioeconomic status of parents, the type of first job, modern schools that member attended, and the level of education. The information is taken from *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades*. We supplement the data by consulting a number of published source materials including *nei meng gu wenshi ziliao* [Inner Mongolia's Cultural and Historical Materials] series, *nei menggu yinglie zhuan* [Biographies of Inner Mongolia's Glorious Martyrs], and *min'guo renwu da cidian* [The Big Biographical Dictionary of Republican China]. Unfortunately, we are only able to identify age for 33 of 52 IMPRP elite members, which generates a substantial percentage of missing data (nearly 37% of the entire sample). As a consequence, we do not control for age in our regression models.

Based on the information about the league of birth, we construct two dummies - Hulun Buir and Western Inner Mongolia. We use this variable as a proxy of localism – the subnational identities. Geographically, Western Mongolia encompasses Tumed, Ulaanchab League, and Yekhe Juu League (it was also called Ordos). We differentiate Hulun Buir from other regions since Hulun Buir had been treated as a separate administrative region since the Qing Empire. We focus on inter-regional differences because historians have suggested localism within Mongols exacerbated tensions between IMPRP elites from different regions. For instance, the Mongols of Eastern Inner Mongolia and the Kharachin banners in particular, were strongly influenced by state-led modernization since the early 20th century and produced more modernity-oriented intellectuals. Most of these new elites attended modern schools and viewed the popular religion among Mongols at that time – Buddhism – as a backward cultural practice. In contrast, a majority of *duguiliang* leaders from the Western Inner Mongolia like Ordos were lamas who served as leaders of local Buddhist communities. In fact, within the party, "much tension arose from the condescending

attitude of the East Mongols towards Ordos herdsmen" (Atwood, 1992, p.22). Therefore, it is possible that an individual's decision to stay in the rebel organization was closely associated with the region in which the person was born.

In addition to localism as a potential source of schism, we also examines the influence of nationalism on a party member's decision to join a splinter group. Ideological disagreement on how to advance the nationalist agenda often results in political fragmentation within nationalist movements (Pearlman, 2011; Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour, 2012; Seymour, Bakke, and Cunningham, 2016; Krause, 2017). We use the level of education to approximate the intensity of nationalist sentiment. Studies show that there is a strong correlation between mass literacy and the level of nationalist feelings among the population (Darden, 2006). Evidence supports this argument in the case of Inner Mongolia. Few *duguiliang* leaders from the Western Inner Mongolia had attended modern schools and most of them tended to embrace a more parochial view of Mongolian nationalism. They prioritized the autonomy of their own banners over the political liberation of all Mongols. On the other hand, highly educated Eastern Inner Mongolian intellectuals gave their policy priority to the Pan-Mongolism - self-determination for Mongols as a whole.

Finally, we combine socioeconomic status of parents and the type of the member's first job to measure an individual's social class when the person joined the IMPRP. Disparities between different social strata may give rise to the resentment of Mongols from the lower classes toward the aristocrats. For instance, in 1927, the incumbent Bai was challenged by a group of rebel elites who were from non-elite families (Atwood, 2002, pp.280-281). In fact, they saw the faction led by Bai Yunti for "the rich and the nobles" (Atwood, 2002, p.418). Therefore, we code the variable "class" as "0" when the party member was from a non-elite class and the variable is coded as "1"

if the person came from an elite class. If an individual was from a local noble family, or a wealthy family, or a family of the banner's bureaucrats (i.e., the person's father worked as an official in the banner's yamen), or the person worked as a local religious authority figure, we classify this individual as a member of the elite classes.

Table 1 presents the results of the regressions and provides support for our theoretical arguments. Model 1 presents the theory's explanatory variable. Model 2-4 include control variables related to alternative hypotheses. As predicted, the elite member's position in the organizational hierarchy significantly affects the likelihood of breaking off from the parent group and join a splinter entity. In the case of IMPRP, high-ranking rebel elites are more inclined to break away to create a new group. This effect persists with the control of other competing explanations and the full menu of control variables. The models further reveal *non-significant* relationships between different types of personal dispositions and the propensity to depart. According to Model 2, the level of education fails to reach significance once we control for the member's rank within the IMPRP, which casts doubt on the explanatory power of ideology on fragmentation. Model 3 shows that social class itself does not act as a significant independent predictor of an individual's decision to exit the IMPRP to start anew. Finally, Model 4 indicates that localism *per se* is not a primary determinant of the elite member's decision to depart.

