Survival of the Fittest

Leadership, Organisational Design, and Outcomes of Intrastate War



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ABSTRACT

The three papers included in this dissertation dynamically explore insurgencies – across a range of critical concepts, between levels of analysis, and with explicit sensitivity to how agents and organisations adapt to their changing environments. Paper I illustrates how insurgent groups can routinise, or normalize, violence to generate credibility and ultimately achieve public support. Contrary to previous work that has studied violence as an outcome of insurgent group behavior – under the assumption the high levels of violence are detrimental to public support – I explain how making violence predictable amid the uncertainty of conflict can create credibility and generate public support for the authoring group. Importantly, I also leverage existing work on the importance of group discipline and challenges associated with the principal-agent problem to explain how the regulation of violence is, itself, made possible by highly disciplined insurgent organisations who remain strategically independent of outside or third parties. Framing violence as a form of communication amid noisy and unpredictable social environments offers a new perspective with which to understand why only certain insurgent groups can generate public support amid intrastate conflict. Paper II demonstrates how changes – and specifically the increase – in external coercion against an insurgent group, paired with a loss of internal cohesion, serves as a catalyst for organisational adaptation. Specifically, these mechanisms drive insurgent leaders to decentralize their authority – reducing the potency of their groups, but also increasingly their ability to survive. These findings may appear intuitive but are chronically overlooked within the conflict literature, which trains undue attention on theoretical models that explain insurgent group success. Focusing on what makes an insurgency successful is critical but misses how organisations selectively abandon the structures and distributions of power that make them most competitive to increase their ability to survive. By providing a mechanistic explanation for the process of insurgent decentralisation, I break new ground for the study of other organisational consequences, such as insurgent fragmentation and splintering. Paper III offers the first known theory of insurgent leadership, exploring differences between individual leadership styles have measurable effects on the organisation they construct, and how those organisations fare amid crowded intrastate conflict settings. The new leadership typology also allows me to draw insights into which type of leader is most likely to be dominant within these conflict spaces – a critical scholarly gap in the insurgency literature. Importantly, the three leadership typologies – crusaders, strategists, and opportunists – can be applied in and across intrastate conflicts, offering a framework to systematically assess the influence individual leaders exert on their conflict environments.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLED – Armed Conflict Location Event Database
AQI – Al Qaeda in Iraq
COIN – counterinsurgency
ENLF – Eelam National Liberation Front
EROS – Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
EPRLF – Eelam People's Revolutionary Left Front
GoSL – Government of Sri Lanka
IPKF – Indian Peacekeeping Forces
ISWAP – Islamic State West Africa Province
JVP – Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MNJTF – Multinational Joint Task Force
OSV – One-sided violence
PLOTE – People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
PFLP – Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
RAW – Research and Analysis Wing, a section of India's Intelligence Services.
TNA – Tamil National Army
UTHR – University Teachers for Human Rights

INTRODUCTION

Insurgencies are not created equal. They are complex organisations led by unique individuals tasked with coordinating the interests of myriad members under high-risk and designed to generate violent political change. To understand an insurgency requires careful attention to the finer details: the context in which it arises; the social-political environments that feed its grievances; the wider political status quo to which its reforms apply; and how leaders – who "ride the storm and direct the whirlwind" – shape the outcomes of the world's most common form of conflict (Hamilton 1967).

This collection of papers seeks to contribute to our understanding of insurgencies by engaging several outstanding puzzles. First, what is the relationship between insurgent group violence and its propensity to build public support? The answer to this question – which relies on understanding the internal features of an insurgent group – provides the impetus for the project's second puzzle: how, and under what conditions, do insurgent organisations adapt or change? Recognizing that processes of change are an outcome of the complex interplay of exogenous and endogenous factors, the third puzzle of this project zeros in on the role of leaders: how do different leadership styles influence insurgent group performance? These three puzzles take us across multiple levels of analysis and engage with the complexity of the concepts explored, as well as the outcomes of interest. Together, these papers represent an attempt to build new theories to explain how leaders, the organisations they build, and the strategies they subsequently employ, are the outcomes of nuanced causal processes. To do justice to this complexity, the project is presented in three research essays, across which I am able break the puzzle of insurgency in civil war into smaller questions and pay close attention to the actors, agents, and wider structural features that present amid intrastate conflict.

This broader project draws guidance from previous work in International Relations and joins the rising chorus of academics eager to explore different — more granular — levels of analysis, telescoping from the realm of inter-state affairs down to the often-puzzling profundities of the domain of the individual. In short, the study of civil wars is rich, deep, and wide – and that intertextual complexity offers ample territory to explore.

My dissertation offers a range of academic insights. First, my work highlights some of the theoretical fallacies adopted in the study of violence. Notably, past scholarship tends to fixate on the presence or absence of violence as an indicator of the intended relationship between insurgent groups and local populations. My research suggests, amid the uncertainty and unpredictability of conflict, insurgent groups that generate routine patterns of violence – visible or legible to the non-combatant public – are more likely to achieve public support than others. I substantiate – and incorporate – previous insights about the utility of violence, arguing that a high level of organisational discipline within the insurgent group, combined with their strategic independence from external or third-party actors, are vital conditions for preserving the insurgent group's capacity for managing violence.

Second, I demonstrate how an increase in external coercion against an insurgent group, paired with the loss of internal cohesion, prompts insurgent leaders to decentralize their authority – and adapt their organisational structure. Extant literature suggests group centralization and centralized command are strategically advantageous for insurgent groups as they compete, notably against the state, during civil war. If true, however, we lack systematic explanations as to why insurgent groups would decentralize this command structure. Thus, my second paper specifies that high coercion and low cohesion prompts one of two reactions, what I refer to as the security and power-sharing responses. I explore how these responses lead insurgent leaders to decentralize their authority, which both reduces their group's potency but increases capacity to survive. This paper is the first

of its kind to propose a theory of insurgent decentralisation, offering additional insights for late-stage organisational changes, such as fragmentation or splintering.

Finally, the third paper offers the first known theory of insurgent leadership, exploring how features of individual leaders have measurable effects on the organisation they construct, and how they fare amid crowded intrastate conflicts. By developing an original characteristic-based typology, I construct three ideal leadership types – crusaders, strategists, and opportunists – which capture how differences in the level of individual leaders generate downstream effects on how those leaders build their organisations, determine their strategies, and pursue their ultimate goals in intrastate conflict. By bringing leaders "back in" to the analysis, this paper breaks new scholarly ground by demonstrating, beyond the traditional dyadic distinctions between risk-acceptant vs risk-averse leaders, for instance, how granular detail about the specific leader can help explain subsequent conflict outcomes (Prorok 2016; Brenner 2017).

The papers in this dissertation focus on theory-building and its importance when studying civil wars. Thus, I propose a set of formative hypotheses intended to challenge or reassemble insights from extant theoretical relationships – many that linger at the heart of conflict scholarship.

Most succinctly, the papers offer three critical takeaways. First, by calibrating our treatment of the use of violence, my work argues violence is formative of critical norms during conflict.[1] These norms, specifically the creation of predictable violence, generate credibility and legitimacy for their

[1] Standard explanations for the form or level of violence often rely on the territorial-control model proposed by Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Recent empirical updates offer similar framing in terms of absence, presence or intensity of violence, cf. Kristine Eck and Lisa Hultman, 'One-Sided Violence Against Civilians in War Insights from New Fatality Data', *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no. 2 (2007): 233–46; Other theories of violence assess them as the *outcome* of the constellation of actors in a conflict space, such as Michael G. Findley and Joseph K. Young, 'More Combatant Groups, More Terror?: Empirical Tests of an Outbidding Logic', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 5 (November 2012): 706–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2011.639415; While others isolate violence as an important tool for internal group management, cf. Dara Kay Cohen, 'The Ties That Bind: How Armed Groups Use Violence to Socialize Fighters', *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 5 (September 2017): 701–14, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343317713559. Importantly, work on violence as a tool for group socialization gets closer to this paper's own orientation, which sees violence as a form of strategic communication.

insurgent authors. Second, I argue that organisational adaptation is critical for understanding the durability – and capability – of insurgent groups amid the flux of civil war. In short, my work reveals that while counterinsurgent practices may degrade a group's ability to harm the state, those same factors may catalyse a form of organisational adaptation that makes insurgent groups more likely to survive over time. Finally, my work argues that leaders matter – and the leaders they encounter and compete against matter, too. Hence, scholars must understand that leadership styles matter and may interact with other leadership styles in predictable ways amid multiparty conflict.

INTRODUCING THE ESSAYS

Due to the dissertation's focus on puzzles, the topic of each essay emerges from the deductive-inductive engagement across a wide array of conflict literature. The dissertation is divided into three papers which can be seen as overlapping research essays – in conversation with one another and aimed to advance a set of central and critical debates. While paper remains independent and self-contained, they adopt a similar epistemic and methodological orientation, embracing the theory-building approach and focused on creating useful conceptual frameworks for understanding the dynamic process- and mechanism-oriented models to inform, strengthen, and correct extant scholarship on insurgency.

The first paper tackles the relationship between insurgencies and the non-participant public. This paper conceptually untangles the relationship between insurgent group violence and public support. Instead of assuming levels of violence are themselves indicators of an insurgent group's interest in public support, or merely a functional outcome of an organisation's ability to control violence, I argue that violence should be seen as causally important instrument wielded by insurgent groups amid conflict. Specifically, I assert violence is a communication tool that, once patterned and routine, is critical for generating credibility and legitimacy among key audiences and

parties to conflict. This paper takes violence — and its strategic use — seriously by exploring how insurgent organisations can regulate their patterns of violence and leverage this use of predictable (routinised) violence to generate public support or complicity. Reframed in this way, predictable violence becomes an important mechanism for generating credibility or legitimacy, and ultimately popular support for insurgent organisations amid civil war.

The second paper explores how insurgent organisations change or adapt over time. Innovation and strategic adaptation are evident in any careful study of armed actors amid conflict. Experts on insurgencies have noted the need to "adopt the concept of the enemy as a learning, adapting, reacting organisation" (Anderson et al, in A. G. Long 2008). As specified in the United States 2006 manual on counterinsurgency, for example, "[e]ffective insurgents rapidly adapt to changing circumstances. They cleverly use the tools of the global information revolution to magnify the effects of their actions" (United States 2007). While this process of change is intuitively understood by experts, strategists, and military practitioners, scholars must now theorize with similar complexity.[2] These processes of change are themselves multivalent, responding to characteristics across multiple domains within the conflict environment: from differences and decision-making at the level of individual leaders, to the shifting of organisational practices, rules, or mores; to wider structural changes in the conflict theatre. The second paper in this collection offers a theory-building attempt at explaining how one feature of insurgent group design — distribution of decision-making authority — may fluctuate amid conflict. To do this, I explore the logics (and mechanisms) that inform when and whether insurgent organisations decentralize authority, arguing that the trigger for this structural change occurs amid high levels of external coercion and low levels of internal cohesion. This work highlights an overlooked distinction between organisational goals and mission goals, recognizing the process of decentralisation may

[2] For example, see Biddle 2021; Marks Forthcoming

concurrently improve an organisation's capacity to survive while limiting its potential to succeed militarily against their opponents. This distinction becomes increasingly important for recalibrating how we study and assess the effectiveness of counterinsurgent (COIN) operations over time.

The final paper offers a novel theoretical framework for understanding the role of insurgent leadership. I argue insurgent organisations perform differently according to the type of leader they have. In part, this intuition is already reflected in the practice of counterinsurgent operations, as state or government intelligence agencies frequently scour the personal records and biographical details of insurgent leaders for vital operational information in subsequent targeting or COIN operations. This leadership-bias is most visible in the rise of decapitation or assassination programs aimed at disrupting or destroying insurgencies by removing the top-ranking elite. Yet, despite literatures that explore why leadership matters across a wide domain of social environments — notable in the context of heads of state or military leaders — we have little systematic study on insurgent leadership itself.

This paper argues that insurgent leadership matters and that differences in leadership styles are particularly important for understanding how their groups perform amid crowded intrastate conflict environments. While crowded conflict environments can be complex to study, the fact that not all insurgent organisations perform equally well suggests that factors internal to the group may be overlooked while being causally important. Thus, this final paper develops a typology of leadership to allow scholars to distinguish between three distinct models of leadership: crusaders, strategists, and opportunists.

Throughout this dissertation remains sensitive to the endogenous and process-generating qualities of intrastate conflict. As the violent rupture of conflict tends to radically reshape social, political, economic, and ideological environments, scholars must pay particular attention to how various

levels of analysis operate in tandem — and across time. Thus, while Paper I explores the relationships between an organisation and its host population (meso level relations), the explanandum demands intra-organisational assessment of features such as discipline, institutionalization, and strategic orientation, as well as extra-organisational considerations such as third-party relations and principal-agent structures to derive a satisfactory causal picture of the modern insurgency environment. These two domains — the internal (meso) and international (macro) — are also evidenced in Paper II, which takes a similar multi-level approach in explaining how exogenous factors, such as the coercion or violence a group receives its opponents, interacts with internal factors, like cohesion, to prompt organisations to adapt their structures within their conflict environment. Finally, Paper III accepts that individual agents and their actions and decisions lie near the beginning of any causal chain of any insurgency – consequently constructing, building, and shaping the resulting violent organisation. Notably, insurgent leaders operate amid great uncertainty in fluid environments, and careful attention to how individual leaders embody and demonstrate specific leadership tendencies is vital for exploring how they shape the trajectory of their conflicts.

ENGAGING ONGOING DEBATES

Given the range of implications of this research, the following section seeks to be more explicit about some of the critical debates my project engages. The section below features three recent and critical contributions to the insurgency and non-state actor literature and explores how my own work interacts, problematizes and, in some circumstances, corrects the critical findings in the field. In addition, and for further clarity, each individual paper features an extensive literature review, highlighting the relevant extant scholarship while situating the puzzle and contribution of the paper within its wider research agenda.

Networks of Rebellion

Published in 2014, Paul Staniland's groundbreaking *Networks of Rebellion (2014)* offers a rich theoretical treatment of how insurgencies emerge, consolidate, or eventually fragment. Relying on deft reconceptualization of the insurgent process — from how political entrepreneurs mobilise to how insurgent organisations weather their subsequent conflict — Staniland's contribution is to study insurgency as a dynamic process that responds to key internal and external mechanisms. Many of these mechanisms relate, at least obliquely, to the concept of public support. Specifically, Staniland claims insurgencies emerge from "social bases" — essentially the miasma of personal, professional, social, political, and economic relations present in any complex society. Specifically, while social bases are present in myriad contexts, the right combination of structural factors — notably a shared grievance and political worldview — permits violent or political entrepreneurs to build support for armed insurgency. However, by studying the relationships – or "ties" – between the rebel elite and their social bases, Staniland argues we can better understand the durability of the subsequent organisations. At this stage of the description, readers may highlight the indistinct causal mechanisms and process of rebel group emergence. Staniland argues insurgent group durability is shaped by the strength of a group's horizontal and vertical ties: namely, how cohesive the ruling cabal of elites is (horizontal ties) and how those elites are connected to their non-combatant constituencies (vertical ties).

The combination of these two characteristics generates a typology of insurgent group forms: vanguard, fragmented, parochial, and integrated. Vanguards have strong horizontal ties (and strong trust) among the leadership but lack strong connection to the local population. Fragmented groups tend to have suffer weak relations between elites, as well as limited connection to the local population. Parochial groups tend to have strong vertical ties — as elites tend to serve as representatives for their local constituents – but the organisation has weak horizontal ties between leaders. Integrated groups, which Staniland claims are the most competent and dangerous (i.e.,

least likely to fragment), retain strong horizontal and vertical ties: they build systems of elite trust and cooperation and tend to be systematically stitched into their local populations. Considering my interest in the role of public support and insurgent outcomes, Staniland's concept of vertical becomes both promising but underspecified.

Vertical ties take on the imprimatur of public support in Staniland's theoretical framework: integrated groups' strength and resilience flows from their strong leadership and the organisation's inferred public support. This relationship between public support and an insurgent group's success is not new, nor is it specific to Staniland's work. However, as Staniland remains quiet both about what generates vertical ties – that critical entanglement between insurgent and civilian – and what those ties are good for, we do not know whether or how public support helps explain the rise of one insurgent group over another. Stated differently, and in Staniland's own words, his theory fails to explain why, in the case of Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), specifically, the group grew into an integrated organisation while other pro-Tamil groups did not. Further, and more importantly, Staniland's theory is unable to explain why the LTTE only achieved integrated status in 1985.

Engaging this puzzle, Paper I tackles the relationship between public support and insurgent performance. Critically, I introduce a variable that Staniland's model formally excludes – insurgent group violence. For clarity and fairness, Staniland's dependent variable is organisational fragmentation, and, to this end, his independent variables are distinct from my own. However, by overlooking violence, and particularly the generative and formative effects of insurgent violence, Staniland misses the ways in which a group's modes of engagement may influence or even generate vertical ties — i.e., public support or complicity — strong insurgencies are defined by and rely on. My paper argues an insurgent group capable of making violence predictable or routine is better

able and more likely to establish credibility and legitimacy among civilians trapped in crowded conflict environments.

Perhaps most importantly, I engage with Staniland's Sri Lankan puzzle directly. I identify that the LTTE's predictability of violence in the mid-1980s allows the group, and not their competitors, to build credibility among the Tamil public. While my intervention in Staniland's work does not discredit Staniland's contribution, I demonstrate that theorizing the development of insurgent organisations without exploring the role of violence limits our subsequent insights. Further still, my research affirms that discipline and trust among elites and members within an organisation (horizontal ties) remains critical for cohesion, and that cohesion is, in line with Staniland arguments, influences the risk of future fragmentation (See *Paper II*). However, the management of violence theory in Paper I offers two key contributions to the wider scholarship. First, my paper specifies some of the micro-mechanisms upon which Staniland's conceptual terms rely – such as "ties," both horizontal and vertical. Secondly, the proposed management of violence framework retains a key actor missing in Staniland's theoretical treatment: the state. In short, my empirical evidence suggests the LTTE gains credibility, legitimacy, and thus public support because their patterns of violence are more predictable than the patterns authored by their pro-Tamil rivals *and* the Sri Lankan state. While Staniland's theory presumes that uncertainty colours the conflict environments, my work situates that background uncertainty as an enabling condition for insurgents to generate their own norms of predictable violence, which subsequently help build wider public support.

How Insurgency Starts

Another innovative addition to recent scholarship is *How Insurgency Starts (2020)* by Janet Lewis. Unpersuaded by extant work on conflict onset, and eager to address the left-censoring problem of conflict data, *How Insurgency Starts* explores why only some organisations survive past the critical

feasibility threshold early in their development. Engaging in-depth archival and field investigations – and a welter of mixed methods that leverage available quantitative data – Lewis argues that nascent insurgencies able to stay out of the state's firing line (preserving their clandestinity) while subsequently shaping and controlling the local information environments to generate support or complicity, are most likely to survive to become credible threats to the state.

Notably, Lewis unpacks the early stages of insurgent organisational life and reveals the small numbers of individuals initially involved and the often-preponderant control of given insurgent leaders. Lewis outlines why insurgent organisations begin highly centralized — their small size is advantageous given the high risk of discovery – and how leaders exert control over group members to limit the loss of information and control behaviors which might draw the attention of the state or other competitors. Lewis challenges extant assumptions about public support, for instance, by suggesting the early-stage context of insurgent conflict features a precarious balance of information control, as early rebel groups understand that "information … strongly influences the behaviour" of both the public (whom they need for support) and the state (whose reprisals they fear) (Lewis 2020, 20). The most successful groups understand "rumours rule" and that the need to keep the group, its members, and even its name secret must be balanced with selective broadcasting of their capabilities and aims. Rebels need the public to discuss their liminal existence, without that public sharing operational details that would assist state forces in neutralising the emergent threat.

These "information-centric" insights are edifying, and Lewis's work is additionally valuable for how it explores an insurgent organisation's evolution. Lewis finds that violence, for instance, is best understood as a tool of rebel group communication and that violence's utility depends on the stage of organisational development. Thus, early organisational violence is limited, selective, and minimal in its objectives — both because the initial resources of an insurgent group are not devoted to generating military capabilities, but also because nascent rebels want to communicate

in patterned, credible events that they are legitimate agents looking to rectify political grievances. Thus, violence should be studied as an instrument used strategically according to the conflict phase. In other words, violence is not merely the outcome of group characteristics, but an evocation of the insurgent leaders designs and strategies amid the complexity of conflict. In short, violence has its own logic.