Table1: The Effect on Joining the Splinter Group (IMPRP)

	Exit			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Rank	1.395***	2.009***	1.975***	1.947***
	(0.454)	(0.617)	(0.694)	(0.698)
Education level		-1.145	-0.964	-1.060
		(0.816)	(1.129)	(1.171)
Class			0.644	0.562
			(1.533)	(1.580)
Western Inner Mongolia				-0.415
				(1.489)
Constant	-2.983***	-1.443	-2.584	-2.128
	(0.840)	(1.718)	(2.102)	(2.577)
N	45	40	35	35
Log Likelihood	-22.889	-16.398	-13.416	-13.377
AIC	49.779	38.796	34.833	36.754

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

The Split of the Red Army, 1935

The organizational split of the Red Army during the Long March was one of the most dramatic episodes of the Chinese Communist Revolution. More than three decades later, Mao Zedong still regarded this split as the darkest moment in his entire life (Snow, 1973). This internal fragmentation was mainly caused by a fierce leadership dispute between Mao Zedong, a fledgling leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and Zhang Guotao, who was a CCP veteran and a commander of the Fourth Front Red Army.

The CCP was founded in 1921 under the sponsorship of the Soviet Union via the Comintern and the Party initially maintained a close collaboration with the Kuomintang (KMT) to form a united front (Pantsov, 2000). When Chiang Kai-shek became the paramount leader of the KMT in 1927 and initiated a purge against the CCP, the confrontation between the CCP and the KMT escalated into the Chinese Civil War (Elleman, 2009). After the defection of Chiang, the CCP gradually turned to a rural-centric strategy and established a set of revolutionary base areas called "Soviet" in rural areas (Opper, 2020). Most importantly, through organizing and formulating a number of local uprisings, the CCP created its own military force – the Red Army, which allows the nascent political organization to engage in armed struggles against the KMT (Averill, 2006). After withstanding four massive counterinsurgency campaigns led by Chiang, the CCP was defeated by the KMT in 1934 (Opper, 2018). In October 1934, over 86,000 Red Army members retreated from the Jiangxi Soviet (Yang, 1990, p.101), a revolutionary base area in which the CCP Center (i.e., The Central Committee and the Central Military Commission) was located at that time, to escape from Chiang Kai-shek's troops. The troops retreated from the Jiangxi Soviet were organized as the First Front Red Army. This escape is well known as the Long March later and becomes a legendary symbol of the Chinese Revolution.

The Red Army's hasty retreat from the Jiangxi Soviet cut off the connection between the CCP and the Soviet Union, which unexpectedly affected the subsequent internal dynamics of CCP politics. Before the Long March, the CCP Center in Jiangxi maintained radio communications with Moscow through a secret radio station based in Shanghai (Gao, 2000, p.33). Through this covert channel, Moscow was able to carefully monitor and tightly control activities of the CCP. However, after the beginning of the Long March, the CCP center lost its connection with Moscow via telegraphy (Gao, 2000, p.94). As a consequence, the Soviets could not intervene CCP's internal politics during the Long March. The inability of the foreign sponsor to influence the dynamics of internal rivalry distinguishes the case of Long March from the split of the IMPRP, which was directly shaped by Moscow's intervention.

For Mao, the Long March resulted in his ascent to power. The Politburo was controlled by then Soviet-supported leaders such as Bo Gu, Otto Braun, and Zhou Enlai before the evacuation. The military defeat created an opportunity for Mao to launch an attack against the incumbents. With the support of a majority of Party leaders during the Zunyi Conference, the Politburo (the highest decision-making body of the CCP) was reshuffled and Mao managed to take over military command in early 1935 (Yang, 1986). However, Mao's rise to power was facing an immediate challenge posed by Zhang Guotao. Zhang had established a Soviet in Sichuan. The Communist armies under his leadership were organized as the Fourth Front Red Army. In June 1935, the First Front Red Army led by Mao and his comrades joined Zhang's Fourth Front Red Army in Sichuan after months of battles with Chiang's troops. Although Mao's First Front Red Army had reduced from 86,000 at the beginning of the Long March to 10,000 at the moment of union with the Fourth Front Red Army, Zhang had around 80,000 soldiers, "well fed, clothed, and rested" (Sun, 2006, 155). Despite the military superiority of the Fourth Front Red Army in 1935, the distribution of

power at the CCP center - the Central Committee and the Central Military Commission - was significantly skewed against Zhang and his comrades. Of eleven Politburo members, only Zhang alone was from the Fourth Front Red Army. Within the Central Military Commission, the Red Army's supreme policy-making body, only three of eighteen were from the Fourth Front Red Army (Wang, 1995).

As an ambitious commander emboldened by his military superiority, Zhang was thus reluctant to accept his subordinate position. His discontent with the status quo thereby exacerbating the tension between the CCP center and Zhang. Zhang and other CCP top leaders also could not reach agreement with regard to the direction of the armies – Zhang and Mao had different opinions over "whether the armies should move further north to establish a new base area in the Sichuan-Shaanxi-Gansu border region" (Zarrow, 2006, p.299). This power struggle eventually led to the split of the Red Army. Mao and several top leaders fled north for a fear of Zhang's preemptive strike while Zhang moved his armies south. After the split, Zhang's troops "amounted to about 80,000 soldiers and 3,000 cadres and officers together" while Mao only had around 7,000 men (Yang, 1990, p.192). In October 1935, Zhang and remaining CCP leaders held a conference in *Zhuomubao* and established another Party Center headed by Zhang. This new Party Center included a Central Committee, a Politburo, and a Central Military Commission (Yang, 1990, p.193).

Statistical Analysis of the Split of the Red Army

Similar to the case of the IMPRP, our unit of analysis of the split of the Red Army is each top elite of the Army. In particular, we create a list including all members of the Old Center and the New Center - the Central Committee and the Central Military Commission of the CCP. Note that the New Center led by Zhang Guotao enlisted a number of Old Center elites. The names on the list

are taken from *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao huibian* (Compilation of Materials on CCP Organization) and Liu (2016). The detailed biographical information of these elites is taken from the 16-volume *Zhonggong dangshi renwuzhuan* [Biographies of the CCP Elites], which covers the CCP's major leaders during the entire Chinese Civil War.

The dependent variable, whether the elite broke off from the Old Center and joined the New Center, is taken from Liu (2016), which presents one of the most thorough descriptions of the power struggle between Mao and Zhang during the Long March in Chinese-language sources. For our explanatory variable, we code the formal organizational rank as an ordinal variable. In particular, "1" represents the non-leadership roles; "2" denotes alternate members of the Central Committee – the CCP's leadership organ; "3" represents full members of the Central Committee; "4" indicates the status as an alternative member of the Politburo – the top decision-making body of the Central Committee; and "5" denotes full members of the Politburo. Put otherwise, all CCP elites in the sample can been ranked as a five-level hierarchy. Note that we use the ranks of these individual prior to the occurrence of the organizational split in September 1935.

Our statistical analysis include age as a control variable. A dummy variable indicating whether the member was from the Second Front Army is generated as a reference group since the power struggle was mainly between leaders of the First Front Army and the Forth Front Army. To test competing hypotheses, we control for socioeconomic status, the level of education, the personal connection with the Soviet Union, and the province of birth. We use disparities in socioeconomic status and the level of education to capture ideological differences among CCP elites. CCP is well known for its liability to ideology-based fissure (MacFarquhar, 1974; Gao, 2018). The disputes among party elites were usually over the goal of the Party and the specific tactic to implement the goal. The first proxy of ideological variation is the elite's social class. The Chinese Communist

Revolution paid specific attention to the issue of class struggle (Eddy, 2016) and categorized different social groups as various classes (Treiman and Walder, 2019). From the perspective of the CCP, "exploiters" such as landlords, businessmen, and capitalists were often perceived as potential "class enemies" that need to be cracked down. Since many early CCP leaders were intellectuals who originally came from relatively wealthy families, they were especially susceptible to intra-party purges (Chen, 1994; Huang, 2011). Therefore, it was possible that leaders from more privileged families were less likely to embrace more radical party lines. We also use the level of education to approximate the degree of sophistication in regard to internalized ideologies. Political psychologists show that there is a strong correlation between the level of education and ideological commitments (Jost, Federico, and Napier, 2009). There were considerable variations of education levels among CCP leadership. For example, He Long, a major commander of the Red Army and a member of the Central Military Commission, received no formal education. On the other hand, many CCP leaders such as Zhang Guotao graduated from top universities.