Failing to see insurgent group development according to stages, and to reframe our expectations for this phased effect on a range of organisational behaviours, has "limited both quantitative and qualitative work on conflict onset," she argues, but also for our theoretical frameworks for recruitment, organisational discipline, and – notably for my purposes – violence (Lewis 2020, 27). Drawing further from Lewis's identification of the "feasibility threshold," it becomes clear that the study of insurgent organisational structure (and the internal distribution of authority) may suffer from systematic bias. As paper II explores, extant scholarship tends to over-report the prevalence of the centralized command and control among insurgent organisations. Lewis's work reveals the overrepresentation of centralized control is a function of data collection at or around the critical feasibility threshold. In other words, due to the organic emergence of insurgencies –small groups organised around a central leader – and because data collection occurs when insurgencies first generate sufficient violence to *qualify* for inclusion, the resulting quantitative datasets are more likely to categorize all groups as centralized organisations. Moreover, as data collection is not time variant (i.e., the measure is determined at T=1 only) scholars have ostensibly overrepresented insurgencies as centralized. Paper II notes the likely centralisation bias but accepts that organisational structures change over time and explores how and why organisational adaptation will occur.

Thus, by studying multiple proto insurgencies in Uganda, Lewis's book persuasively lays the foundation for the puzzle of paper II: why, and under what conditions, do insurgent organisations

decentralise? My own analysis suggests that insurgent leaders reform the organisations they built in response to two dynamics: the level of coercion (or targeted violence) they receive from opponents, and the degree of cohesion within the group. Paper II argues that insurgent groups decentralise when coercion increases and group cohesion decreases — and that this decentralisation improves the changes for organisational survival at the cost of potency. I vest my theory-building approach in the interactivity and dynamism of these mechanisms in ways similar to Lewis's analytical attention to how strategies have outsized consequences for insurgent group evolution.

The Commander's Dilemma

Finally, Paper III explores how leadership differences influences insurgent group outcomes amid crowded conflicts. Notably, this work builds of a strong canon of developing scholarship that locates leaders as vital arbiters within violent organisations: they are responsible for inculcating and subsequently motivating their members to adopt behaviours that otherwise violate the norms of peace-time society. These leaders must simultaneously design institutions that restrain and punish actors who deviate from the prescribed strategy. Most notably, Amelia Hoover-Green's *The Commander's Dilemma* explores this classic command trade off, arguing that leaders walk a fine line between being a booster for violence while maintaining the strategic level-headedness to provide necessary guardrails — in the form of monitoring, incentives, and punishments — to keep members from using counter-productive practices of violence.

Hoover-Green's innovation — and intuition — was to situate the insurgent leader as the fulcrum of broader organisational study. Leadership assessment has a long and potentially contentious history, fixating on military, political, and predominantly male leaders. However, few would argue that leaders *do not* matter. As Henry Kissinger, the former United States Secretary of State, famously noted, "As a professor, I tend to think of history as run by impersonal forces. But when you see

it in practice, you see the difference personalities make" (Isaacson 1992, 13). The challenge for scholars is identifying the mechanisms — those real connections between agents and structure — leaders influence.

For Hoover-Green, and in my own work, a leader's agency will be more pronounced and consequential when and where the institutions of power are nascent, underdeveloped, or in decline. Stated differently, the degree to which a leader's characteristics may exert independent force over organisational decisions, actions, and thus, shape their outcomes, is theoretically higher in an insurgent group than the influence of a specific president or prime minister within a traditional bureaucratic state. While all social environments are shaped by the interaction between agency and structure. Hoover-Green asserts that leaders face a classic "catch-22" predicament: in order to win they must "create and arm large groups of fighters willing and able to deploy considerable violence" while also "retain at least some control over the timing, target, and type of violence" (Hoover Green 2016, 17). Hoover's proposed solution is for leaders to divine ways to generate consistent discipline and ensure their fighters "internalise messages that valorize limited, controlled violence" — the latter is possible only when commanders "deliberately create institutions to spread and enforce [those messages]" (Hoover Green 2016, 17).

In short, Hoover-Green argues that group socialization is vital for preserving the commander's ability to balance violence and restraint. This socialization is achieved most directly by curating recruitment, instituting military training, standardizing rules and codes of conduct, and investing in political education for members. Importantly, Hoover-Green argues that these institutions — the codes and mores for members within the group — are critical for building discipline, and higher levels of discipline will increase the likelihood that members will follow the leader or commander's discretion. In short, the personalities of specific leaders will generate variation in how some insurgent organisation will be built.

My work orients itself according to Hoover-Green's fundamental analytical assumption: leaders have definitive roles to play not only in determining the structure of their organisations, but for the maintenance and adaptation of the organisation's structure over time. While Hoover-Green's work shows the importance of leadership in establishing programs of discipline and institution-building, my work asserts that different kinds of leaders — tasked with addressing this Commander's Dilemma — will vary in terms of how they build their organisations – in service of their preferred ends. Leaders may differ in terms of how they see their group's priorities, with certain leaders' remaining predominantly *goal-limited* compared to others who may be *situationally responsive*. Leaders may also vary in terms of how they see the conflict, either as *inclusive* (a mass struggle or revolution against the status quo) or *exclusive* (including on a definable group they feel is legitimately aggrieved). In addition, differences in leaders' relationships to information (*open* or *closed*) and how they select their fellow elites (relying on *loyalty* or *proficiency*) have substantive effects on the organisations they construct.

Using these characteristics, I propose the first typology of insurgent leadership, defining three distinct types: crusaders, strategists, and opportunists. Further still, this typology allows me to generate a set of hypotheses to explain how leaders (and their groups) are likely to fare in competition with others in the conflict environment. In sum, my work seeks to take leadership seriously, and explores a range of mechanisms to better explain (and distinguish) how leaders influence insurgent organisations' performance amid intrastate conflict.

METHODS, ISSUES, AND COVID LIMITATIONS

In spring 2021, and in response to the ongoing travel complications imposed by COVID-19, I requested a late change in the dissertation format: shifting from the book-length submission to a

three-paper dissertation structure. This request was prompted by recognition I would have limited access to field interviews initially envisioned for my central empirical cases: Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Further still, as additional travel restrictions lingered between the United Kingdom, the European Union, and United States, I was unable to travel to several archives to consult additional sources that could have enriched the data collection process. To supplement where possible, I conducted a range of interviews which helped to corroborate or call into question some of the insights from the primary and secondary source materials used in this project. Most of these interviews pertained to the Sri Lankan civil war, which features in the empirical sections across two of the three papers. To offset my initial data losses, I conducted a thorough review of all available primary and secondary materials published or otherwise locally archived. This includes cultivating relationships and gaining access to the Tamil Information Centre in southwest London to consult an array of primary source materials collected for and by the *Tamil Times*, a newsletter published throughout the conflict in the 1980s through the 2000. These resources, while compiled by those sympathetic to the Tamil cause, included considerable disputes among the Tamil intelligentsia and diaspora regarding the conduct of various pro-Tamil organisations. These documents revealed an ongoing and real-time debate over the strategies and tactics employed during the Sri Lankan civil war — while providing useful temporal material to chart the ebb and flow of opinion and performance of the respective groups.

THEORY, EMPIRICAL PATTERNS, AND CONTRIBUTION

Before turning to the three papers, it is important to highlight several critical findings. First, my theory-building approach exploring the relationship between public support and violent insurgency helps identify a set of multiple (micro) mechanisms that connect insurgent violence to subsequent levels of public support. Notably, I find insurgent groups that are more capable of controlling and systematising their patterns of violence are better positioned to build credibility

and legitimacy in the eyes of the wider non-combatant public. Importantly, what I call the "management of violence" corrects extent scholarship that tends to stipulate an insurgent group's increased restraint or their commitment to excess violence are independently determinative of insurgent group credibility or legitimacy. In other words, my management of violence argument suggests credibility and legitimacy are not gleaned merely by reducing the numbers of civilians harmed or demonstrating preponderant insurgent strength through the extensive use of violence. Instead, credibility and legitimacy flow to groups capable of establishing predictability amid chaotic conflict environments. In other words, the management of violence theory suggests the sovereign rupture that defines civil war is a fertile environment where groups can generate their own norms (Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl 2019). Norms that provide shape or frame otherwise disparate violence have positive downstream benefits for generating credibility and legitimacy for the responsible group.

My research also affirms that insurgent organisations are almost always more capable and potent when their authority is centralized. However, this centralisation comes with operational vulnerabilities, including a heightened risk of discovery and targeting by state or opposing forces, particularly as the size of the group increases. Thus, Paper II highlights, first, how the process of decentralization can be critical for weathering high-risk conflict environments, and explains that decentralization, as a process, is best explained by two organisational responses: security and power-sharing. My paper argues that groups confronting an increase in external coercion, and those groups that suffer a decline in internal cohesion, will opt for strategies of decentralisation — or the diffusion of decision-making power — to increase the likelihood their group's survival. These findings, while novel, also suggests scholars would benefit from better disentangling two different goal domains for insurgency – what I distinguish as mission goals and organisational goals. My research suggests both security or power-sharing responses prioritize organisational goals over mission goals: decentralisation makes the group less capable of defeating their central

enemies and decreases their chances of ultimate mission success (i.e., defeating the state, for example).

The wider implication of this research, then, is to highlight the substantive difference between the concepts of success and survival. Further, however, in my own research highlights that counterinsurgent strategies have also overlooked their unintended consequences – consequences that may complicate a conflict further unless scholars and practitioners appreciate the dynamism of insurgent group adaptation. Specifically, counterinsurgent operations that leverage targeted violence (punishment strategies) or that seek to target insurgent group leadership (decapitation strategies) may shock an organisation into decentralising – aiding the group in evading discovery and targeting, setting the stage for longer attrition-heavy, irregular conflicts that may unbalance the security status quo for extended periods of time.

Finally, an extended and novel theory-building exercise centered on insurgent leadership confirms that leaders do, in fact, matter. They matter not only because they differ across key substantive characteristics, but these differences influence the kinds of organisations they build, and subsequently how robust, assertive, credible, and durable those organisations tend to be. The project's third paper offers an opening salvo for the continued study of insurgent leadership, distinguishing between the ideal forms of leadership illustrates how specific forms of authority are more likely to dominate in conflicts featuring multiple insurgent organisations. The precise mechanisms that explain this dominance offer ample area for scholarly expansion and refinement. However, my typological approach helps update a range of extant research agendas that explore how differences in organisational resources, design, or orientation influence everything from the kinds of violence a group uses and how robust or effective their internal monitoring is, to how organisations deal with the adverse selection problem during recruitment and mobilization. My work does not suggest that leadership alone is the latchkey for any unified theory of insurgency,

only that its tepid, unsystematic, and sparse treatment in the extant literature ignores the complex ways in which leadership matters.

At its heart, this collection of works takes seriously the dynamism of insurgent organisations — from their internal workings to the myriad influences that help shape their position, orientation, and subsequent behaviour in intrastate conflict. By leveraging established theoretical insights and frameworks, this dissertation has benefited from the richness of previous political science and International Relations scholarship. While I do not seek to reinvent the theoretical wheel, my own contributions update or corroborate previous treatments of key concepts that proliferate within the study of insurgency.

Short of being prescriptive or policy-formative, this research has potential consequence for academics and practitioners. To be clear: the orientation of the work is normatively agnostic, hedging — as one ought — that something as complex and intertextual as political insurgency cannot be considered uniformly pejorative or morally abhorrent. Instead, the work — and the approach of the author — recognises the importance of understanding conflict, and particularly political revolution, as a complex interaction of agents and the structures they both inherit and subsequently reshape. Only by finding ways to connect the logics between these forces, and by tracing mechanisms across levels of analysis, can we say anything, much less anything definitive, about the principles and practice of political insurgency.

I

AGENTS OF ORDER

Insurgencies and the Battle for Public Support

Introduction

During World War I, a reporter from *Guy's Hospital Gazette* described war as "months of boredom, punctuated by moments of extreme terror."(The New York Times Company 1915, 959) While the quote was drawn from interviews with soldiers, the aphorism speaks to a clawing characteristic of conflict: unpredictability. That unpredictability is particularly high in intrastate conflict – a violent undoing of the status quo that Thomas Hobbes, reflecting on the English civil war, likened to a return to humankind's state of nature. In this state of nature, individuals were vulnerable, saw trust as dangerous, and experienced life as "nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes 1651). Unpredictability, in other words, was the dominant characteristic.

For citizens, who typically have little direct agency in conflict, this unpredictability is even more stark. Non-combatants are subject to both targeted and incidental violence and suffer the highest costs amidst intra-state, or civil, conflict. Yet, at the same time, civilian support remains critical for determining the outcome of this violent form of politics. It then follows, in such settings, that the capability to routinize, or make predictable, the experience of war – specifically its violence – carries considerable appeal to non-combatant audiences. In fact, the ability to make chaos predictable serves as the critical incentive through which individuals consent to any political organisation. In short, this paper intervenes in this ongoing debate by asking how violence is related to levels of civilian public support.

This paper argues that groups capable of making violence predictable amid the uncertainty of civil war have a higher likelihood of earning credibility and legitimacy from the wider public, and thus their support. To substantiate this proposition, the paper adopts a two-stage research design. First, I explore the two conditions necessary for an insurgent group to manage their levels of violence – internal discipline and strategic independence from third-party actors. Second, I explore how predictable patterns of violence shape public perceptions of group credibility and legitimacy,

arguing these features correspond to an increased likelihood an insurgent group will achieve public support.[3]

Literature Review

For many scholars, violence is often studied as an indicator of group and conflict features. For Weinstein, the form of rebel violence is an outcome of the group's recruitment appeal and mobilization dynamics. His foundational work *Inside Rebellion* (2007), argues violence towards civilians is conditional upon what he calls the "endowments" of the specific group, and he distinguishes between rebel group with low or insignificant pre-conflict endowments whose success or survival depends on public support, from groups with significant endowments where local or civilian support is less essential. Weinstein argues *consumers*, because they do not *require* public support, are more likely to use indiscriminate violence against civilians while investors, whose future success relies on leveraging the material and legitimacy benefits of public support, look to minimise their levels of indiscriminate violence. However, Weinstein sees violence as an outcome of public support, instead of a practice that may be formative or generative of that support.

According to Kalyvas, violence has its own logic, and he draws the distinction between indiscriminate and discriminate violence – the latter, which targets specific "enemies" – and specifies how the difference in the form of violence may generate important deterrent effects or modify the behaviours of individuals who witness the pattern of violence. However, Kalyvas

[3] For clarity, I adopt a political science and historical approach by treating legitimacy as a "symbolic commodity, which a political system generalizes … through reference to the belief patterns or the social structure of a given society" (Thornhill 2008, 29). This definition permits scholars to explore and assess multiple concurrent legitimacies. In the empirical cases in this paper, there is a "legitimate" claim by Sri Lankan authorities, particularly for Sinhalese civilians, that their government retains sufficient legitimacy as stewards of their political future. However, there are competing and overlapping legitimacies on the side of the insurgent Tamil organisations, whose positioning – viz-a-viz- one another and against the state – differ and against which their actions are differently assessed. While extant research suggests a diverse array of legitimation practices may be sufficient for explaining the success of the LTTE (notably Bart & Maunaguru, 2017), this paper argues that the LTTE's management of violence – in concert with their sensitivity to custom and history – better informs the process of legitimation, and their ultimate success.

(2006) argues the logics of violence during civil war are patterned according to territorial control – as territory furnishes insurgents with more information for targeting their violence effectively.[4] In this model, groups with territorial control are better able to identify – and thus specify the "legitimate" – targets for violence, leaving opponents to rely on the blunt tool of indiscriminate punishment strategies of violence to "sway" the public. What Kalyvas misses, however, is that violence is also foundational for establishing territorial control, and these early forms of violence have consequence in terms of shaping the credibility and legitimacy of insurgent organisations.

Violence, then, remains a multi-valent tool. In its coercive form, violence is studied at the extremes. Groups that author high levels of violence are sometimes thought to "outbid" – or outperform – their more moderate competitors. Conversely, others have argued that moderate or restrained rebel groups are an indication of superior discipline and strength (Stanton 2015; 2016). Scholars in these camps have adopted a view of violence as an instrument for communicating a range of potential details to and for audiences. More recent work explores violence as a tool of communicating the group's intent to both the incumbent political opponent, as well as the wider public. For example, Lewis, studying early-stage insurgency in Uganda, finds violence generates "rumours" that permeate the social geography, which announce the presence of a rebellious group and helps to slowly build their credibility (Lewis 2020).

This paper seeks to fill a conceptual and theoretical gap by connecting violence to credibility and legitimacy and exploring how these mechanisms may generate public support. Classic studies of political rebellion have embedded the assumption that public support is critical for insurgent success (Fearon 2004), while formative quantitative scholarship seems to affirm this relationship between high levels of public support and insurgent group victory (Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch,

[4] In subsequent work, Kalyvas also notes that high levels of indiscriminate violence by opposing actors in conflict can drive non-combatants to mobilise and fight – a suggestion that uncertainty about risk (in situations where risk increases) may drive individuals to choose a high-risk option to improve the *predictability* of every life. (C.f. Kalyvas and Kocher).

and Salehyan 2009). Scholars have also worked to explore how public support is generated and sustained, with some finding support reliant on – and perhaps derivative of – how embedded the group is with their host public (Parkinson 2013). The logic of embeddedness assumes the greater the degree of overlap or reinforcing relations between members of the group and members of the "public" the stronger the support and more robust the logistical assistance will be during conflict.

Subsequent scholarship by Paul Staniland (2014a) distinguished insurgent groups according to their relationship with the public, conceptualizing the most robust – what he called "integrated" – insurgencies were organisations that benefited from strong ties among group leaders and with the public. In other words, these groups have strong internal relationships and strong public support (see Chapter 2, 2014). Staniland argued the variation in level of public support was particularly important as it had measurable consequence for organisational durability. However, his theory failed to explore how any insurgency established these ties of public support.

Recent work by Arjona argues that civilian support remains the "central determinant of civil war outcomes, and typologizes non-combatant behaviours in terms of obedience (following group directives), spontaneous support – a kind of preference alignment leading civilians to volunteer for insurgent activity – and enlistment (Arjona 2017). In this paper, these would all qualify as indicators of public support. Thus, while the private preferences of individuals may remain unknowable – at least until the owl of Minerva has taken flight – I make two calibrating assumptions regarding how we identify and subsequently assess public support. For one, I assume an insurgent receives public support when the population provides food, information, and/or locations to hide or evade the incumbent authorities during conflict. Importantly, I argue these indicators suggest support when these observed *regardless* of whether insurgent members have prior or direct social connections in that location. In other words, these services and goods are provided

because the recipients are members of the rebel group, not merely because they are socially connected or linked to the location or population.[5]

I draw on extant theoretical work that suggests popular support remains conditional upon both predictability and credibility of violence. For example, Rueda finds superior military force is not sufficient for establishing civilian cooperation, unless that population expects and receives punishment for their support of the rebels. Further, those punishments must be certain and delivered immediately – suggesting violence becomes credible when it is legible and predictable (Rueda 2017). In this sense, I endorse Kalyvas's assertion to see violence as "a primary resource rather than the final product: it is intended to shape the behaviour of a target audience by altering the expected value of particular actions" (Kalyvas 2006, 100). My work merely extends this logic to suggest that repertoires of violence that remain legible and predictable are generative of credibility and legitimacy, and thus public support.

Theory

Standard accounts of insurgent group violence are usually shaped by two interlinked assumptions. First, that insurgent organisations are eager to generate public support to position themselves as the legitimate form of alternative governance. Second, insurgent groups that generate higher levels of harm towards that public will likely decrease their degree of public support. Logically, it follows that groups that author no or low harm towards the population should attract increased public support. However, there are good reasons to challenge these assumptions.

[5] The New York Times reporter David Halberstam recorded the early Vietcong strategies of building credibility in Vietnam during the 1950s. In one account from a contested village, he reported the Vietcong had served tea and offered a kind of sermon: In this sermon, "the villagers were the poor people who had no land and wanted to be free, but they had not guns; there were rich foreigners who had guns, but who were against the people; the foreigners gave these funds to bad people who were their puppets, and the paid the puppets; but the puppets would not fight, and so the foreigners themselves had to fight. But the poor people were brave and captured the guns, and now the weapons would be used against the foreigners and the puppets, and many of them would die because of it." This kind of engagement was critical for establishing the insurgency's legitimacy. See further: Halberstam, David, and Daniel Joseph Singal. The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era. Rev. ed. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008., p 55.

For starters, in the context of modern political systems, neither support nor legitimacy is synonymous with sovereign restraint. States, for instance, are incapable of generating public support by refraining from using violence or coercion. Instead, public support is secured through order, which is a function of the formative use of coercive practices. Here, I leverage the work of Mancur Olson, suggesting that unpredictable violence is akin to uncoordinated theft – a kind of extortion practiced by 'roving bandits' – which destroys the "incentive to invest and produce" (Olson 1993). In other words, this kind of coercion offers no predictability and stability for social – or political – exchange. Conversely, coordinated theft – practiced by 'stationary bandits' – represents what we might call the stability or predictability of coercion: a kind of status quo which makes subsequent social exchange possible. Conceptually, rebel or insurgent groups should be similarly seen as agents of order – whose order, like state authorities, is maintained not by the absence of violence, but by the predictability and routinization of their use of violence. Stated simply, predictable violence is a factor constitutive of and critical for political order. Actors who can generate this predictability should draw higher levels of credibility, legitimacy and – as *predictability* or *routine* are desired ends for the sufferers and victims in conflict – ultimately public support.

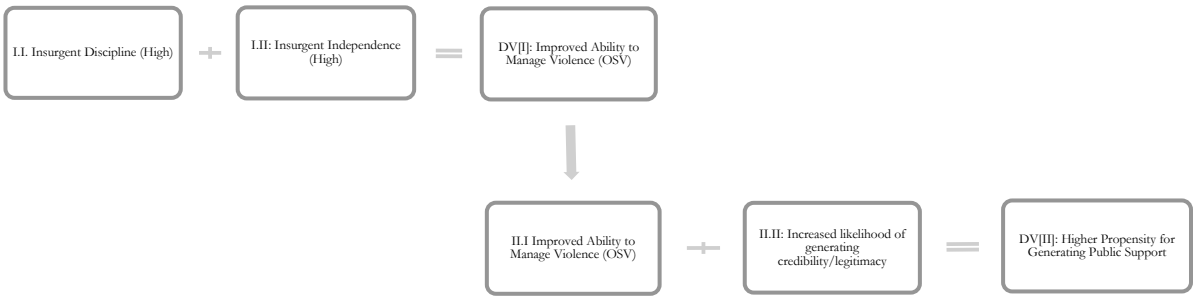
Drawing from previous work on de-facto sovereignty – "the ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity" – affirms the importance of predictability, as a "form of order that is backed up by disciplinary violence and does not yield to a superior force"(Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 295). I leverage this work to suggest order is "grounded in violence that is performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear, and legitimacy"(Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 297).[6] Stated simply, the normalization of specific patterns of violence creates a vital form of order. Further leveraging the

[6] Hansen and Stepputat's work on sovereignty, as it applies to the field of anthropology, is particularly relevant where formal legal sovereignty "is particularly tenuous in many postcolonial societies where sovereign power historically was distributed among many forms of local authority" (c.f. Hansen and Stepputat, p. 295). The empirical case in this paper, Sri Lanka, represents just this kind of post-colonial state.

work of institutional and political scholars, a legitimate armed actor is "the rightful wielder of power, maker and interpreter of rules or user of force and who thereby warrants support and compliance"(Rapkin and Braaten 2009, 120). That legitimacy, in the long run, then assists in the creation of public support. Stated simply, this paper argues that civilians are more likely to support groups that create predictability in their patterns of violence.

This paper offers a two-step causal argument. I argue that a group's ability to generate predictable violence is informed by two characteristics: the level of group discipline and the nature of their external relationship. In part two, predictable violence is used as an input and condition for exploring a group's ability to generate public support. To be clear, methodologically, I consider the ability to generate predictable violence is firstly a dependent variable (DV), and then serves as an independent variable (IV) in the second causal story, which seeks to explain public support.

FIGURE 1: THE MANAGEMENT OF VIOLENCE THEORY



Insurgent groups with a high degree of internal discipline (Box I.I) will have discernible internal rules and protocols that improve discipline and increase the likelihood that member behaviours will follow the group's strategic and tactical norms. These rules and protocols – which Hoover-Green refers to as "institutions" – may include internal codes of conduct, internal monitoring

processes to ensure compliance, strong filtering processes for recruitment (Obayashi 2017), and programmes of political education – particularly those programs that highlight the need for restraint in violence against civilians (Hoover Green 2016). It is important to clarify, however, that I do not assert that public support is conditional on the insurgent's reduction of violence against civilians. Simply, that groups with a greater number of more effective internal institutions will be more diligent in following leadership guidance on how violence should be authored within the conflict. Thus, organisational discipline is not sufficient for establishing predictable violence but is a necessary condition – inability to constrain member behaviour makes shaping aggregate patterns of violence impossible. Similarly, organisational discipline is not sufficient for engendering public support either, as ordered behaviour remains an intermediate step towards building legitimacy and credibility. This paper's theoretical assertion is that the stronger or more numerous the internal institutions for group management, the more disciplined and controllable the group's aggregate behaviour is likely to be, and the more capable these groups will be at generating predictable repertoires of violence.

In terms of strategic independence (Box I.II), I assert that groups reliant on third-party or external actors may suffer constraints or dependencies that limit their ability to control their patterns of violence. For instance, insurgent groups reliant on third parties for arms or ammunition might find themselves vulnerable to fluctuations in supply, which can impact how commanders can control individual fighters on the ground. Further, scarcity, or the uncertainty of supply, under these conditions, may drive localized looting, pillaging, or extortion of locals. In addition, groups that operate, or are presumed to be in coordination, with others may suffer a pernicious form of principal-agent challenge which I will call associative guilt. In these dependent relationships, insurgent groups may find it impossible to manage the behaviour of their partner group. By this, I mean groups perceived to be in alliance or partnership with another can be damaged by the patterns of violence selected by their partners – even when their own patterns of violence are

comparatively predictable. This guilt by association is why strategic independence is a pre-requisite for the management of violence theory.[7]

Taken together, strong internal discipline (I.I.) and strategic independence (I.II.) are necessary for generating predictable patterns of violence (DV[I]) in the conflict environment. Through this management of violence – the production of a predictable patterns of violence in the conflict environment – I argue groups are more likely to generate credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the public, increasing the likelihood they receive public support. In the context of crowded conflict environments, seeing violence as a tool for producing legitimacy or credibility production can help explain why some insurgent groups appear to rise above, or achieve dominance over, their competitors.[8]

Methods, Scope Conditions and Alternative Explanations

This paper serves as a plausibility probe for my theoretical argument. Specifically, I use the two empirical cases drawn from within a single conflict and country to develop my theoretical expectations. The benefit of the plausibility probe is that the empirical investigation is used to reveal process-focused, mechanism-sensitive, details to explore the pathways through which insurgent group violence influences public support among non-combatants. By design, plausibility probes are akin to "illustrative" case studies in International Relations (Levy 2008, 6) and provide "concrete examples of [a theory's] application, or to demonstrate the empirical relevance of a theoretical proposition by identifying at least one relevant case"(Eckstein 1975, 109).

[7] Some readers may highlight that, while the model produced is predicated on a form of agentic decision-making – the decision to purposefully pursue a predictable repertoire of violence – there is muted discussion of insurgent leadership and the strategic thinking that may be related to this outcome. Given concerns over paper length, this omission is purposeful, but I tackle how the specific characteristics of insurgent group leaders are also critical contextual factors in the strategies of violence pursued in multiparty conflicts. For more on this, please see paper III in this collection.

[8] While public support may not be a sufficient condition for insurgent group success, increasing levels of public support also increases the likelihood of insurgent victory.

In this paper, I select two insurgent groups, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Eelam People Revolutionary Left Front (EPRLF), within the Sri Lankan Civil War. The Sri Lankan civil war provides a complex conflict environment in which I can evaluate both how the groups use of violence influenced their patterns of public support, while also exploring a range of alternative explanations. Notably, scholarship on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been considerable, particularly during the post-1990 period where the group's strategies of contest drew increased attention from conflict scholars. At this time – and notably before the post-9/11 period with the growing interest in terrorism studies – the LTTE attracted attention for their novel repertoires of violence, notably suicide attacks (Hopgood 2005). In addition to novel tactics, extant scholarship on the Sri Lankan conflict tends to privilege explanations that highlighted the LTTE superior military capabilities and material resources to explain its subsequent dominance within the multiparty conflict. However, these materialist accounts of the LTTE's performance remain insufficient for explaining variations in public support. For instance, both the LTTE and EPRLF emerged under relatively similar material and military conditions and the groups, both quite small, were subject to similar structural or environmental constraints in Sri Lanka.

Most Tamil insurgent groups in Sri Lanka were comparatively equal in terms of material or economic resources – all quite limited. In 1983, for instance, all Tamil groups were thought to have fewer than 50 fighters and shared comparatively similar financial resources. Without economic or material advantages, extant scholarship suggests all groups would have been similarly interested or reliant on non-combatants support, placing an emphasis on low and predictable levels of violence towards civilians. Thus, differences in levels of violence between the LTTE and EPRLF remain poorly explained. If endowments or material assets are insufficiently different to explain the variation between groups, then the factors determining management of violence between groups must lie elsewhere within the organisations. Similarly, some readers may suggest that the decision to enact certain repertoires of violence derive from a group's (or group leader's)

goals amid the conflict. While goals matter, both the EPRLF and LTTE share a common goal – defense of the Tamil people against the Sri Lankan state. Thus, goals are not independently useful for explaining the variation in levels of public support.

Connecting the use of violence to the concept of legitimacy, this paper's selection of the EPRLF and LTTE is also purposeful. Insurgent groups can be "organic outgrowths of the societies or micro-societies from which they spring," appealing and receiving support from the public as a function of their local recruitment (shared norms), their "overlap with pre-existing social and political rules in their locality" and because they go to "great lengths to strike and maintain cooperative bargains with civilians" (Gawthorpe 2017, 845). Thus, ethnic, political, or social characteristics – in so far as they signal political affiliation and cultural affinity – may be critical for generating insurgent credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the public. However, as both LTTE and EPRLF forces are drawn from similar localities, share similar normative affinities, and engage in cooperative bargaining with the same civilian population, these features fail to explain why the LTTE gains disproportionate public support. As the selection of the two cases effectively excludes many of these alternative explanations, it provides an opportunity to explore whether the management of violence theory may usefully explain the outcome in Sri Lanka.

Importantly, however, I assume violence's ability to facilitate public support is also reliant on wider environmental conditions within the conflict theatre. Thus, the management of violence theory is influenced and conditional upon a set of *enabling conditions*: the management of violence argument is *most evident* in conflicts where the state or incumbent power uses high levels of indiscriminate violence or punishment strategies against the civilian population. This does not mean that the management of violence theory does not apply under other conditions, simply that the legibility of the theory is clearest in cases where the de facto state authorities are incapable or unwilling to use discriminate practices of violence. In other words, when the state uses high levels or deliberate

indiscriminate violence – what we can see as "disordered" or "unordered" violence – against civilians in the conflict environment, the conditions are ripe for insurgent groups to generate credibility and increase their propensity to receive public support by developing their own norms of predictability in their use of violence.

The Sri Lankan case features high levels of government-sponsored or supported violence against the Tamil population. The adoption of punishment strategies – largely indiscriminate programs of violence against an identifiable population – is intended to increase the wider societal costs associated with the insurgency and, in the case of Sri Lankan government, to "curb civilian support for the [Tamil] movement"(Furtado 2007, 99). However, the long-standing punishment strategy serves as the critical enabling condition for the management of violence theory: the Sri Lankan government's violent onslaught increases the uncertainty and unpredictable experience of violence for all Tamils, providing an opportunity for an armed non-state actor to generate credibility through the regularization and normalization of predictable violence.

This paper features empirical materials culled from primary documents published by the groups, memoirs written by members within the Tamil movement, reportage and interviews with insurgent members and leaders during the period, and a wealth of secondary source material written about the civil war. Where possible, I consult sources for details regarding unstated affiliations or biases across these primary materials, notably reporting on the LTTE (and their leader Prabhakaran) which scholars have criticised for "reif[ying] the cult around the movement and its leader"(Klem and Maunaguru 2017a, 646). I have tried to corroborate all claims through triangulation of multiple sources – and careful attention to the primary materials used and the positionality of their authors.

Methodological Limitations

There are two potential limitations of this research design. First, this project is vulnerable to charges of the indeterminacy problem. As I assess two group characteristics – discipline and external relations – from two cases, drawn from the same conflict, I am limited in my ability to definitively assert which of the two variables is more influential in terms of my outcome. I address this by isolating the range of processes associated with developing discipline from those processes that influence the nature, extent, and consequence of external relations between the two groups. Highlighting how these processes function allows me to construct a plausible story for how discipline and external relationships contribute and interact to shape a group's ability to structure their strategies of violence.

Second, some scholars have suggested discipline and external relations are causally connected. Weinstein argues that group endowments shape the kinds of members insurgent groups recruit, with comparatively wealthy groups attracting opportunistic – self-interested, and potentially difficult to control – recruits, compared to resource poor insurgents which attract investors, or committed members willing to accept risk for the cause. In other words, external actors can influence the size of a group's endowments and thus affect the level of discipline within the group. However, both the EPRLF and the LTTE receive similar "treatment" effects – both groups are admitted to the Indian intelligence training programme in 1983 – which can be seen as a kind of rebel standardization: all the Big Five groups benefit from this same (and standard) endowment effect. In addition, most literature suggests the LTTE is – by 1984 – the better resourced insurgent group and should therefore attract more "bad apples" (opportunists) that would degrade discipline. However, the empirical record below suggests that features endogenous to the group – i.e., how the group was structured and built – remain more important for explaining the LTTE's ability to retain discipline during the period of study.

Context

Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, was considered property of successive colonial powers until 1948. From the Dutch to the British, Sri Lankan society, like other post-colonial states, carried the residue of ethnic and cultural inequity from previous governance of the territory. In Sri Lanka, the tensions lay between Tamil, roughly 18 percent of the country's population, and majority Sinhalese.

Figure 5: Map of Sri Lanka



Sri Lanka's ethnic tensions expressed themselves geographically, as the northern territories, more proximate to the Indian sub-continent, were the primary home to the Tamil populations, with the country's south dominated by the Sinhalese. Changes in the post-independence period soon christened a domestic political status reversal, as Tamils were systematically marginalized by the incoming Sinhalese government. The battle lines between the Tamil and Sinhalese community were solidified with the passage, in 1979, of the Proscription of Liberation Tigers Act, eventually

the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which declared a "state of emergency throughout Jaffna and sent [government] troops to the region" to preserve public order. In practice, this meant "soldiers went after Tamil young men with unprecedented ferocity" taking hundreds into custody and leaving mutilated bodies in their wake (Narayan Swamy 1994, 41). By 1983, more than 37 pro-Tamil groups had formed to protect ethnic interests within Sri Lanka (Narayan Swamy 1994). Two years later, with recruits steadily increasing their ranks, the opposition was dominated by the "Big Five" Tamil groups – the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS), the Eelam People Revolutionary Left Front (EPRLF), and the People's Liberation Organisation of Thamileelam (PLOTE).

The following sections explores how both the LTTE and EPRLF – two of the central Tamil groups – structured their organisations. Importantly, this paper asserts that an insurgent group's internal discipline is a critical mechanism explaining how that organisation can control violence.

Organisation**al Discipline**

LTTE Discipline

The LTTE was renowned for its disciplined culture, with Prabhakaran as its supreme leader (Terpstra and Frerks 2017a, 287). Across most scholarship on the LTTE, Prabhakaran is positioned as a kind of Tamil king – a leader by example, requiring fealty, and embodying a kind of awareness that made members feel he had perfect knowledge of all facets of the organisation. To some, Prabhakaran was a dictator ruling the LTTE "with an iron fist." (Baetjer 2007, 231)[9] but

[9] Dagmar Hellman explains the LTTE's political vision for Sri Lanka as a free "Tamil Eelam" under the 'benevolent dictatorship' of one man, Prabhakaran. For full description see Hellmann-Rajanayagam, Dagmar. 'The Tamil Militants-Before the Accord and After'. *Pacific Affairs* 61, no. 4 (1988): 603. HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.2307/2760524.

few could refute that he purposefully structured an organisation prepared for both guerrilla and conventional contests with the Sri Lankan state.

From the LTTE's formation in 1976, Prabhakaran appointed an initial committee of five senior members, retaining a position on the leadership council (Narayan Swamy 1994, 59). Many of these people were drawn from Prabhakaran's closest associates, including childhood friends. These classically "strong ties" are seen by some as critical for building the trust and robust upper management of the LTTE (Granovetter 1973; Lewis 2020; Staniland 2014a). While the leadership cabal involved close allies, the ultimate decision-making processes was left to Prabhakaran himself. Accounts from within the organisation from this time affirm Prabhakaran "would take the leader role in discussions … [and] share operation[al] secrets only on a need-to-know basis"(Narayan Swamy 1994, 60). The leadership committee was also responsible for crafting the LTTE's constitution, which outlined the group's mission and internal code of conduct.

Prabhakaran's challenge was to ensure his subordinates followed his orders. In this regard, some scholars have suggested the LTTE's strong discipline derived from the tight allegiance among group leaders, who were also members of the same Tamil caste. Prabhakaran was a member of the Karaiyar, known as a fisherman caste, whose traditionally lower-middle class status among Tamils (Staniland 2014a, 166). The Karaiyar tended to be geographically located in the country's north and northeast, in cities such as Prabhakaran's hometown of Valvettiturai (Kearney 1985). While this caste allegiance may inform our understanding of the LTTE's elite coordination, it is less useful for explaining why the organisation (generally) would be more disciplined. Specifically, while the Karaiyar were overrepresented among LTTE elite, the group's general membership consisted of the most diverse mix of caste groups of all Tamil organisations (Terpstra and Frerks 2017b, 299; Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1988, 140). In fact, if caste membership explained high levels of cohesion, we would expect discipline, as well as command and control, to be most fraught

within the LTTE. The LTTE's discipline is better explained through the mechanisms the LTTE leader established and then institutionalized within the organisation – training, monitoring, as well as a combination of compellent and coercive strategies for maintaining internal order.

Prabhakaran worked to professionalize the LTTE, with specific focus on the group's war-time activities. He divided the group's military wing into three sectors: one focused on eliminating Tamil "traitors" and those working for the Sri Lankan police intelligence; a second focused on degrading the Sri Lankan government; and the third, aimed at destroying the Sri Lankan army camps and wider administrative structure (Richards 2014, 18). Most important for our purposes was that one third of the group's operations were focused on internal monitoring and punishment of those members found to have violated the LTTE's rules. Extant scholarship on insurgent group behaviour suggests this kind of monitoring and punishments system helps inculcate fealty and orderliness among group members.