In addition to ideology, we include a measure of overseas experience in Soviet Union as a proxy of a CCP elite's connection with the foreign patron. The Party was initially sponsored by the Soviets and was directed by the Soviet leaders (Pantsov, 2000; Elleman, 2009). A number of CCP elites were trained in the Soviet Union and later promoted as top leaders of the Party (Zhou, 2018, p.779). Therefore, the Soviet Union was more likely to support this subgroup of people whose preferences Moscow believed to align with their own (Sheng, 1971). It is possible that this subgroup is less likely to exist the parent group because they were disciplined Leninists and they were more loyal to the cause of the Comintern.

Finally, we use the province of birth as a control of localism. In particular, we crate two dummy variables to indicate the top two provinces in terms of the regional origins of CCP leaders: *Hubei*

Origin and *Hunan Origin*. Around 47% of CCP top elites in our sample were originally from these two provinces. The locality-based subnational solidarity was pervasive in Chinese society throughout the Republican China. Mao himself "recalled that at junior middle school, he was excluded by students from other counties who also generated factions along subcounty lines" (Zhou, 2018, p.772). Likewise, "among students studying in Japan and France, locale-based factionalism prevailed as well because student groups were organized along regional lines" (Zhou, 2018, p.772). Subnational identities were salient because of a lack of standard language during the studied period – Mandarin had not yet been fully institutionalized as a Chinese standard language. In fact, the differences between so-called "dialects" are phenomenal (Weng, 2018). The absence of a shared language further strengthened the prevalence of localism.

Table 2 presents the results of our logit models. Our argument about the importance of organizational hierarchy find support in the regressions. As expected, Model 1 shows a significant relationship between a CCP elite's position in the ranking and the odds of departing and joining the New Center. More specifically, lower-ranked elites are more likely to break away from the Old Center. This effect persists across all model specifications in Table 2. Both the level of education and social class fail to reach significance in Model 2, which does not support the influence of ideology on organizational splintering at the individual level. The connection with the foreign patronage does not affect the likelihood of exiting, indicated by the non-significant coefficient on "*Study in Russia*" in Model 3. Localism, or provincial identity, does not motivate rebel elites to exit and start anew, shown in Model 4. Finally, CCP top leaders from the First Front Army and the Forth Front Army were not significantly more likely to depart than those from the Second Front Army.

Table 2: The Effect on Joining the Splinter Group (Red Army)

	Exit					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Rank	-0.428**	-0.441**	-0.394**	-0.445**	-0.438**	-0.413**
	(0.175)	(0.196)	(0.199)	(0.206)	(0.198)	(0.210)
Age		-0.067	-0.095	-0.070	-0.064	-0.090
		(0.073)	(0.081)	(0.076)	(0.074)	(0.089)
Class		0.297	0.338	0.290	0.132	0.165
		(0.695)	(0.705)	(0.699)	(0.708)	(0.723)
Education level		0.217	0.299	0.222	0.255	0.359
		(0.252)	(0.273)	(0.254)	(0.258)	(0.285)
Study in Russia			-0.769			-0.944
			(0.675)			(0.715)
Hubei Origin				-0.096		-0.325
				(0.776)		(0.813)
Hunan Origin				0.056		-0.363
				(0.747)		(0.850)
Second army					1.166	1.527
					(1.186)	(1.314)
Constant	1.622***	2.341	2.970	2.427	2.133	2.845
	(0.522)	(2.434)	(2.585)	(2.487)	(2.459)	(2.772)
N	59	59	59	59	59	59
Log Likelihood	-35.251	-34.298	-33.635	-34.283	-33.730	-32.740
AIC	74.503	78.596	79.269	82.567	79.459	83.479

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

Summary of Case Study Findings

In sum, our theory explains individual-level variations in the propensity to exit from the parent group and join a splinter entity for the cases of the IMPRP and the Red Army. Table 3 summaries our case study findings, which lends strong support for our theoretical framework.