Prabhakaran was also "very strict on the quality and character of his men and women" (Narayan Swamy 2003, 94). Initially, all aspiring Tigers had to undergo a probationary period "during which [they] would be assigned preliminary tasks such as spying on selected targets, passing messages, [and] smuggling literature and weapons" for the group (Narayan Swamy 2003, 95). In addition to filtering out the potential 'bad apples' (a solution to the *adverse selection problem* – recruiting individuals whose interests diverge from the leaders in ways detrimental for eventual performance[10]), this also generated robust local intelligence throughout the country and, specifically, the Tiger's area of operations.[11] Prabhakaran would often keep an eye out for men and women he believed would make strong potential recruits: "If there was a young man in a village

[10] For details on the adverse selection problem and organisational solutions, see further: Obayashi, Kazuhiro. Rebel Recruitment and Information Problems [Electronic Resource]. 1st ed. Routledge Studies in the Politics of Disorder and Instability. London: Routledge, 2017; Haer, Roos, Lilli Banholzer, and Verena Ertl. 'Create Compliance and Cohesion: How Rebel Organisations Manage to Survive'. Small Wars & Insurgencies 22, no. 3 (July 2011): 415–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2011.581477.
[11] The importance of intelligence and the networks that share information during the nascent period of insurgent group formation are essential for building a feasible opposition force in intrastate conflict. See further Lewis, BOOK, forthcoming.

with some talent for underground work, he would be sounded out by an emissary who tried to persuade the person to throw in his lot with the LTTE" – and this practice continued for a number of years after the group's formation (Narayan Swamy 2003, 94–95). Prabhakaran's discipline and approach to organisation building stressed quality over quantity: "With just 50 good people I can do a good job, instead of having a bloated but useless 500," he told an early LTTE associate. Through a variety of controls, the LTTE had a way of "attracting some of the most committed, dedicated and decent young men and women into its ranks" (Balasingham 2003b, 65).

Once inside the organisation, LTTE members were forced to adhere to a strict set of moral rules and constraints. Vices were prohibited, including cigarettes and alcohol, and relationships with the opposite sex were strictly prohibited. Even a casual wave between members of the opposite sex was cause for punishment from LTTE superiors (Terpstra and Frerks 2017a, 287). Individuals were held accountable and responsible for their actions – anyone who lost their weapon would remain unarmed and demoted to camp cleaning and administrative duties, the severity and length of punishment conditional on the offense (Moorcraft 2012, 95). Individuals were not allowed to leave the group without prior consent (rarely granted) and were prohibited – for life – from joining or organizing other armed groups (Richards 2014, 18).[12] The codes of conduct were "essential to the discipline and integrity of the organisation" as members "committed and subordinated themselves for the purpose of achieving the noble cause of liberating their oppressed people" (Richards 2014, 18). All members were also obligated to swear an "oath of allegiance" both to struggle of the Tamil Eelam but also personally to Prabhakaran (Richards 2014, 18). Organisational pledges are common for most military associations and state militaries, but the member's pledged fealty to Prabhakaran, as an individual, signalled the unique and powerful position he held amongst

[12] One of the early exceptions – though not without historical consequence – was the departure of one-time chairman of the LTTE, Uma Maheswaran, who defected (after attempting to usurp Prabhakaran as group leader) to form the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), a rival organisation. Personal animosity between the two men continued for years, which included an armed standoff in the Tamil Nadu, India.

the Tamils. Taken together, these practices were thought to unify and discipline the LTTE in ways other groups could not.

Discipline was further improved through mandatory training for all members – male and female – which "mimicked the training systems used by national armies" involving both the physical conditioning of basic training and the political education necessary for understanding the Tamil contest. This political education usually consisted of reading or memorizing LTTE literature and viewing LTTE films (Richards 2014, 18). The training typically lasted from three to six months, as recruits improved their "fitness, basic infantry skills and tactics, weapons usage, parade drills … [and learned how to] use code words and map reading"(Richards 2014, 18). LTTE officials would observe recruits throughout the process and identify individuals' comparative strengths, ultimately assigning them specific roles or further specialized training. Prabhakaran and the LTTE leadership stressed the importance of full and ultimate commitment to the Tamil cause. LTTE members were each given a necklace and vial containing a cyanide capsule and were instructed to take the cyanide if they were captured – a practice that would limit their captors from extracting information, and a signal of their ultimate devotion to their cause – a degree of allegiance that marked the LTTE as the progenitor or restorer of "ancient traditions of hero warriors" (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1988, 612).

Combined with the potential punishments for transgressions, LTTE organisational norms were made more potent by consistent internal enforcement. For example, LTTE operating procedures demanded all commanders provide full reports from any completed operations. These reports were "faithfully passed up the command chain to senior officers who, if necessary, punished lower ranking combatants and commanders for unsatisfactory performance and for breaches on the code of conduct"(Richards 2014, 18). Dutiful internal reporting meant senior officials could effectively "manage down" the chain of command, instilling in LTTE members fears that mistakes would

not be overlooked. This detailed accounting also replicated the modern military's practice of "after-action reports" which are central moments of reflection where commanders (and subsequently the organisations they shape) can adapt to changing circumstances in the conflict environment.

Together, these features produced a disciplined organisation capable of strategically engaging amid conflict. Evidence of this organisational control was the LTTE's self-imposed period of détente in 1979-1980. This period included the passage and subsequent enforcement of the Terrorist Act (1979) which gave extraordinary powers to the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to deploy the military in the north to confront the "terrorist threat" posed by Tamil separatist groups. The LTTE understood the GoSL's punishment strategy could be a catalyst for increasing Tamil grievances against GoSL,[13] and according to Adele Balasingham, who was privy to command level discussions at the time, "the LTTE leadership embarked on a plan of action to expand and consolidate the organisation" amidst the intensifying counterinsurgency measures by "suspending all hostile armed activities against the state" and commence[d] an enhanced "programme of political action … to mobilise, politicise, and organise a broad civilian population towards the national cause" (Balasingham 2003b, 33).

EPRLF Discipline

The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) was officially christened in the town of Kumbakonam, in Tamil Nadu, India in 1981. While the group consisted of three main authorities, the group's leader central and strategic leader was Kandasamy Pathmanabha, also known as Ranjan, who got his start in radical politics nearly a decade before as the member of the Tamil student and youth resistance (Jayatilleka 2014, 16). According to Dayan Jayatilleka, a former associate, Pathmanabha was one of the founders of the very first socialist oriented organisations

[13] International lawyers and observers also condemned the Terrorist Act policies.

within the Tamil National Liberation Movement, called Eela Liberation Organisation (ELO) in 1974 and 1975. Ranjan was a "classic example of Tamil youths who left their homes in the late 1970s attracted by militancy" and, like many, ended up "finding salvation ultimately in Marxism"(Narayan Swamy 1994, 103).

Pathmanabha was one of the "first to break with the bourgeois and Parliamentary policies of the Tamil United Front,"(Jayatilleka 2014, 16) which led him "into the countryside and among the working people." This experience pushed the young Tamil leader further to the political left and encouraged him to reframe the struggle for Tamil Eelam in ways that "workers and peasants … suffering from caste oppression" may also find common cause in calls for revolutionary reforms or changes to Sri Lankan politics. In short, Pathmanabha saw himself at the beginning of a wider moment of political change (Jayatilleka 2014, 16), and – in a message he would repeat for years to come – he believed it "was very clear that the Tamil National Liberation struggle was the first step and stage of an overall socialist revolution throughout Sri Lanka"(Jayatilleka 2014, 17).

To build the EPRLF, Pathmanabha focused his attentions on Sri Lanka's eastern states – a region more economically impoverished and unequal than others in the country.[14] He advocated for "armed expropriations" – the use of force to reclaim profits taken from the Sri Lankan people which, in practice, led to his participation in the Puloly bank robbery, allegedly the first in the history of Tamil resistance (Jayatilleka 2014, 16). The robbery was so surprising to state security services they launched an extensive investigation and Ranjan was shielded from the Sri Lankan authorities by the people in the region, which allegedly "deepened his love … and respect for the common people"(Jayatilleka 2014, 16).

[14] Staniland admits this conclusion must be drawn from "sparse" evidence: the social base of the group is "a combination of students and some eastern lower castes" (167)

These "common people" were Pathmanabha's ideal cadres – the so-called "depressed classes" – which would come to dominate the EPRLF demographics. Thus, the archetypal member of the EPRLF was comparatively different from those attracted to the LTTE. While LTTE cadres "had an inherent sympathy with socialist views" wrote Adele Balasingham, "none of them articulated Marxist positions" (Balasingham 2003b, 45). Even aesthetically, EPRLF members differed from their LTTE contemporaries, tending to *look* like Marxist revolutionaries with "long beards and scruffy dress"(Balasingham 2003a, 45). These accounts are suggestive of EPRLF's membership dynamics – an organisation "open to all" and devoid of the personal grooming standards and rules of the LTTE.

The EPRLF was looking for "revolutionaries first" – a kind of young and radical thinker eager to commit their lives to the Marxist struggle. This orientation meant that the EPRLF were less scrutinizing than their LTTE counterparts about who signed up to fight. Calling for a "mass struggle" they employed weaker criteria for rejecting self-professed recruits. Within conflict studies literature, this inability or unwillingness to filter potential members can lead to the adverse selection problem, where the addition of self-interested and opportunistic kinds of members can make command and control more difficult. Further, as evidenced by existing studies of revolutionary movements, commitment to the "cause" does not necessarily translate into a commitment to or facility with armed struggle (Obayashi 2017). Thus, for some of the interested recruits, their contribution to the movement may have been limited if not counterproductive.

One question that remains is why the EPRLF's adverse selection problem was more acute over time in the 1980s. This evolution also renders Weinstein's theoretical explanation unhelpful: the adverse selection problem gets worse as the material assets of the group – their endowment – shrinks. Thus, while scarcity of material wealth should attract investor-style insurgents – committed to the cause – we do not observe this outcome. Instead, the EPRLF lost the ability –

or failed to invest in the capacity – to monitor their forces internally. Like most of the Big Five Tamil groups, they had grafted off the early Indian military training programs which sought to teach young Tamil fighters how to be military ready. While this support program had the effect of educating most of these early recruits across the Big Five Tamil insurgent groups, once the training was curtailed training and indoctrination would have fallen to EPRLF members directly.

The EPRLF did employ political education practices but given the orientation of the group – with many of the formative leaders being subscribed Marxists without considerable conflict experience – these processes were mostly around political questions, certainly not around tactics or strategies of violence. Even Pathmanabha's close friends reported the EPRLF leader's strategic thinking was too strongly informed by his "adherence to fundamental principles of Marxism and Leninism and revolutionary internationalism" which were "located in Comrade Pathmanabha's own style of leadership"(Jayatilleka 2014, 18). These same sources suggest the "belatedness of the EPRLF's attempt to develop a powerful military apparatus was also due to [Pathmanabha's] philosophical conviction that what was most important was a *mass* struggle, *mass* organisation, and a correct political orientation (Jayatilleka 2014, 18). These motives diverted resources away from mechanisms that might have otherwise strengthened the group's internal discipline.

The EPRLF worked to position itself as the quintessential Marxist vanguard group, working to generate strong linkages with the public. For example, an interview with an EPRLF fighter in 1982 notes:

> In villages, we held study classes. These were held at short notices and people would be blindfolded before they were taken to the venue … In our classes, we discussed subjects like the national question, the international situation, what

> Eelam should be, Sri Lankan political parties, the Indian Tamils…We used to say that India was anti-imperialist and pro-liberation movements and so India is our friend and should be kept as one." With a focus on the "essential questions", "we insisted on the importance of politics and ideology" causing "many of the new recruits … threaten[] to leave us"(Quoted in Narayan Swamy 1994, 106).

The EPRLF's decision to focus on offering ideological courses and attested (with well-developed propaganda and political education curriculum) to the importance of resistance and revolution, which may have been of lesser interest to the average Tamil civilian – particularly as the population was subjected to increasing coercion from the Sri Lankan security forces. The straddled strategy, between political education for the public and the instrumental use of violence, also meant the EPRLF failed to identify strategic opportunities to deploy violence. Put simply, the EPRLF's mission seemed to place politics before demonstrable action. The modus operandi of Pathmanabha's organisation was not to generate a tightly cohesive insular militia, keen and able to confront the incumbent power with violence, but to market the idea of political reform to the widest possible Sri Lankan demographic: a conscious revolution for a social democratic future.

External Relations

The following section explores the consequences of alliances and partnerships for the two Tamil groups, the LTTE and EPRLF. This section traces the groups' relationships with the Indian state and pro-Tamil political forces outside Sri Lanka to explore how these relationships influenced their respective capacities to control their patterns of violence.

LTTE External Relations

Prabhakaran had long recognized the war within Sri Lanka would require an ability to license and control the effect of politics beyond Sri Lankan borders. In the 1970s, Prabhakaran saw an opportunity for the LTTE to leverage a growing cleavage in the international politics in South Asia – specifically between the governments of India and Sri Lanka. In 1972, amid the Cold War, the Indian state declared itself independent of the growing entanglements of the Western bloc. This independence from the West did not suggest India would look eastward – the Indian government of Indira Gandhi remained concerned about being swept up by Soviet politics, too. At the same time, Sri Lankan state authorities recognized there might be a way to leverage tension around India's non-alignment to position themselves as a Western-friendly port in Asian waters – notably for the United Kingdom and United States. Prabhakaran recognized Indian political interests in the Sri Lankan regime were changing: the Gandhi administration wanted to ensure Sri Lanka did not turn either east or west, preferring a pro-India or at least non-aligned government of Sri Lanka (Jayasinghe 1989, 36) and the LTTE leader worked to position his group and align the pro-Tamil fight with India's geo-political interests.

What ensued was a two-pronged strategy of net-benefit cooperation with the Indian state. Prabhakaran petitioned to the Indian intelligence service's – known as the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) – for support and sent his associate, Anton Balasingham, to India to reach out to Tamil Nadu's Special Branch Intelligence bureau to get the LTTE added to RAW's training roster for the LTTE's inclusion (Balasingham 2003b, 73). Prabhakaran wanted to leverage the "free training" and supply of munitions through RAW's program. Once invited, however, Prabhakaran proceeded with caution, advising all LTTE members to provide only their "organisational name"– their nom de guerre – to Indian authorities. Prabhakaran carefully reviewed the Indian training program and quickly grew concerned about the quality and nature of their training.

He soon opened his own military camp in Tamil Nadu's Salem district – even before the first batch of LTTE fighters had finished their training with the Indian authorities. These early LTTE training camps (three in total) benefited from the safe haven of the Indian state but allowed greater control over the specific mode of training and organisation. Prabhakaran's believed RAW's program was purposefully flawed, with Indian authorities providing just enough firearms, training, and combat materials to ensure the pro-Tamil militants would "keep the Sri Lankan forces occupied but not enough to defeat them decisively" (Narayan Swamy 2003, 108). This assessment was apt, but also critical for highlighting the importance Prabhakaran placed on LTTE independence.

In parallel, and as early as 1983, Prabhakaran selected a senior associate, known as KP, to construct a parallel arms and supply chain to support the LTTE.[15] This procurement wing of the LTTE "operated in complete secrecy and even senior leaders of the LTTE were unaware of [KP's] activities" (Narayan Swamy 2003, 109). The first arms shipment arrived in 1984 and would continue throughout the conflict.

The LTTE also identified how international or extra-national coalition-building required a form of mass marketing of the Tamil cause. Within India, the LTTE built strong relations with key members of the political and economic community in Tamil Nadu. One of the most valuable was a pro-Tamil politician, M.G. Ramachandran, known as MGR, the most powerful and wealthy politician in the state of Tamil Nadu. MGR took particularly interest in Prabhakaran, becoming a friend and collaborator, who prised the Tiger leader's strict and disciplined persona. Between 1983 and 1985, the LTTE approached MCR requesting 200,000 Rupees for additional support and received 20 million instead.[16] The effect of personal connections – through Prabhakaran – and

[15] With two Indian passports and one Sri Lankan one, KP became "known in the files of many intelligence agencies, travelled extensively around the world, visiting Lebanon, the Thai-Cambodia border, Paris, London, Sweden, Greece, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Seoul, Tokyo, Singapore, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Australia." C.f. Swamy, Elusive, 109)

[16] In one account, the promised sum was so large the LTTE suggested it would be better to receive this funding in instalments. This revelation, while comical, also speaks to the considerable trust between Prabhakaran and MGR: foregoing the single-payment approach introduces additional risks of MGR's potential withdraw the pledge of support.

subsequently amplified by the higher discipline and commitment by the LTTE, was vital for gaining resources and the operational freedom throughout this period.

LTTE also remained close to EROS (Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students), based in London – a group that was sensitive to the LTTE's commitment and mission. Prabhakaran and EROS cadres worked to expand the extensive international network of the Tigers, particularly after the mass exodus of Tamils during the 1977 riots – where as many as 30,000 Tamils fled the country and served as a valuable source for remittances and channels for sharing information about anti-Tamil violence committed by the Sri Lankan regime. Over time, these inputs helped the LTTE shape a formidable public relations and propaganda program.

By 1987, Prabhakaran's concerns about Indian duplicity was affirmed when captured cadres from the EPRLF, PLOTE, and TELO admitted they had been trained and armed by RAW before being released back to Sri Lanka to confront the powerful (and growing) LTTE (Pālaciṅkam 2004, 115). That same year, amid the flurry of negotiations around the Indo-Lankan Accords, the LTTE sought to position itself between the Sri Lankan and Indian states. Recognizing the benefits of an Indian safe haven for Tamil insurgents, the LTTE worked to maintain their close relationship to key partners, notably MGR. However, as Indian state support could not be trusted, and the suggestion of pro-Tamil sentiment had ruffled Sri Lankan authorities, Prabhakaran and Anton Balasingham identified a potential window of opportunity. The "LTTE made overtures to India throughout late 1987 and 1988 regarding negotiations, but when these were repulsed, the group extended tentative feelers to Sri Lanka on commencing peace talks"(Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 195).

The strategic ploy was to signal, first to India, that the LTTE was the only legitimate pro-Tamil militant group, highlighting their superior capacity to protect the vulnerable Tamil population.

When the Indian state rebuffed the LTTE, the group then signalled the same organisational superiority to the Sri Lankan state, suggesting that the peace negotiations could only be guaranteed by including key LTTE demands. The group's potency gave them leverage – as they were best positioned to spoil any negotiated outcome – but their independence game them options. When the 1987 Indo-Lankan Accords were signed without concern for the LTTE's demands, however, the group repositioned itself as the immovable obstacle against both Indian and Sri Lankan state. If the Tamils had a voice, Prabhakaran aimed to ensure the LTTE was the mouthpiece.

One condition of the Indo-Lankan Accords was that Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF) would be deployed to pacify and stabilize northern Sri Lanka. This drove the LTTE to blame the Indian state for waiting too long to intervene if their interests had truly been to protect the Tamil people. The LTTE also alleged the IPKF was a front for snatching Eelam, the Tamil homeland, from LTTE control. Prabhakaran also suggested Indian authorities were the handmaidens of either American or Soviet power, making anyone associated with the intervention mere "pawns in the hands of superpowers"(Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 191).[17] Prabhakaran argued the IPKF had purposefully targeted the LTTE and – combined with previous attempts to instigate quarrels between the pro-Tamil groups – illustrated that India's concern for Tamil protection was artificial. Finally, Prabhakaran asserted the Indian government, under Indira Gandhi, was secretly concerned that LTTE success would generate increased political contest from co-ethnics in Tamil Nadu state in India. A publication from the period spells out, in no uncertain terms, the LTTE's position: "[Tamils] have been the slaves of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, and the Sinhalese. Now India calls us her slaves. Another word given to this phenomenon is 'democratic path"' (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 192).

[17] The 1970s and 1980s in South Asia featured considerable preoccupation, particularly between Sri Lanka and India, in terms of their positioning during the Cold War. This background noise was available to political entrepreneurs who sought to reframe local (private) grievances amid macro- or systemic-level contests.

In summary, the LTTE's careful evolution illustrates the group's insistence on operational and political independence. By creating multiple – and parallel – networks for sourcing materials, generating funds, and preserving the operational demands of the organisation, the LTTE was able to remain nimble and unattached to the dominant third parties active throughout the conflict. This independence, importantly, also meant that the strategies and behaviours of the LTTE were of their own choosing. The organisational discipline generated by the structure of the group combined with their independence of action, ensured that the public recognized the LTTE's actions as independent and purposeful.

EPRLF External Relations

The story of EPRLF external relations is comparatively simplistic. From the Indian training program, run by RAW, through the 1987 Indian-Sri Lankan Accords, the EPRLF continually looked to their Indian neighbours for vital assistance. Initially, this took the form of guns, ammunition, intelligence, and training, and – over time – continued as a kind of Faustian political bargain, particularly as the post-1987 accords christened a period of Indian intervention (Staniland 2014a, 166). Arms deliveries from Indian Intelligence, or RAW, continued to run between 1984-1987, usually delivered in air force planes in neatly packed cartons to air strips in Tamil Nadu (Wilson 1988). However, by 1987, support for Tamil groups was conditional upon their support for the Indo-Lankan Accords.

While India's RAW was initially hesitant to even touch the EPRLF because of its links with the Naxalites in Tamil Nadu "[t]he agency reviewed its stand … after Pathmanabha decided to cut off the nexus with Indian Maoists" (Wilson 1988). The EPRLF remained resource-poor in those early days and saw RAW's offer of training as means to their insurgent ends. Sending recruits to Tamil Nadu to train, however, EPRLF leadership did not attempt to build a parallel support or training structure. By 1987, however, the EPRLF had increased its reliance on their third-party ally further.

With the impending Indo-Lankan Accords in August of that year, the EPRLF saw a narrow window of opportunity, and sought to pounce.

The Indo-Lankan Accords in August 1987 followed a year of escalating violence in Sri Lanka and stipulated Indian military forces would be deployed as peacekeepers to stabilize the north of the country. While all the pro-Tamil groups were listed as "signatories" of the accords, many – and most notably the LTTE – claimed the Tamil contingents were given little notice and no direct concessions during the talks. Most Tamil parties took this as further evidence they were merely pawns in a larger Indo-Lankan political game. One of the Accord's central proposals was the November 1988 Provincial Council Elections. The EPRLF, recognizing the attrition and high cost of conflict, was the only pro-Tamil insurgent group to run in the elections. As a result, "India had no alternative but to cooperate" with the EPRLF (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 186).

Amid allegations of corruption, the EPRLF claimed the elections confirmed their monumental "democratic" victory in Sri Lankan politics. While political opportunism was one reason for the EPRLF-IPKF alliance, the EPRLF had made itself so reliant upon the Indian support that allying with peacekeeping forces was a necessary outcome. For their part, the EPRLF's electoral 'successes appeared to reinforce their narrative of a "national democratic revolution." In the words of Dagmar-Hellman, the EPRLF "hoped that by participating in elections it could introduce a 'centralized democracy' under the leadership of the suppressed classes"(Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 185). But this prioritization of the "parliamentary approach" also demanded organisational sacrifices.

Notably, Pathmanabha had to moderate their repertoires of protest in 1987, as the EPRLF sought to transition from pro-Tamil group into legitimate political party. This had two notable implications. First, the EPRLF's decision to stand for elections forced them to moderate the

Marxist tenets of the EPRLF's mission, notably rejecting the "armed appropriations" previously central to the group's program. This had the effect of further increasing EPRLF reliance on the IPKF when the LTTE increased their offensives in the autumn of 1987. Second, the EPRLF's alignment with the Indian state sparked immediate opposition from PLOTE and the LTTE. The EPRLF's alliance with the IPKF meant they had 'contract out' their pro-Tamil protection to the Indian peacekeepers – an armed force that did not see Tamil population as its constituency, and against which their disparate violence and indiscriminate patterns of harm had begun to generate considerable local grievances.

In short, the EPRLF was unable to minimize their dependence on the Indian state – coming to depend on the peacekeeping forces for their own protection. For instance, the EPRLF was reliant on Indian-supplied arms, as well as the physical presence of armed Indian officers, for their organisation's security, and lacked alternative suppliers of critical resources – notably intelligence and ammunition. These dependencies made it impossible for the EPRLF to routinise their patterns of violence or coercion among the Tamil population. Worse still, the violence authored by the IPKF was subsequently attributed to the EPRLF – the sclerotic, indiscriminate, and intimidating forms of violence diminished any credibility the EPRLF may have held.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF MECHANISMS

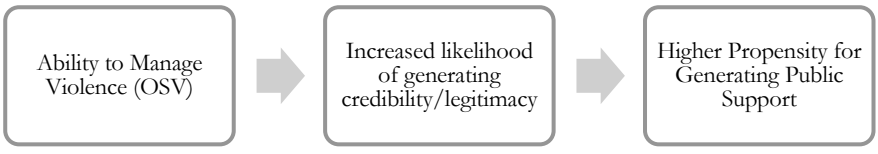
	LTTE	EPRLF
Organisational Discipline	*High*	*Low*
Organisational Independence	*High*	*Low*
Ability to Manage Violence	*High*	*Low*

As stipulated by the theory, organisation discipline and independence are strong for the LTTE, which suggests they will be most capable of controlling their violence towards civilians – and making that violence predictable. Conversely, the EPRLF struggled to establish either robust internal discipline and revealed itself to be reliant on external or third-party actors in ways that corroded its capacity for deploying – much less controlling – the violence it produced. The following section explores how the outcomes of these mechanisms – the strategic practice of using violence by Tamil groups – are associated with processes of establishing credibility and legitimacy during the Sri Lankan civil war.

Predictable Violence and Public Support

The empirical accounts above highlight differences between the LTTE and EPRLF in terms of organisational discipline and external relations. The final segment of this paper explores how the consequence of these differences, namely the variation in terms of the groups management of violence, influences how credible or legitimate these groups are seen, and thus, their level of public support.

FIGURE 2: CAUSAL PROCESS FOR PUBLIC SUPPORT



The expected outcome, according to the theoretical logic presented above, is that the LTTE – due to their ability to generate predictable violence – should be more likely to demonstrate credibility and legitimacy among the Tamil public. To explore this systematically, the next section looks first

at evidence of how violence is used by the groups, and how that violence is described by actors in the conflict environment.

In the case of the LTTE, their patterns of violence served as an important means of communication to the wider Tamil population. This was often juxtaposed, in the eyes of the Tamil public, with the EPRLF's comparatively intellectual or ideological approach to reforms. As one EPRLF member explained:

> In 1982, we (in the EPRLF) worked among landless peasants. We tried to get them ownership of the land on which their houses were built. But we were not violent. We were labelled the 'lower caste' party in Jaffna... We also carried out campaigns against illicit liquor and at times succeeded in organizing people to smash up the producing centers. For doing sustained political work, we got taunted in villages. PLOT and LTTE cadres called us pachchaivali (pasters) whenever they saw us carrying posters and buckets of paste (Narayan Swamy 1994, 105).

Here, EPRLF members became the target of both PLOTE and LTTE cadres viewed the former's work as wasteful and inefficient. Both PLOTE and the LTTE, in these early years, worked to model a different profile of revolutionary zeal: a willingness to step in where the state was not.

> PLOT[E] and LTTE boys were different. They would appear suddenly out of nowhere, distribute leaflets and disappear. They had small pistols tugging on their waists. It was really thrilling to see them. Naturally the Jaffna crowd pestered us: "Why don't you take up arms as well? We were accused of only writing pamphlets and not doing any work. But we believed that to hold arms one must be politically mature.

In these testimonies, we see signs of the growing fissure within Tamil society. Groups willing to take the risks of violent reform – and to make their violence legible and patterned – were seen as more credibly committed to the Tamil cause. Importantly, the violence the Tamil population could readily see, as authored by the LTTE, followed pattern and calculation. In this sense, the experience of violence – and the nature and utility of that violence – became a topic of intra-Tamil debate, with Tamil groups carving out their own philosophical positions on the socially acceptable limits this violence.

For instance, EPRLF members noted, with distain, that the "LTTE … began killing suspected criminals and alleged anti-social elements … [discussing summary execution of a thief] …" The EPRLF put up posters criticizing the practices, and "warning that fragrant misuse of weapons would one day lead to disastrous consequences." These public critiques belayed the wider societal grappling with what violence could be acceptably used for.

One notable example was the LTTE's use of "lamppost murders" – where Tamil civilians alleged to have betrayed the Tamil cause, or to have cavorted with Sri Lankan authorities, were tied to lampposts around Jaffna and shot a single time in the head. Their bodies were left as a "symbolic warning to the rest of the population"(Lilja 2009, 313). These incidents began with regularity around 1984. This violence served as a warning to the civilians and as a signal to that same population about the trustworthiness and commitment of the LTTE to the pro-Tamil fight.

For the management of violence thesis, these practices of violence against alleged criminals or anti-social elements illustrates the LTTE's control over its use of coercion. These incidents also reveal instances where the LTTE sought to use strategic violence to generate support among the local population – particularly as Sri Lankan law enforcement was not to be trusted. In fact, the LTTE's sustained commitment to the forceful and violent defence of the Tamil people – even if the pattern

was vicious – helped calcify the LTTE as the dominant Tamil insurgency. As evidenced in an account from 1988, a reverend travelling to Jaffna witnessed high levels of indiscriminate violence from both Indian Peacekeeping Forces and their EPRLF affiliates, and recorded in his journal: "my general impression is that support for the Tigers has increased again, caused by a growing feeling of irritation at the presence of the Indians"(Bavinck and Rajeshkumar 2011, 32). The support for the LTTE appears to be buffered further by government announcements, like the one in December 1988, that warned "anyone who takes part in [pro-Tamil] demonstrations against the government will be shot on the spot"(Bavinck and Rajeshkumar 2011, 42). Not only did these warnings make peaceful protest seemingly impossible, but they also made the LTTE's continued commitment to targeted violence more credible.

The LTTE was also careful to attach their use of violence to consistent propaganda and public relations campaigns. These tended to capture the LTTE as the "underdog Tamil outfit bravely fighting the Sri Lankan army and keep it at bay"(Katoch, n.d., 2505). Others have speculated that "even though the LTTE's rebellion was also based on coercion and an enforced agenda of social and political reform in the Tamil community, broader civilian compliance existed, shaped by legitimation based on Tamil nationalism, tradition, charismatic leadership, enemy images and LTTE cadres" (Terpstra and Frerks 2018, 281). My recalibration would be to argue that these wider legitimation strategies were themselves a function of the LTTE's stable and recurring patterns of violence within the conflict, such as the targeting of security forces, however brutally and sometimes with collateral damage. Further, the LTTE's violence was seen as the only element keeping the Sri Lankan authorities – and their indiscriminate patterns of violence – at bay. A resident on Kondavil, in December 1988, said his support for the LTTE grew throughout 1987 because, "if not for the LTTE resistance, the Sri Lankan army would have overrun Jaffna and turned it into a heap of rubble"(Bavinck and Rajeshkumar 2011, 51).

While Terpstra and Frerks note "other forms of legitimacy … were a consequence of behaviour or acts that were not intended as a legitimation strategy," I assert the LTTE's ability to generate sustained and resilient patterns of violence throughout the conflict period allowed the Tamil public the most stable and reliable evidence of the group's commitment to the cause – thus legitimating their claim as the rightful Tamil protectors. As Mampilly writes about rebel governance, pre-existing experiences, or patterns, between government and the governed can determine the form that rebel governance takes – and the legitimacy that such authority relies upon. My argument is that pre-existing patterns of harm – random, chaotic, and often without discernible pattern – between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil population made it possible for a non-state actor to establish new normative expectations about how violence would be used. Thus, the high civilian cost of Sri Lankan military offensives, the government's repressive policies and undisciplined raids, and attacks against Tamil civilians by many insurgent groups, created an environment where consistency of action, even if action might be costly, was preferable to the unpredictability of chaos.

This helps explain why the LTTE retains considerable support in periods where their violence against civilian populations was high. Sometimes this harm came from their decision to wage conflict in crowded urban environments, or through collateral damage in their attacks against Sri Lankan security forces. At other times, purposive crackdowns on specific communities or villages would be explained as a means of silencing sell-outs, denunciators, turn-coats, or spies of the regime. As Lilja and Hultman write, "a rebel group's ambition to lead the ethnic minority may thus result in attempts to establish dominance" – what they call "complete power over the community" – and this process involves "eliminating competitors and associated supports through guilt-by-association targeting" (Lilja and Hultman 2011, 179). The LTTE spurred public protests from Tamils who had lost their homes to LTTE requisitions, and even student demonstrations against what many saw as the "excesses of the Tigers" (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 137). While these

patterns of violence can be harmful, they embody what we might call the conqueror's logic. In other words, they demonstrated a regularity that gave the LTTE more credibility than any competitor while remaining patterned or regular in a way the Sri Lankan government's indiscriminate violence was not.

Most dramatic, however, was Prabhakaran's gambit between 1985-1987, targeting fellow Tamil organisations for extermination. The LTTE attacked TELO first, before targeting the EPRLF, and finally PLOTE. According to various scholars, the motivation for this internecine violence was to gain the strategic advantage, noting the LTTE would target groups when the demonstrated internal weaknesses and were thought to be easier to defeat. Others argued that Prabhakaran turned LTTE violence against his competitors as a means of eliminating the "bad apples" to ensure the wider pro-Tamil militant movement would not be jeopardized. Yet, even here, and if the logic holds, the wider claim in this paper would remain consistent: the elimination of comparatively erratic sources of violence within Sri Lanka – other insurgent groups – would help regularise the patterns of violence in the conflict environment – a process that vouchsafes public support by routinizing the experience of conflict (and the variation of violence) felt by civilians. The LTTE's continued public support relied strongly on their ability to make violence predictable for the locals. As one Tamil notes, "when you know what it's like to be the possible victim of arbitrary violence, that insecurity is something very deep within us… It is that [uncertain] violence, with its emotional residue, that makes the Tamil cause popular"(Anderson and Anderson 1988, 185).

It is important to note the EPRLF did not simply abandon violence during this period. However, the EPRLF's two-pronged approach – taking both the military and parliamentary routes at once – limited their ability to optimize their form of contestation. Specifically, with the passage of the 1987 Indo-Lankan Accords, the EPRLF saw the deployment of Indian peacekeepers as a means of augmenting its lagging military capacity. In July 1987, 3000 IPKF formally deployed into

northern Sri Lanka, and soon found their forces in open conflict with the LTTE. The Indian soldiers turned to the EPRLF for tactical support and their members were employed as "spotters" – identifying LTTE members throughout Jaffna (Balasingham 2003b, 167). These individuals would don hoods to hide their identity and position themselves in public spaces to identify LTTE members and sympathizers. The EPRLF's assistance to the IPKF further alienated the Tamil population who, as conditions worsened, were coming to see the LTTE's continued fight against *both* the Indian and Sri Lankan forces as evidence of their ultimate commitment to the Tamil population.

Left without alternatives, the EPRLF was dependent on the Indian peacekeepers, and had to respond to near constant rebukes from the LTTE that the their organisations had "operated as a political extension of the Indian military occupation of the Tamil homeland"(Balasingham 2003b, 209). For some observers, the EPRLF's willingness to stand for elections was an indication of desperation: an attempt to avoid a direct conflict with the then-stronger and more self-sufficient LTTE. Experts and LTTE-supporters alleged the EPRLF's was "unable to stand up to the Tigers on its own but had to rely extensively on India for arms and know-how [intelligence]"(Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 196).

By attempting to change Sri Lankan politics from within, the EPRLF fell victim to the critiques the LTTE had used so effectively against the pro-Tamil political parties in the past: the EPRLF was guilty of pandering and surrender to the Sri Lankan elite. The internecine nature of the Tamil movement, combined with the chauvinist tendencies of Sri Lankan national politics, meant that engaging politically was akin to "selling out" the Tamil people. Thus, the philosophy of reform adopted by the EPRLF clashed with the latent worries among Tamils that the Sri Lankan political arena was little more than staged performances where "negotiations and truces are just [the] means

of respite and vehicles for exposing the hypocrisy of the Sri Lankan government"(Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 175).

Meanwhile, the EPRLF's partnership with the IPKF meant their legitimacy was ultimately reliant on public perceptions of the behaviours (and strategies) employed by the Indian peacekeeping forces. Perhaps unsurprisingly, while the IPKF was politically interested in settling the Sri Lankan civil war in line with their interests, the Indian authorities were not politically invested in pursuing these ends at all costs. In other words, the principal-agent relationship between the actors complicated the ability for the EPRLF (the agent) to shape their principal's (IPKF) behaviours, and specifically their pattern of violence against the Tamil population. According to Wilson, this was EPRLF's "most egregious blunder" as the practice of "cooperating with India and Colombo in implementing the provincial council's scheme …[and] the organisation's close ties with India discredited it in the eyes of the local population"(Wilson 1988, 129). This was made worse after the arrival of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) whose deployment into the conflict-prone region led them to frequently harass the local Tamil population, draining the IPKF and the accords of any public support. Yet, it was not merely the alliance with the IPKF, but their inability to influence the behaviour of that ally, that mattered.

Between July 1987 and March 1990, '[t]he only thing you could do was to hold your breath and concentrate on how to survive," according to one Sri Lankan Tamil (Fuglerud 1999, 37). Residents began referring to the IPKF as the 'Indian People Killing Force.' At the low end of the estimate, at least 10,000 Tamil civilians died during this period (Amnesty International 1990). This period also included allegations against the IPKF for the torture, extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and unlawful detainment of the Tamil people (Amnesty International 1990). To make matters worse, the EPRLF was consistently seen (and labelled, notably by the LTTE) as the "mercenary arm" of the IPKF, particularly as the IPKF used members of other militant groups as

spotters to identify alleged Tigers in villages and towns throughout the region (de Silva 2014, 452). In other words, the principal-agent relationship between the actors complicated the ability for the EPRLF (the agent) to shape their principal's behaviours, and specifically their pattern of violence, against the Tamil population.

Rumours of IPKF withdrawal would often circulate and the EPRLF leadership could sense the winds of change. Worried about confronting the LTTE without the IPKF's support, the EPRLF hastily created the Civilian Volunteer Force (CVF) but, due to their lack of support, resorted to forced recruitment of Tamil youth to fill their ranks. For a group whose internal discipline was always deprioritized, building an organisation capable of discriminately using violence was near impossible. According to Bavinck, discussing with a fellow bishop, Rev. Ambalavanar, in January 1989, the ensuing period of violence drove public disillusionment with the EPRLF: "[I]nstead of presenting themselves as a government, they were only visible in the form of groups of boys without uniforms but with guns, loitering on the street or driving in vehicles" (Bavinck and Rajeshkumar 2011, 51).

By June 1989, local observers heard reports that the "EPRLF and its allies, [were] arresting hundreds of boys" and, in places like Jaffna, this "continuing round-up … appeared to cause a great deal of anxiety in the minds of people" (Bavinck and Rajeshkumar 2011, 63). According to some, "the sense of insecurity [was] apparently so great that [Bavinck] noticed … women became tense if their men folk had to leave the home or, having left, stayed away too long"(Bavinck and Rajeshkumar 2011, 63). He added, "one gets the impression that after [Sri Lankan Prime Minister] Premadasa's demand for [the IPKF] to leave, [they] don't care anymore what the consequences of their actions are for the citizens"(Bavinck and Rajeshkumar 2011, 63). Most telling about these anecdotes is that the EPRLF, by late 1989, retained little to no organisational discipline, much less influence with the IPKF. Not only was the organisation unable to control the IPKF's use of

violence – which greatly diminished their standing among the Tamil population – but their leadership was unable to control how group members used violence more generally. In the language of this theory, the EPRLF lacked both the internal discipline and the strategic independence to moderate – and regulate – their program of violence.

TABLE 2: MANAGEMENT OF VIOLENCE OUTCOMES

	LTTE	EPRLF
Organisational Discipline	*High*	*Low*
Organisational Independence	*High*	*Low*
Ability to Manage Violence	*High*	*Low*
Capacity for Generating Public Support	*High*	*Low*

As Table 2 highlights, the variation in control over violence by the LTTE and EPRLF have clear consequence for their ability to generate public support. One way of framing the insights presented above is to lean on our conceptual understanding of legitimacy – legitimacy as a symbolic commodity drawn from extant belief patterns and the social structure of a society – and the extent to which the patterns of behaviour adopted by these groups are associated with increasing their legitimacy. I assume "the extent of legitimacy enjoyed by a government or rebel group can only be understood by observing the populations responses to their concrete actions" (Gawthorpe 2017, 843), and the reported accounts of the LTTE and EPRLF suggest the consistency and predictability of the violent LTTE allowed them to glean more legitimacy, and subsequently greater levels of support, among the population.

Implications

This paper's key contribution is to illustrate how an insurgent group's management of civilian victimization is vital for explaining how credibility and legitimacy are generated amid the fog of war. Framed as communicative action, a group's violence – even violence towards civilians – is neither inherently advantageous nor disadvantageous. Instead, the effect of violence fluctuates according to how, when, and which actors choose to employ specific patterns within a conflict environment. I assert that insurgent groups can gain critical legitimacy by making patterns of civilian victimization predictable, especially when opponents – state or other insurgents – adopt strategies with high levels of disordered violence.[18] Thus, understanding the LTTE's management of violence against civilians – patterned, predictable, and seen by fellow Tamils as credible – helps explain how the LTTE was able to generate public support compared to their other pro-Tamil insurgents.