As predicted, an elite's position in the organizational hierarchy rather than her personal dispositions significantly shapes her motivation to engage in leadership disputes in the IMPRP and the Red Army. Furthermore, the outcomes of leadership feuds determine which subgroup – high-ranking leaders or low-ranking elites – initiated the fragmentation. In the case of the IMPRP, former incumbents, or high-ranking elites, departed from the rebel group and establish a new one. This is because their foreign sponsor, the Soviet Union, supported the challenger subgroup during the leadership quarrel and therefore the incumbents lost their battle for preserving the paramount leadership. Given there was a clear losers and a clear winner, the loser – former incumbents – could no longer take advantage of the status quo organizational arrangement. Consequently, they created a defecting splinter group. In contrast, in the case of the Red Army, political challengers or low-ranking elites, chose to break off from the Old Center. Unlike the case of IMPRP, there were no clear winners or losers of the feud between Mao and Zhang. Mao and his comrades managed to maintain an independent military force in the end and the Soviet Union did not intervene to resolve the dispute by shifting for Zhang because of a lost connection between Moscow and the Red Army at that time. Since Zhang Guotao and his political allies could not alter this stalemate in 1935 despite of their stronger military power, they created a splinter rebel organization that they could fully control.

Table 3: Case Study Findings

Case	Mechanism	Clear Result of Leadership Dispute?	Which Subgroup Initiated the Splintering?
IMPRP	Organizational Hierarchy	Yes, challengers won	Former Incumbents
Red Army	Organizational Hierarchy	No, stalemate	Low-ranking Elites

Conclusion

This paper proposes a theory to explain why some rebel elites decide to form a politically independent entity while others stay in the parent organization. We argue that that organizational hierarchy has a significant impact on the risk of rebel fragmentation since it serves as a "master cleavage" around which rebel elites engage in leadership disputes. The outcomes of leadership feuds, which are often between incumbents and low-ranking challengers, then account for individual-level variations in rebel splintering.

The experiences of the IMPRP and the Red Army in China bear out our theoretical arguments. Although these two rebel organizations exhibited considerable differences across a variety of organizational characteristics, the processes of their fragmentations are consistent with our hierarchy-centric explanatory framework. The intra-group rivalry in both cases was largely shaped by the cleavage with regard to the arrangement of top leadership positions. The outcomes of bids for leadership between privileged incumbents and low-ranking challengers further explain individual-level variations with respect to insurgent fragmentation.

These findings have important implications for rebel split in particular and the dynamics of civil war in general. First, our study shows the importance of *institutionalized organizational relations* for a better understanding of rebel organizations. Our main explanatory variable – organizational

hierarchy – is a type of institutionalized intra-organizational relations. The social linkages between rebel elites in the hierarchy are institutionalized because they are arranged as a structure that entails explicit rules or norms for affiliated group members. Such codified system constitutes a chain of commands that form the backbone of any functional insurgent organizations. Our findings show that rebel groups are not merely constrained by resource endowments (Weinstein, 2006), ideologies (Hafez, 2017), and pre-war social network (Staniland, 2014), but are also molded by wartime institutionalized organizational relations (Parkinson and Zaks). We add an organizational lens to the literature on rebel fragmentation.

Second, our hierarchy-centric explanation provides a framework to bridge micro and macro approaches on civil war (Balcells and Justino, 2014). On the one hand, we use biographical data on rebel elites to examine individual-level variations within rebel groups, which has not been fully explored by the existing research that overwhelmingly focuses on group-level differences. Our perspective thus complements predominant macro-level analyses that tend to overlook constituent elements of organizations. On the other hand, our results indicate that macro-level phenomena – the outcome of leadership feuds – are also indispensable for our understanding of rebel fragmentation. Unlike micro-level factors such as organizational hierarchy, the results of leadership disputes are usually determined by macro-level shocks such as battlefield performance or shifting support by the external patron. Our paper demonstrates how a synthesis of micro- and macro- analysis allows us to account for individual-level variations of rebel group behavior in a more systematic way.

Third, the significance of organizational hierarchy leads to a number of unanswered questions forming a future research agenda. If contestation over the top rung of the ladder is a crucial reason for organizational schism, how do high-ranking leaders legitimatize their authority to dwindle the

risk of group fissures? Which type of strategies of legitimation are more effective than other ones? Furthermore, how do insurgent groups design specific arrangements of organizational structure to mitigate the odds of splits? Why some rebel group adopt a more decentralized leadership structure while leaders in other groups are less likely to share power? We believe our organizational framework is a meaningful starting point for these lines of inquiry.

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