This empirical evidence challenges some of our suppositions about the relationship between insurgent restraint and public support. If restraint or the reduction of civilian harm was determinative of public support, then the EPRLF's comparatively non-violent, politics-first, approach would have drawn strong public support in the early 1980s. Instead, in this period, insurgent groups willing to use violence – LTTE and PLOTE, notably – were christened by the Tamil public as "their boys" – a title that denoted their commitment to Tamil defence. Interestingly, however, the empirical evidence from this paper also challenges our scholarly accounts and assumptions on outbidding behaviours, which tends to assume the extreme use of violence is, itself, an indicator of insurgent strength or credibility. Turning to extant work on national movements, Krause highlights the "network" instead of "dyadic" effects of multi-party

[18] We can think of disordered violence as akin to punishment strategies which involve "deliberately targeting non-combatants to raise the societal costs of continued resistance," according to Seth Jones. While Jones defines punishment strategies as an insurgent practice, the empirical record clearly shows these types of actions are also perpetrated by governments. Most importantly, punishment strategies are associated with "undermining hearts and minds, creating high levels of resistance to rebel [or government] advances, and damaging the reputation of rebel groups [or the government] within the country and internationally. C.f. (S. G. Jones 2017, 169)

conflicts, where retributive state violence will often target the "strongest group" even if it is in retaliation for violence offered by other weaker armed actors within the movement (Krause 2018). In this system, insurgent A will receive state violence because of the behaviors or strategies of insurgent B. In these environments, it becomes difficult to calculate the wider conflict environment effects that influence the ultimate balance of power. One area of convergence between my theoretical argument and Krause's, however, is that dominant actors within the movement are less likely to support escalatory violence (and disorganised violence). Addressing actors that use un-strategic modes of contestation was, according to some, the reason the LTTE eliminated the rival Tamil groups in the mid-1980s. The EPRLF's late-conflict inability to contain violence, and high levels of indiscriminate violence, was not useful for signalling their credibility, nor was it generative of public allegiance. Instead, the LTTE's violence, which was patterned and routine, carried the most weight: generating credibility, legitimacy, and eventually the support of the public.

This paper also calibrates our perspective on violence by stressing the importance of iteration and evolution. I argue that pre-existing patterns of harm – random, chaotic, and often without discernible pattern – between dominant actors in Sri Lanka made it possible for a non-state actor to establish new normative expectations about how violence would be used. This argument then helps highlight how violence's utility fluctuates according to key contextual factors. For instance, extant scholarship has shown that when civilian loyalties to an insurgent group are robust, selective (targeted) violence from the state is unlikely to deter people from supporting that group. When selective violence is inefficient, the state is forced to adopt high-cost punishment strategies (indiscriminate violence) to try and stem civilian support (Downes 2007). Yet, this paper's findings suggest this is precisely the chaos-inducing decision that offers insurgents an expanded window of opportunity to regularize and make predictable their respective patterns of violence, solidifying themselves as credible and legitimate in relation to the state power. By extension, then, this project speaks to a lacuna within the literature on civil violence which, if it does involve the state, almost

never incorporates the government's actions substantively into its models (Lacina 2014, 721). The management of violence theory outlines a pathway for establishing rebel credibility – a pathway trimmed and pruned by the government's own abuses of violence.

Perhaps most unsettlingly, this paper affirms that the 'might makes right' aphorism may be particularly apt in the context of multiparty civil wars – provided the use of force is predictable. The core theoretical contribution of this paper is that violence is not merely a bug in the machinery of conflict, but a critical causal feature used by groups to communicate an array of information and to generate credibility and legitimacy. This claim challenges the traditional Western philosophical assumptions about the root of legitimacy in political systems – that a political actor's legitimacy derives first from the consent or willing subjugation of the public. This consent is often theoretically assumed a priori to the practice of governance, and certainly the conduct of war. This does not mean the ruling authorities cannot suspend the rights and liberties of their citizens, but that the logic for why authorities are legitimate does not derive from those actions. In other words, these actors are legitimate first, and then their use of coercion is therefore justified. For example, in Western democratic states, governments might enact War Powers measures that fundamentally limit their citizens' rights and liberties: governments are not legitimate because they enact these measures: because they are legitimate, they may enact these measures.

The management of violence theory suggests that legitimacy is generated through the actions of violent entities. Predictability and stability of violence, under these circumstances, become central tools in establishing credibility and legitimacy. Thus, violence provides an alternative route to credibility and legitimacy – even more so in the context of complex and chaotic civil war. The wider policy implication here, however, is that new norms of violence may be more potent than any of the extant non-violent reforms or policies often deployed in service of liberal or progressive governance outcomes (i.e., the establishment of democratic norms and representative electoral

practices). In fact, these "democratic" reforms are likely insufficient for establishing an actor's credibility or legitimacy – and are thus duly limited in establishing the conditions for public support during conflict – a reality that challenges our "hearts and minds" frameworks in modern insurgency. Amid the uncertainty of war, the most routine and predictable violent actors – in whatever form they present – may be preferable to the liberal or the principled.

Conclusion

This paper develops the management of violence theory through a comparative (and illustrative) probability probe of two cases in Sri Lanka, between two rival insurgent organisations with similar origins but divergent outcomes: the Eelam People Revolutionary Left Front (EPRLF) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). While each group began in similar circumstances and at a similar time in the Sri Lankan state, the LTTE would become the dominant pro-Tamil insurgent group, surviving as continued rival to the incumbent state until their eventual defeat in 2009. The EPRLF, by comparison, failed to generate public support during the mid-1980s and faded from prominence by 1989. This paper's empirical sections highlight how the LTTE's management of civilian victimization communicated specific information to the host (Tamil) population that generated higher levels of credibility and legitimacy, particularly when compared to the violence authored by the Sri Lankan state, and*, more importantly,* competing Tamil separatist groups. In short, insurgent groups able to generate norms of predictable violence, while their opponents struggle to control their patterns of violence, will be seen as more credible or legitimate protectors or representatives of conflict-affected constituents.

The plausibility probe approach reveals how critical it is for insurgent groups to manage uncertainty more generally, and specifically through the management of violence towards civilians. I argue that two mechanisms – group discipline and the nature of a group's external relations – influence their ability to control their patterns of violence. This control introduces predictability

into an otherwise chaotic conflict system. This predictability is what generates credibility in the eyes of the non-participant population, leading to higher levels of public support, and usually increased dominance or potency for the insurgent group.

This paper also offered a nuanced qualitative analysis of insurgent groups in Sri Lanka, exploring how the proposed mechanisms explains the different organisational outcomes in the civil war. First, the paper's empirical findings highlight the importance of agency amid the structural conditions of any conflict theatre. For instance, differences between LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and EPRLF leader Pathmanabha are critical for how they narrate, interpret, and thus position themselves and their groups in the conflict ecosystem. Second, the paper suggests how group leadership style shapes organisational discipline – and the organisations leaders inevitably build.[19] Finally, the paper explores how differences in leadership vision and organisational discipline can be further amplified by the groups' selection of external partnerships. These alliances are strategic decisions, and the two groups' external relations influenced their ability to control their use of violence during the conflict. Taken together, these two mechanisms explain why the LTTE and EPRLF were differently capable of positioning themselves as representatives and protectors of the Tamil people.

The ability to manage violence against civilians served as a critical means of communication of the insurgent groups' ability to regularize the conflict environment. Compared to the high instances of civilian victimization authored by the EPRLF and Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), the LTTE's moderate use, and careful control, of punishment tactics let them position themselves as protectors of the Tamil population, particularly between 1983 and 1987. This positioning was vital for producing legitimacy, which generated support among non-combatants. Thus, this paper finds

[19] This is the subject of Paper III in this thesis collection, Architects of Conflict.

the LTTE's ability to manage violence against civilians is central for explaining the group's trajectory in the context of the Sri Lankan civil war. The cases presented in this paper confirm that public support does not emerge under conditions of uniform restraint. Instead, public support is purchased through order, which only emerges through the predictable and routine deployment of coercion and violence. This paper demonstrates that, amid the uncertainty or fog of war, the strongest rebel and insurgent groups establish themselves as agents of order: an order maintained not by the absence, but the predictability and routinization of violence.

II

UNDER PRESSURE

Explaining Decentralisation of Insurgent Organisations

INTRODUCTION

Even the most chaotic civil war is a clash of organisations. Civil wars, otherwise known as intra-state conflicts, typically feature an insurgent competitor seeking political reform or revolution through violence against a materially stronger state military. In these imbalanced conflict environments, insurgent leaders and decision-making elites must design their groups to take best advantage of their circumstances to increase their chance of victory. Within the extant literature on insurgent group structure and organisational design, scholars suggest that strong centralised command and control are critical characteristics for increasing the likelihood of group victory. Yet, given the organisational benefits of centralization, under what conditions do insurgent groups decentralise?

This paper argues that an increase in the level of external coercion and the loss of internal cohesion within an insurgent group, serves as catalytic triggers for organisational adaptation. These mechanisms interact in complex and iterative ways but tend to prompt insurgent leaders to decentralize – to distribute decision-making authority. This decentralization has important conflict consequences by subsequently reducing the potency of the insurgency while improving their ability to survive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Insurgent organisations are increasingly the focus of academic investigation. To date, the dominant strands of organisational literature investigate why organisations breakdown (Pearlman and Cunningham 2012; Staniland 2014b), how organisational trade-offs affect insurgent violence (Heger, Jung, and Wong 2012), how organisations remain cohesive (Cohen 2017), or find cause to cooperate with others (Christia 2012). Other works have adopted the organisational approach to assess how multiple groups within political or revolutionary movements interact with each other (Krause 2018). These studies are central to our understanding of organisational behaviour, but

they differ in the (purported) cause of effects. For instance, some scholars are interested in how organisations fracture or splinter, but the triggers for the phenomena are determined by the presence of external actors (Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour 2012), or due to internal leadership disagreements (Brenner 2017). Importantly, however, there is growing consensus that "dynamics associated with violence, non-violent strategy adoption, long-term resilience, and post-conflict transformations … all occur at the organisational level" (Sarah E. Parkinson and Zaks 2018, 271). On the organisational effects directly, "scholars have many theories of civil war, insurgent participation, and patterns of violence, but few that take insurgency serious as a problem of organisation building" (Staniland 2012, 148).

For instance, nascent insurgencies tend to be dominated by a single, or small set, of leaders (Leites and Wolf 1970, 51).[20] This narrow distribution of authority is critical during the initial phases of development, when groups are more vulnerable to detection and destruction by the state (Jeffrey Herbst 2000) and because centralization allows insurgents better ability to control the flow – and potential leakage – of information (J Herbst 2000; Lewis 2020). Extant literature has highlighted how centralized insurgent command is related to higher likelihood of insurgent group victory (Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009), and how centralized command makes combined arms – i.e. more technically complex military tactics – possible (Biddle 2004). Specifically, the ability to organise and deploy specialized military units, under common command, with the capacity for real-time communication, increases the likelihood a non-state group can employ conventional, instead of merely irregular and guerrilla, military tactics. More generally,

[20] Seth Jones finds upwards of 90 percent of insurgent groups since 1945 are "centralized" and the Non-State Actor dataset records centralized control for 91.3 percent of groups, with 5 percent with no centralized control, and 3.6 percent of the sample is missing this organisational data. These figures might lead us to question whether centralisation is necessary and sufficient condition for success and survival for insurgencies. One cause for concern with these figures, however, is their static nature: if groups must centralize early to pass the initial survival threshold and, at which point, they are assessed in terms of centralisation/decentralisation, then we should see high percentages of centralisation, but this measure offers only a static snapshot of the group at a specific moment. Further, the limitation of this measure is it is temporally insensitive: 91 percent of insurgencies are "centralized" at *some* phase of their evolution. As centralisation is commonly found in early-stage insurgencies, this finding is not particularly useful for exploring variation *across time* for insurgent groups.

control over insurgent group tactics – amid intrastate conflict – is critical to leverage the insurgent advantage, with non-state actors often benefiting from indirect, attrition-style strategies of confrontations against their more powerful opponents (Mack 1975; Arreguin-Toft 2001). Centralised decision-making makes deployment of tactical repertoires more efficient. In short, these literatures argue centralization increases the group's ability to *hurt* the state (Krause 2013).

Centralized authority – where insurgent leaders have considerable control over their subordinates – is also positively correlated with strong internal monitoring practices, essential for instilling and preserving codes of conduct, increasing group discipline, and controlling strategy in the theatre of conflict (Hoover Green 2016; Sinno 2008, 17).[21] Further, centralised authority may reduce the risk of the adverse selection problem – recruiting self-interested and poorly disciplined recruits whose actions can be detrimental to organisational effectiveness (Obayashi 2014). The adverse selection problem can be particularly pernicious in political environments were insurgency presents as a means for personal or private profit (Weinstein 2007; Collier 2004; Walter 2004). Centralised control may also rely on an organisation's strong horizontal ties, or linkages between central elites, whose coordination and trust is vital for preserving the integrity of the organisation amid conflict (Staniland 2014a). Staniland argues that strong horizontal and strong vertical linkages (sometimes understood as public support) is a recipe for a robust integrated insurgency, both potent and durable (Staniland 2014a). However, centralization also increases certain strategic vulnerabilities. Centralisation can make a group's hierarchy more visible, which increases the likelihood counterinsurgent (COIN) forces can identify the different strata of members, infiltrate said organisation, and potentially target key or senior members within the group. This assessment tracks Shapiro's (2013) findings that organisations with centralized control incur higher security risks.[22]

[21] Sinno (2008) asserts a similar argument, with one caveat: the costs and benefits of centralisation and decentralisation depend on whether an insurgent group enjoys a territorial safe haven – within the geography of their home state/state of contest.

[22] Both Shapiro and Jordan find centralisation tends to lead to strong or resilient organisations – a potential challenge to the argument proposed in this project. In response, it is important to remember that Jordan uses time as a proxy for organisational robustness, yet what she is seeking to identify is bureaucratization. Thus, the mechanism doing the work, so to speak, is not

Over time, however, and often as insurgent groups increase in size, organisational changes follow. The first prompt for organisational adaptation tends to be endogenous, as group leaders seek to optimize their group's operations (Biddle 2021; Jordan 2014; King 2019). We can think of this adaptation as specialization. For purposive institutions that balance myriad goals, success requires individual members specialize and take responsibility for particular tasks. For instance, insurgent leaders must organise to train, equip, feed, house, and direct their members towards their common goal. This process is similar to Jenna Jordan's concept of bureaucratization, explaining that "as organisations become larger, more complex, and more specialized, they are likely to develop diversified functions"(2014, 12). While task specification is a form of decentralization, specialization remains distinct from the process explored in this paper. In this respect, extant literature offers intermittent insights but fails to provide a systematic explanation for either the drivers or consequences of group decentralization.

While there is scant literature that directly tackles the concept of decentralization, using the established logics of centralization, we can deduce that decentralisation, or the distribution of authority or decision-making power, may retain specific benefits. For instance, decentralisation appears to improve clandestinity. For example, disaggregated organisations – without visible central organizing hierarchies – increase the identification problem for the state,[23] making the identification of group members more resource intensive; penetrating the organisation more difficult, and harder to connect members to one another.[24] Decentralization may also provide a

centralisation, but the development of standard operating procedures. The generation of SOPs, however, is not exclusive to centralized, even if the sampled cases each scholar studies tends to be dominated by those that appear to favour centralisation.

[23] Young and inexperienced groups will not possess the institutional memory necessary to weather leadership changes, at least compared to older, more established, insurgent organisations. This explains their specific vulnerability to counter-insurgent practices at this stage in their lifecycle.

[24] Some readers may challenge the logic of decentralisation for the purposes of survival/security. There is some literature on insurgencies and within security studies that suggest decentralisation, under certain conditions, can lead to increased risk of information loss. This charge runs counter to, or refutes, this paper's assertion that decentralized insurgencies are comparatively advantaged for preserving clandestinity. Critics claim that the loose organisations of members within a decentralized organisation offers *greater* opportunity to identify, intercede or infiltrate the group, and without central leadership knowing it has happened. By gaining access to vital organisational information, the group is vulnerable to more effective COIN responses. Thus, decentralisation

structure more resistant to factionalism "through regional or functional segregation" until the resources necessary for rectifying this factionalism can be procured (Sinno 2008, 93). Further, scholarship on "network" organisations[25] implicitly suggests decentralized groups are more likely to be adaptable, resilient, with increased capacity for learning, innovation, and recruitment (C. Jones 2006, 8; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Jones 2008, 8).[26] Thus, these organisations derive their security through the autonomy of their group's component parts and their ability to operate without extensive coordination (Sinno 2008, 15).

However, disaggregating authority and flattening the organisation also limits the group's capacity to organise coordinated campaigns against the state, thus limiting a group's ability to hurt the state. Understood in these terms, decentralisation is maladaptive for achieving a group's stated aims, whether the overthrow or defeat of the incumbent power, or the establishment of autonomous or independent authority. While decentralization is often overlooked in extant literature, the puzzle of balancing both success and survival is implicated in our summary assessments of insurgencies as entities needing to "fostering commitment to achieving the organisation's goals amongst its members" while also "ensuring that the organisation maintains its structural integrity" (Kenny 2010, 536). In other words, insurgencies are learning organisations (Leites and Wolf 1970) that must "pursue strategic goals that benefit larger social movements … while simultaneously pursuing organisational objectives that benefit the groups themselves (Krause 2013, 261).

is related to higher potential for discovery and dismantling.[24] This concern is important, as information is the most critical commodity for COIN operations (and counter-COIN response). However, I consider this specific vulnerability to be a second-order threat for decentralized groups. Theoretically, members of a decentralized group will hold less information about the general operations of the group. Per agent, the state's information quotient for each member captured ought to be lower in a decentralized group compared to a centralized group. I base this assumption on literature on network theories about organisation (C. Jones 2006; S. G. Jones 2017) In sum, the strategic or tactical value of information held by the average member diminishes with decentralisation, which then lowers the organisational costs of potential information loss. The net effect is a shallowing-out of the risk curve for groups that are decentralizing – at least in terms of their risk of discovery, infiltration, or counterintelligence.

[25] Due to the skyrocketing interest in terrorist organisations – researched as distinct from insurgencies – in the era after the attacks of September 11, 2001 – there has been an increase in scholarship on "network" or "cellular" organisations. For conceptual clarity, I contest network or cellular organisations should be understood as forms of decentralized organisations: firms or groups where the decision-making authority is distributed across a wider set of actors. Accepting this correction, decentralisation – as an organisational form – is far more commonly observed and, as the above puzzle outlines, suitably under-explained.

[26] As Eilstrup-Sangiovani and Jones note, the term "network" is often used metaphorically without clear definition or exposition.

Thus, the literature outlines an unsolved puzzle: if decentralization is negatively correlated with groups success, but necessary, under certain conditions, to remain organisationally operational, under what conditions do insurgent groups decide to decentralize? Currently, we lack a theoretically informed exploration of why, and under what conditions, insurgent groups decentralize. Thus, we need to understand insurgent organisations engage in a critical two-level game: attempting to balance the strategies that improve their chances of victory with strategies that help them survive changing conditions amid the conflict. In this vein, this paper argues decentralization, or the distribution of decision-making authority, is a means of preserving the organisational integrity of the group and is prompted by changes in two critical characteristics – external coercion and internal cohesion. The next section explains how variation in these characteristics can trigger insurgent leadership to alter their organisational division of authority.

CONCEPTS AND MECHANISMS

I argue an insurgent group's performance is strongly influenced by its distribution of decision-making authority – namely, the extent to which their organisational structure is centralized or decentralized. However, unlike remanding my analysis to static measures of a group's command arrangement, I assume these organisational features fluctuate according to the needs of the organisation and in response to changes, both internal and external to the group, in their conflict environment. Specifically, I argue that changes in a group's external environment – an increase in coercion against the insurgents – and their internal environment – a decrease in the group's cohesion – are critical catalysts for organisational change and prompt insurgent group elites to decentralize authority within the organisation. Respectively, I refer to these decentralization processes as the security response and the power-sharing response.

Coercion and the Security Response

Violence is an important instrument for communication during intrastate conflict. As an insurgent group commits acts of violence within the state, incumbent or opposition forces will often target the insurgent threat through increased intelligence gathering, arrests, or violent reprisals against real or perceived members and supporters of the organisation. The latter forms of state intervention qualify as tools of coercion, as defined in this paper, as *violence directed towards the insurgent group by external actors*. This external coercion may come from rival non-state actors or incumbent (state) security forces.

For groups with centralized command structures, their operations – and wider membership – may be comparatively visible to these threatening opponents. In some cases, this results in sustained pressure from counterinsurgent forces, and insurgents may decentralize in order to survive (Shapiro 2013). Thus, as external coercion increases, insurgent groups may opt to decentralize authority to avoid detection and reduce their organisational vulnerability. As centralised groups are comparatively more visible than decentralized network or cellular structures, distributing authority can be vital for preserving organisational integrity. Importantly, recent work on insurgent groups in warfare may affirm the logic of organisational change, finding investment in new forms of combat or alterations to the organisation's structure tends to be more likely when the stakes are high, and are particularly likely if those stakes are seen as existential (Biddle 2021, 89).

Cohesion and the Power-Sharing Response

Insurgent leaders rely on the cooperation and coordination of their group members, operated in environments of high risk (Biddle 2004; 2021). Internal organisational management spans two domains: material and normative. Materially, insurgent leaders must distribute sufficient resources (in training, foodstuffs, housing, equipment or clothing, and payment) to retain group members. Normatively, the leader must provide a suitable emotive, political, identarian, or ideological

framework to inspire common sacrifice in service of the group's ends. Further still, elites can incorporate rules, institutions, codes of conduct, and education programs to socialize insurgent members. Some groups implement induction rituals – from pledges and oaths to specific uses of violence – to generate in-group connections, generate mutual trust, or to isolate members from non-combatants or relations from their pre-insurgent group lives (Klem and Maunaguru 2017b; Day 2017).

For organisations that attract members of different ideologies, ethnicities, political and class identities, practices of socialization according to codes of conduct can be particularly critical. In these groups, intra-organisational tensions – particularly amid fluctuation in terms of group performance or strategy – can rise quickly. According to Woldermariam, battlefield outcomes – either victories or losses – are junctures where these elites may reassess the group's expected probabilities of success, as they choose how to cooperate with their leader moving forward (Woldemariam 2016). These elites, if they choose to break from the current leader, become veto players – individuals whose independent leverage within an organisation allows them either to petition for wider control over, confound the plans of, or directly challenge the command structure of the organisation. For groups constructed of different ethnic, socio-economic, tribal, ideological, or political groups – thus, groups with lower original conditions for cohesion – the likelihood of veto player emergence may be higher.[27]

Under conditions of diminishing cohesion, group leaders can select between a range of strategies to address internal threats.[28] First, leaders may decide to purge or eliminate these actors, if possible. These actions may provide short term – and comparatively decisive – solutions to the veto player problem, but demand the leader institutionalises those internal instruments to consistently punish

[27] Evidence drawn from literature on coup-proofing can be useful in guiding our insights and calibrating effective strategies for leaders.
[28] Space limits full exploration of these strategies of veto purge and cooptation.

members to deter future members from similar patterns of defecting. These internal monitoring and management tools can be essential for retaining organisational integrity. Alternatively, leaders may decide to co-opt the veto player through selective inducements, such as re-distributing authority – ostensibly giving them larger slices of the leadership pie. These power-sharing solutions may be particularly attractive to leaders where internal discipline or punishment is deemed too expensive or onerous. In this latter case, where leaders adopt a power-sharing response to an intra-organisational threat, the organisational effect is decentralization – a flatter distribution of authority. To adopt Hirschman's famous trade-off, I reframe the power-sharing decentralisation process as a leader's attempt to offer 'voice' instead of 'exit' to aggrieved elite members, ostensibly aiding in member retention, purposive commitment to the cause, and increasing group cohesion (Hirschman 1970).

Observable Implications

Recalling that coercion refers *violence directed towards the insurgent group by external actors*, this paper argues the following. Materially or militarily stronger states, or the presence of capable antagonistic non-state organisations, will likely generate higher levels of external coercion against an insurgent group. Further, as centralized organisations tend to be more capable, and efficient, in hurting the state or their opponents, these groups are more likely to be seen as credible. This credibility will, comparatively, prompt their opponents to invest more energy and resources in their counterinsurgent or violent contestation of the group. By the logic of the theory, I assume that centralized organisations, which tend to be more potent, are more likely to be the target of strong state response.

COERCION SHOULD BE HIGHER IF:

- GROUP IS THE ONLY NON-STATE ACTOR IN CONFLICT
- GROUP IS ATTACKED BY BOTH STATE/NON-STATE ACTORS
- GROUP IS PERCEIVED TO BE STRONG (VIZ. OPPONENTS)
- GROUP ACTIVELY USES VIOLENCE AGAINST THE STATE

Cohesion is defined *as the extent to which members of an organisation are willing to perform specific tactics or operations together, as well as remain active members within an organisation across a specified period.* Importantly, cohesion is critical for establishing structures of authority within the organisation. Group cohesion declines as factionalism increases. Generally, factionalism is least likely in groups where members have strong pre-existing ties, such as being members of student or activist groups, business institutions or organisations, political parties, labour groups, or members of intellectual or epistemic groups should benefit from a kind of provisional social contract upon which trust, and thus collaboration, can be built (Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020). Individuals with these common roots will likely share "social identities" that "link people across space and connect different geographic and social sites" (Staniland 2014a, 21). Sometimes referred to as "horizontal ties," these links between individuals moderate "flows of information, bonds of normative obligation, and shared political preferences across a given set of [group] organizers"(Staniland 2014a, 21). When horizontal ties are strong, a group may retain comparatively higher levels of centralised control – ceteris paribus – than groups with weaker horizontal ties. Similarly, where group leaders institutionalize strong political education, training, or indoctrination programs for their members, the likelihood of factionalism (i.e., decreased cohesion) should be reduced.

With these logics in mind, this paper makes three simplifying assumptions about cohesion: that groups featuring members with similar or shared political, ethnic, religious, or identarian characteristics will have more robust connections between one another should be more cohesive. Second, insurgent groups with members who previously served together in previous conflicts are likely to be more cohesive amid armed conflict. Third, and finally, groups that have instituted

programmes of political education, training, or indoctrination for its members should be more cohesive than those groups that do not.[29]

COHESION SHOULD BE HIGHER IF:

- MEMBERS SHARE COMMON IDEOLOGY
- MEMBERS HAVE PRIOR EXPERIENCE IN CONFLICT
- MEMBERS RECEIVED POLITICAL EDUCATION/TRAINING WITHIN THE ORGANISATION

INTERACTION, SEQUENCING, AND TEMPORAL EFFECTS

Interaction Effects

Some scholars have noted group cohesion may itself be strongly influenced by the pressure, or coercion, applied to organisations. However, subsequent research has cast doubt on whether the experience of coercion is systematically related to a decrease in group cohesion. Woldemariam (2016), for instance, finds that combat performance influences rates of factional infighting, for both insurgent battlefield losses and gains. He interprets this finding in terms of cooperation breakdowns between leaders and group elites, but the theoretical mechanisms connecting these processes remain unclear. Further still, anecdotal and historical records illustrate the mere increase in violence towards certain troops or units on World War I battlefields resulted in increased desertion or flight, while violence towards other contingents increased cohesion. Additionally, combat experience in some of the most dangerous outposts in Afghanistan suggest the crucible of conflict can galvanize, not jeopardise, group cohesion (Junger 2011). Alternatively, Schubiger argues that indiscriminate state violence is associated with decreased insurgent group cohesion – but indirectly, when that violence targets the group's non-combatant constituency. In fact, in Schubiger's (2016) case, coercion effects generate separate dynamics that shape recruitment, and subsequent surges in the numbers of recruits then outpace the insurgent's filtering processes,

[29] Importantly, any process of decentralisation – diffusing authority to sub-commanders or other leaders within an organisation – will have differential outcomes according to the strength of the horizontal ties between these individuals. For instance, decentralisation will pose a comparatively lower risk for groups with strong horizontal links, whereas, in organisations constructed from different social networks, or groups that emerge as umbrella organisations for different social bases, horizontal links are apt to be comparatively weaker, which increases the potential hazard for decentralizing authority.

inevitably sparking adverse selection crises later. In other words, coercion can have a down-stream and processual effect on cohesion, but these findings do not contradict or jeopardise the mechanisms discussed in this paper.

Thus, we should see cohesion not merely as the by-product external factors, but the consequence of strategies of coordination within organisations: cohesion is not merely something a group has, but something a group can create. As Sinno notes, "[t]he management of intense fragmentation is one of the more important considerations driving structural choices for organisational leaders" (Sinno 2008, 93). In summary, I assume a group's ability to cohere is influenced by both external (or structural) features within their environment as well as the internal strategies to build cooperation and collaboration (Cohen 2017; Hoover Green 2016). While there are a variety of factors that may influence both the external independent variable (coercion) and the internal independent variable (cohesion), this paper only asserts that changes in these variables serve as the critical catalysts for the dependent variable of interest: decentralization. To explore how coercion and cohesion interact and organisational changes, I combine the expected patterns of behaviour, leading to the outcomes listed in table I below.

TABLE 3: EXPECTED ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES (IN COMBINATION)

	HIGH COHESION	**LOW COHESION**
STRONG COERCIVE RESPONSE	DISAGGREGATED (1)	DECENTRALISED (2)
WEAK COERCIVE RESPONSE	CENTRALISED (3)	MARGINAL (4)[30]

[30] This theory section is primarily interested in the outcomes in table 3 cells marked (2) and (3): decentralisation and centralisation respectively. Given the potential range of outcomes, cells (1) and (4) represent opportunities for future theoretical development.[30] Briefly, however, I suggest groups that remain highly cohesive but come under considerable coercive threat are likely to decentralize geographically, not in terms of authority (Disaggregated). By evading or hiding through relocation, these groups may still retain key characteristics of a centralized organisation, but also improve their ability to evade COIN forces. Conversely, a group with low cohesion and that receives a weak state response may end up becoming a marginal – and even still violent – agent within the state. Importantly, marginal groups may fall below the violence threshold – with many not registering on our empirical datasets as actual groups – but may remain a key actor for local violent and governance dynamics within their areas of operation.

Different combinations of internal and external pressures will prompt specific patterns of organisational adaptation. At the extremes, low internal fractionalization and low external pressure should – ceteris paribus – ensure insurgent organisations can retain high levels of centralisation (3). Conversely, high external pressure and high internal fractionalization should prompt insurgent organisations to decentralize authority (2). Thus, decentralisation is a form of adaptation to high pressure conflict theatres where the group suffers high levels of fractionalization.

Sequencing and Temporal Effects

Understanding how these two independent variables behave together remains important. This demands that we understand the coercion and cohesion triggers as intertwined and iterative. As such, coercion and cohesion do not strictly conform to our intuitions about necessary and sufficient conditions. In part, we can assess them both as necessary conditions, if high coercion and low cohesion are suitably present. Yet, given the particularities of conflict environments, high levels of coercion alone may also be sufficient to prompt an insurgent leader to decentralize the organisation for security reasons. Conversely, internally riven insurgent organisations may decide to decentralize to placate aggressive intra-organisational rivals alone. While each of these catalysts may present independently, both coercion and cohesion take on additive and combinatorial complexity. For example, a group that receives increasing levels of coercion, and where the leadership is blamed for the resulting harm, *may* also generate conditions that support the rise of an internal veto player, thus degrading internal cohesion. Together, these processes would still prompt an insurgent leader to decentralise their authority. In this instance, the processes generated by higher levels of external coercion and decreased levels of internal cohesion converge to make the prompt to decentralize stronger.

In summary, while the temporal phasing and precise iteration of coercive and cohesive effects differ according to individual context, this paper asserts that increased coercion and decreased

cohesion serve as catalysts for insurgent group organisational change. To build on these intuitions, I examine two empirical case studies, Al Qaeda in Iraq, and Boko Haram in Nigeria, after discussion of the methodology and case selection below.

Methodology and Case Selection

This project endorses detailed and controlled description as a vital weapon for qualitatively exploring conflict phenomena, recognising that description need not be a "euphemism for a failed, or not yet proven, causal analysis" (Gerring 2012). I argue description has the capacity to generate both causal and descriptive arguments with considerable utility: the former exploring the *why*, while the latter tackling the *what* associated with a given phenomenon. In other words, controlled description is a means of engaging arguments with causal implications and possesses the ability to sharpen extant insights in conflict studies (Gerring 2012, 724). Further, in the tradition of case study research, I adopt Harry Eckstein's heuristic case selection as a "means of stimulating the imagination [to] discern important new general problems" and, by selecting two cases as instance of the "same class of events," leverage the methodological benefits of comparative heuristic cases to develop this paper's theory"(George 2019, 201).[31]

Due to the theory-building design of this paper, I selected cases with considerable secondary-source coverage and extensive review, as information about the internal structures of many insurgent organisations is rarely discussed in primary materials and reportage. Secondly, I selected cases with reasonable variation in the two proposed triggers of organisational change: external coercion and internal cohesion. My selection of Unity and Jihad, subsequently renamed Al Qaeda in Iraq, met both criteria. First, due to the subsequent scholarship on the Iraq war and the intense focus of intelligence operations against insurgent groups by American and coalition forces between

[31] Lijphart uses the term "hypothesis-generating case study" instead of Eckstein's *heuristic* case study.

2003-2011, this group – and importantly its internal leadership and members – features prominently within the extant retrospective historical literature. Second, because Unity and Jihad (then AQI) emerges under low levels of coercion and high levels of cohesion, evolving in an environment where the coercion steadily increases, this case allows me to test whether changes in these dimensions are related to organisational decentralisation.

My second case, Boko Haram in Nigeria, is selected to further test the plausibility of my theoretical arguments, and further scrutinize the proposed power-sharing mechanism. While the organisation began in 2003, the group changed considerably throughout its life cycle, regrouping, and launching a furious spate of attacks after 2009. The group receives increasing levels of coercion from COIN forces after 2014, but – interestingly – also suffers from multiple instances of organisational splintering (2011, 2016, and 2018). Thus, this case allows me to explore how variation in terms of coercion, and importantly, internal cohesion, effects changes in their organisational structure over time.

Some readers may wonder about the comparability of these cases. Nigeria is a preponderant regional power, with the largest economy in the continent, one of the largest militaries in the region, and the largest population in Africa. Yet, despite these qualities, previous research on intrastate conflict and insurgencies suggest Nigeria carries increased hazard for conflict onset (Collier 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003). More specifically, the state's inconsistent deployment of military and law enforcement force across their territory hints at the diminished power projection capacity of state institutions—a feature associated with increased viability of insurgency (Buhaug and Gates 2002). In the case of Iraq, the period under study captures the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein's regime through external intervention, leaving the domestic environment without competent coercive political institutions. One engrained bias, then, is that insurgency (and perhaps group survival itself) is simply easier in both these countries. However, it is precisely the waxing

and waning of state capacity across the period of study that makes these cases critical for theory building. By measuring the insurgent organisations' reactions to the changing logics and repertoires of state coercion and counterinsurgency, this paper can trace the consequent impact on organisational adaptation and design, notably how these shifts influence insurgent organisations' decision to decentralize.

Critical Junctures

In each of the cases, I identify a set of critical junctures across which my independent variables (coercion and cohesion) are most likely to vary. Identifying critical junctures are useful to disentangle the mechanisms that shape the consequent outcome (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007). For clarity, critical junctures are moments in which "the loosening of the constraints of structure to allow for agency or contingency to shape divergence from the past, or divergence across cases" (Soifer 2012a, 1573). For a critical juncture to emerge, two conditions must be present. First, there must be "*permissive conditions"* that signal the "easing of constraints of structure." Second, there must be "*productive conditions*…[that] produce the outcome or range of outcomes… after the juncture comes to a close"(Soifer 2012b, 1573). Stated differently, critical junctures represent a moment in which significant and lasting change might occur: "a critical juncture emerges when an earlier period of stability comes to an end"(Soifer 2012a, 1577).

For AQI, I identify the start of the coalition forces 2005-2006 "surge" in Iraq as a critical juncture. This period marks an influx of coalition and American military forces into Iraq, increased intensity of attacks against Iraqi insurgents, and AQI's increased local recruitment of Iraqi fighters. If decentralisation is driven by coercion and cohesion, the "surge" offers a moment in the historical arc where Zarqawi's decision to alter the organisation's structure was most likely. In the case of Boko Haram, I identify the creation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2014 as the critical juncture. At this time, increased COIN action by Nigerian and partner governments,

combined with the consequent loss of territorial control by the group, generate changes in the two characteristics – coercion and cohesion – and trace how they influence changes in the organisational structure. The following section introduces this paper's empirical cases.

Al Qaeda in Iraq (2002-2006)

Before Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi became America's most wanted man, he was one of his hometown's least favourite delinquents. Born in 1966 in Jordan, as one of ten children to impoverished parents in the town of Zarga, the young Zarqawi would emerge, in his teenage years, as impious, fond of drinking, and heavily tattooed, before petty crime sent the 21-year-old to prison for a two-month stay (Bakos 2017, 60–61). This experience introduced the street-hardened Zarqawi to religious education and led him, after release, to join the Al Hussein bin Ali mosque in his hometown. Yet, this was merely the opening chapter in a string of life experiences that led the young jihadist to Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 2000, to meet with Al Qaeda (AQ) leader Osama bin Laden and his second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, set up his first training camp in Herat, Afghanistan, and, after the attacks of September 11, 2001 and corresponding intervention by NATO/ISAF forces, to take his 300 foreign fighters, across the border into Kurdistan, the northern mountainous and quasi-autonomous region of Iraq (Weaver 2006). There, Zarqawi bunkered down with fellow Islamist groups[32] – the most dominant being Ansar al-Islam, whose 1000 fighters controlled 300 square kilometers of the area's mountainous territory (Giaconia 2018, 74; Fishman 2016, 23–25) – and leveraged his mujahid networks to recruit fighters to his cause (Worsnap 2016, 281).

[32] There is some evidence of prior relations between Zarqawi and these groups, as a map of the al-Faruq training camp in Afghanistan, administered by Zarqawi, had included mention of a "Kurds Camp."

Zarqawi's ability to network may have been laudable, but his eventual rise to prominence owes much to the actions of the United States. Specifically, on February 5, 2003, US Secretary of Defense Colin Powell's mentioned Zarqawi in an infamous address to the United Nations General Assembly regarding Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, subsequently making the case of intervention in Iraq.

> Iraq today harbours a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, an associated collaborator of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida lieutenants… Those helping to run this camp are Zarqawi lieutenants operating in northern Kurdish areas outside Saddam Hussein's controlled Iraq...(The Guardian 2003)

The suggestion that Zarqawi was the lynchpin between Iraq and Al Qaeda was patently incorrect but raised the star-power of the marginal jihadist, attracting foreign fighters – from Bosnia, Afghanistan, Somalia, and elsewhere in the Middle East – to his organisation (Bakos 2017, 73).[33] Shortly after Powell's speech, Zarqawi and his associates "began formulating a strategy to isolate and undermine the coalition occupation force and prevent Iraq's Shi'a from governing the country"(Rayburn and Sobchak 2019, 175) and begun expanding the organisation. The group's command was built around "concentric circles" where communication with Zarqawi himself could only be achieved through a range of different intermediaries (Brisard 2005), which both insulated and secured the leader – and his discretion over strategy and tactics.

On March 19, 2003, US military aircraft swarmed Iraqi observation posts along Iraq's southern and western borders, disabling or destroying the state's early warning systems, as US, British, and coalition forces traversed the Jordanian, Kuwaiti, and Saudi Arabian borders, pushing north and east towards the Iraqi capital. On March 28, a joint land assault met resistance from Ansar al-Islam

[33] Powell subsequently referred to this speech as a "blot" on his distinguished career.

(AAI) and associated fighters in Iraqi Kurdistan, forcing Zarqawi and his forces to flee south. This transit allowed Zarqawi's group to absorb other Jihadists fleeing the embattled north, as well as the "foreign fighters" – predominantly Syrians and Saudis – that Saddam's regime had invited into Iraq to join the resistance in the weeks before the US invasion (Rayburn and Sobchak 2019, 176). American and coalition forces seized the Iraqi capital of Baghdad on April 14, 2003, but their intervention fed a growing insurgency in the Sunni triangle.

Zarqawi's network recruited strategically, using facilitators that worked between different geographic networks, usually targeting former Iraqi military or security service personnel (Fishman 2016). A key, but implicit, factor here is that Zarqawi's recruits tended to have previous experience in military command-and-control environments. These members' experiences in conflict made them more reliable and cohesive to command. All else being equal, veterans of military service are more likely to enjoy higher levels of group cohesion than those without similar life experience (Castillo 2014).[34] More specifically, many of these recruits were former members of the Fedayeen, Saddam Hussein's most loyal supporters – and highly trained regime loyalists who had been targeted and then subsequently disenfranchised by American and Coalition forces after the intervention.

Importantly, Zarqawi's organisation also invested in "re-socializing and indoctrinating its recruits" (Worsnap 2016, 281). While members self-selected into Zarqawi's emerging jihad, indoctrination and socializing efforts were instruments of quality control. According to Tønnessen, the technological advancements of the post 9/11 world had made jihadism "easily accessible throughout the world through the Internet…" This meant groups like Zarqawi's need only "apply

[34] In "The Targeter" a book by CIA analyst and tracker Nada Bakos, the author discusses how intelligence analysts were usually tasked with retrospectively connecting Al Qaeda to the Hussein regime as further justification for the initial US and coalition invasion. This focus left other, subsequently consequential intelligence, un-assessed in those early months in Iraq, contributing to a general failure to appreciate the gravity of the growing threat of insurgency. (C.f. Bakos, Nada. *The Targeter*, 2017.)

[the] global jihadi-Salafi ideology to the Iraqi context"(Tønnessen 2008; Worsnap 2016, 277). While Unity and Jihad members' "initial contact" may have been Zarqawi's propaganda videos – "available to anyone with a computer and Internet connection" (Warrick 2015, 265) – prospective members transiting into Iraq were quickly "relieved of any cash [they] had brought along, and then shunted to a kind of holding cell for further indoctrination in near-complete isolation"(Warrick 2015, 265).

In May 2003, Zarqawi christened his group Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, or *Unity and Jihad,*[35] subsequently described as "a kind of Islamist super-group: a merger of smaller factions of Iraqi insurgents and foreign fighters under a single umbrella" (Warrick 2015, 224). Many started referring to Zarqawi as the "default 'emir' of Islamist terrorists in Iraq" (Cottam 2016, 60) and, as the Unity and Jihad group grew, Zarqawi expanded the cadre system – a means of sharing responsibility with a "set of lower-level cadre and officers that were committed to the [group's] cause … [to be placed in positions to] gain the trust of their fighters" (Worsnap 2016, 286). These lower-level officers were selected according to their pedigree, often—in the case of foreign fighters—their experience in the conflict in Afghanistan or prior performance in Iraq. Zarqawi also divided his forces into 15 battalions, and then divided Iraq into a set of specified areas of operation. This process of group bureaucratization allowed them to directly distribute money, food, weapons, and information to deployed units.[36] Nevertheless, the group remained tightly organised around its central leadership, and while the roles of "provincial general emir and an administrative emir … served as key decisionmakers for the allocation of finances between the sectors, directing funds to and collecting revenues from each," (P. Johnston et al. 2016; Worsnap 2016, 284) they answered directly to Zarqawi.

[35] Sometimes translated as "Monotheism and Unity" (C.f. William McCants, ISIS Apocalypse p. 15)
[36] According to Bahney et al, reporting on the seized "Travelstar" documents, AQI's paper trail reveals a "hierarchical organisation with a centrally controlled bureaucracy that directly funded and influenced the operations of the group's subsidiary 'sectors' of Anbar [province]" C.f. Patrick Johnston et al., *Foundations of the Islamic State: Management, Money, and Terror in Iraq, 2005-2010* (RAND Corporation, 2016), https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1192; Worsnap, 'Organisation and Community: Determinants of Insurgent Military Effectiveness', 284.

During this period, Zarqawi's forces seeded the battlefield with improvised explosive devices, targeted American and coalition forces on patrol, and conducted sensational attacks of violence against soft, or civilian, targets. And coalition's forces struggled to respond. American intelligence officers failed to comprehend how, in just five months, "Zarqawi had managed to move his network into a strange capital and build an operation with sufficient intelligence-gathering, firepower, and logistical support to carry out a chain of sophisticated, large-scale terrorist attacks in close succession" (Warrick 2015, 164–65). On August 7, 2003, Zarqawi's organisation bombed the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, killing 17 people intending to target the "'collaborators' with the U.S. invasion"(Fishman 2016, 41). On August 19, 2003, Zarqawi's fighters struck the UN office in eastern Baghdad, leaving 22 people dead including senior UN commander Sergio Viera de Mello (Fishman 2016, 41). Then, on August 29, 2003, Zarqawi assassinated Ayatollah Hakim, a Shia Muslim "calling for unity among Shia Muslims and productive engagement with the United States," in a car bomb attack in the Imam Ali Mosque – and attack intended increase "social polarization [between Sunni and Shia] as a means of gaining recruits" (Fishman 2016, 43).

As of September 2004, American and Coalition forces had to admit their ineffectiveness in replying to Iraq's evolving "traditional insurgency" (Rayburn and Sobchak 2019, 262) and struggled to identify, not to mention target, key units within Zarqawi's group (Rayburn and Sobchak 2019, 203). These identification failures meant the Iraq's Sunni Arab civilian population was routinely subjected to "kick-down-the-door" sweep operations by American and coalition forces, which "often netted few insurgents but made [the Sunni population] increasingly disaffected and created a mass of fodder overnight for a new wave of insurgent propaganda videos" (Pirnie and O'Connell 2008, 70). And Zarqawi's sense of self-importance continued to grow. In mid-2003, his messaging suggested his role was to provide "assistance to his Iraqi brothers" in the fight against the occupation. But by November 2003, Zarqawi was petitioning for "leadership of the entire

insurgency"(Rayburn and Sobchak 2019, 263). Unity and Jihad's lieutenant, Abu Anas al-Shami, even warned Iraqis the group would leave Iraq "as long as you do not agree to form an armed group under the leadership of Zarqawi" (Rayburn and Sobchak 2019, 263).

Thus, Zarqawi was able to build his organisation without recurrent security threats and ensured his core functionaries were culled from a core set of experienced foreign fighters. In short, Zarqawi surrounded himself with personal allies whose commitment to the cause was reliable, and preserved additional organisational resources for sorting, indoctrinating, and subsequently disciplining his Unity and Jihad's recruits. Zarqawi's investment in internal group management practices left his organisation more cohesive and less vulnerable to infiltration or intervention from coalition forces. As a result, Zarqawi's remains highly centralized. Table 4 below summarizes the criteria influencing both coercion and cohesion.

TABLE 4: SUMMARY OF CONFLICT DYNAMICS (IRAQ I)

	2002-2004
Coercion	
Group is the only non-state actor in conflict	✗
Group is attacked by both state/non-state actors	✗
Group is perceived to be strong (viz. opponents)	✓
Group actively targets state/opponents with violence	✓
Cohesion	
Members share common ideology	✓
Members have prior experience in conflict	✓
Members received political education/training within the organisation	✓
Organisational Outcome	Centralisation (Retained)

In fall 2004, Zarqawi pledged *bayat,* or allegiance, to Osama bin Laden and his group was granted affiliate status as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). The strategic alliance promised access to private funders in the Gulf, and served as a cost-saving, legitimacy-producing arrangement with limited constraints

on Zarqawi's operational authority.[37] Around this time, though, AQI's operations attracted increasing numbers of Iraqi recruits (Rayburn and Sobchak 2019, 262). At first, Zarqawi's forces worked to select the most religious Iraqis in each city to receive training and indoctrination (Worsnap 2016, 287) and worked to generate a set of disciplinary punishments against officers who evidenced poor control of their fighters.[38] The newest AQ affiliate also began collecting the informational minutia of common organisations: contracts with members' biographical information, formal job descriptions and responsibilities for their employees – complete with holiday policies, salaries, and claimable travel expenses – as well as advice, rewards, and punishments for workplace performance.[39] The cost of this bureaucratization, however, was an increase in visibility. Importantly, American intelligence was beginning to identify how AQI's "hierarchy and bureaucracy were taking shape"(Bakos 2017, 230).

Increasing Coercion

By 2005, US General Stanley McChrystal, head of the Joint Special Operations in Iraq, reinvigorated the American's engagement strategy with AQI, increasing the "relentless body blows" against the group to "stunt their growth and maturation" (Warrick 2015, 266). Under enough pressure, McChrystal said, "AQI's members would be consumed with trying to stay alive and thus have no ability to recruit, raise funds, or strategize"(Warrick 2015, 266). Meanwhile, American intelligence divided AQI members into three tiers: "Tier 1" were terrorists thought to have personal contact with Zarqawi; 'Tier 2' were leaders in local or regional areas, and 'Tier 3'

[37] The affiliate status did not, for instance, mean alignment between AQI and AQ Central's strategic orientation: bin Laden's AQ focused first on the "far enemy" (Western influences), whereas Zarqawi remained convinced that "by occupying themselves with fighting the far enemy, the near enemy will seize the chance to hurt Muslims." (Statement by Zarqawi's shari'a committee chief, Abu Hamzah al-Baghdadi, qtd in Fishman, After Zarqawi, Washington Quarterly 2006)
[38] C.f. Letter to Abu Usamah; Harmony Document: IZ-060316-02
[39] CPT Bill Perkins, 'Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting al-Qa'ida's Organisational Vulnerabilities', *Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences; United States Military Academy*, 14 February 2006, 116; Unknown, 'Employment Contract - Al Qaeda in Iraq', Harmony Document #AFGP-2002-600045, 2007 (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, n.d.), https://ctc.usma.edu/harmony-program/employment-contract-original-language-2/.

were the organisation's fighters (Urban 2011, 151).[40] The strategy was to eliminate top ranking leaders to disrupt wider operations.

This was soon popularized as the "decapitation" strategy and rested on two key assumptions: first, that operational responsibilities are held by high-level or "Tier 1" members; and second, that the organisation lacked suitable redundancies that would make the elimination of these actors destabilizing for the group. To relate this more directly to the theoretical argument advanced here, AQI (and Unity and Jihad) evolved in the 2002-2004 period into a comparatively centralized, hierarchical organisation, which – ceteris paribus – suggests that decision-making power is constrained to the "Tier 1" cadres in the organisation. For AQI, particularly by 2005, this targeting strategy elicited a dramatic increase in the level of coercion towards the group.

Incidentally, Zarqawi would make a strategic error. In November 2005, he launched a coordinated suicide bombing attack on Jordan's Days Inn, Grand Hyatt Hotel, and Radisson SAS Hotels, killing 57 civilians. AQI claimed the targets were foreign citizens and diplomats, but most of the dead were Muslim attendees of a local Jordanian wedding. The incident drew widespread condemnation throughout the Arab world driving as many as 100,000 Jordanians into the streets chanting "Zarqawi, you coward, what brought you here?"(Kirdar 2011, 4). The Amman bombing was the first, and only, instance where Zarqawi's public response verged on contrition, and a muted apology followed. But the Jordanian's attack at home turned public opinion against the jihadist, and pushed the Jordanian intelligence services, one of the most capable in the Middle East, into alignment with US and coalition forces.

[40] It is worth noting that this organisational assessment was not shared by all intelligence sources or officials. British intelligence and military analysts, for instance, believed this representation was "entirely a feature of the American analytical approach rather than a description of genuine levels within the jihadist organisation." (C.f. Urban, p. 152)

With improved intelligence sharing, AQI's enemies increased the pace and intensity of their operations – claiming to have killed or captured "161 significant players" in AQI by mid-2006 (Urban 2011, 151).[41] General McChrystal's Task Force 17, a combined intelligence and special operations outfit, increased the frequency of raids from 30 per month in August 2003, to nearly 300 per month by August 2005 (McChrystal 2013).[42] Further, the post-Amman blowback bolstered rising sectarian tensions among Muslims, and local armed elements turned their guns against AQI and its allies. In particular, a group headed by the Shiite cleric Muqtada al Sadr, and known as the Mahdi Army, led other minor Shite factions in ordering a "broad offensive against Sunni insurgents and civilians" after the February 2006 bombing of the Shiite Gold Dome Mosque in Samarra (Biddle 2021, 149). [43] Taken together, these developments represented an overwhelming increase in the intensity and precision of coercion against AQI.

Decreasing Cohesion

Amid mounting COIN pressure, AQI leadership tried to retain their centralized control. For example, Zarqawi met Abu Talha, AQI's emir of Mosul and "key member of Zarqawi's inner circle," as often as once a month in varied locations throughout western Iraq (Bakos 2017, 250). The frequency is notable given the risk of these exchanges, highlighting Zarqawi's preference for tight control over his commanders.

But an increasing number of Iraqis, eager to join the fight, was also forcing AQI to "promote cadres who had not passed through the full indoctrination and training sequence" (McCants 2015;

[41] Major-General Rick Lynch divided these 161 captured/killed into the three tiers of AQI: eight were considered 'Tier 1' terrorists; 57 were 'Tier 2' local or regional commanders; 96 were 'Tier 3' fighters. (C.f. Urban, 151)

[42] Bakos, an interpreter and tracker assigned to study Zarqawi, notes this change in her book, The Targeter. She discusses being asked to "ride along" on raids against insurgents. Describing what the CIA referred to as an OODA loop, she explained an increased desire to have trained specialists "observe" enemy combatants now they were apprehended, allowing the task force to "orient" itself with the new information, "decide" on the next target, and "act" within a quicker timeframe. C.f. Bakos, 135)

[43] These Shiite factions would be vital for the eventual "Surge" in Iraq, orchestrated as an alliance between local defensive forces (often Shiite) and coalition partners – the latter of which relied on native knowledge and networks of intelligence from the Shiites to effectively target Al Qaeda operatives and operations throughout the country.

Worsnap 2016, 288). Due to the scale of the growth, AQI struggled to safeguard professionalism and cohesion within their ranks. The lack of trust in local recruits may also be evidenced in their struggle to fill vacant roles within the organisation. Out of 120 positions listed for 30 sectors in 2005, only 46 were filled (P. Johnston et al. 2016, 96).[44] These sub-executive positions were particularly important in the cadre system, as these lower-level officers, responsible for between 5-30 individuals, were relied on to generate strong relationships with their soldiers, and to conduct target specific planning and execution for AQI's coordinated attacks.

Chad Serena, writing about the AQI affiliate, argues that this period was when the conflict theatre grew too risky for Zarqawi's central command to provide anything but general guidance to increasingly "decentralized cells and combatant units" (Serena 2014, 77). In other words, "functions were given definition by leadership, but action elements (cells that carried out attacks) … operated without strict managerial constraints" (Serena 2014, 77). But as this coincided with AQI's struggle to effectively socialize and indoctrinate recruits, AQI's internal cooperation and cohesion degraded. Concomitantly, AQI leadership struggled to maintain internal order with leaders often limited to issuing written warnings – by email or couriered letter – and trying to cajole or punish local commanders by moderating financial or resource distributions deemed vital to "motivate cadres and keep them in line" (Worsnap 2016, 286). In the context of organisational management, these tactics may have been alternatives of last resort in hopes of preserving cohesion among and between an increasingly disaggregated organisation.

In early 2006, Zarqawi announced that he was giving himself a kind of demotion, turning stewardship of AQI over to Iraqi leadership through a newly created Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC). By increasing representation of Arab Iraqis, the council meant Zarqawi would "take a less

[44] The potential counterfactual, here, is that these vacancies are the *result* of better or more effective screening processes, as AQI failed to identify members who would be suitable for these positions and opted to retain centralized control of these districts until appropriate candidates were found.

prominent role as a strategic adviser." Some believed the "generic name aimed to obscure AQI's dominant role in the consortium," (Fishman 2016, 79) while others argued the new arrangement disempowered Zarqawi considerably, first, by excluding him from the ruling council, and – as reported in April 2006 – subsequently stripping al-Zarqawi of his political role and relegated him to military operations"(Warrick 2015, 280; Weaver 2006). In short, the creation of the MSC is the observable indicator that Zarqawi's centralized authority had been subsequently distributed across a wider set of actors. Thus, in line with the theoretical predictions of this paper, by 2006, the pressures from external coercion and internal cohesion-loss prompted Zarqawi and AQ leaders to decentralize.[45]

TABLE 5: SUMMARY OF CONFLICT DYNAMICS (IRAQ II)

	2002-2004	2005-2006
Coercion		
Group is the only non-state actor in conflict	✗	✗
Group is attacked by both state/non-state actors	✗	✓
Group is perceived to be strong (viz. opponents)	✓	✓
Group actively targets state/opponents with violence	✓	✓
Cohesion		
Members share common ideology	✓	✓
Members have prior experience in conflict	✓	–
Members received political education/training	✓	✗
Organisational Outcomes	Centralisation (Retained)	Decentralisation

[45] On June 7, 2006, America's US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) deployed two US F-16 aircrafts and dropped two 500-pound, laser-guided bombs on a compound suspected to house Zarqawi -- US Delta Force Rangers, dispatched to the residence less than 20 minutes later, identified Zarqawi before he eventually succumbed to his injuries. The death of Zarqawi, however – and the continuation of AQI's strategy and violence throughout Iraq – also offers tacit evidence that the decentralization process had not only occurred but was successful in building organisational resilience. In line with Jenna Jordan's logic of bureacratisation, the increased coercion and reduced cohesion within AQI prompted decentralization that essentially reduced the organisational costs of Zarqawi's assassination.

In the section below, the empirical assessment shift, in brief, to the case of Boko Haram between 2010-2018, to explore how changes in the group's experience of coercion and internal cohesion influence subsequent organisational changes.

Boko Haram (2010-2018)

The roots of the Boko Haram insurgency stretch back to north-south (and ostensibly Muslim-Christian) political tensions that began in the post-independence period. The group's founder, Mohammed Yusuf, was born in Yobe State, in 1970 (Comolli 2015, 46; Walker 2016)[46] rose through the local village school system, and – through the 1990s – grew increasingly radical, cautioning his amassing followers about trusting the Nigerian government, implying the *'yan boko*', the north's Muslim elite, had benefited from 'corruption' of Western influence and were "no longer real Muslims"(Higazi 2015, 313). By 2009, Boko Haram members had been implicated in an increasing number of violent events with Nigerian law enforcement (Mustapha 2014, 149). In addition, Yusuf had developed his own community center, the Markas Ibn Taymiyya complex, and offered members a range of range of employment and social services. One such service, the group's motorcycle delivery operation, became a flashpoint after a spate of new Nigerian laws, namely a measure mandating helmets, angered the devout Islamic followers who would be required to remove their traditional Islamic caps (Perry 2014).

On June 11, Nigerian security forces violently confronted and halted a Boko Haram motorcycle procession, allegedly wounding seventeen.[47] The event prompted Yusuf's call to mobilise against the Nigerian state (Comolli 2015, 54). Then, in July 2009, officials in Bauchi state ordered federal

[46] There are competing reports that place Yusuf's place of birth as Jakusko, a small community nearby in Yobe province. It remains difficult to confirm this biographical detail.
[47] Again, there is conflicting evidence as to whether the Nigerian security forces were responding to helmet violations or because they received information that this procession was for a Boko Haram member the state forces had earlier killed. See further, Comolli, *Boko Haram*, 53.

police to raid Yusuf's properties in Maiduguri, and the clash between Boko Haram and state forces set off a chain reaction of violent clashes across Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe, Kano and Katsina states. More than 1,200 people were killed, among them 22 police officers, in just four days.[48] Further, Yusuf's headquarters was 'razed to the ground' and more than 200 buildings, including many police stations, were destroyed in Maiduguri alone (Mustapha 2014, 150). The Nigerian security services claimed to have killed between 700-800 Boko Haram members and videotaped their extrajudicial killing of the Boko Haram leader, Yusuf.

Boko Haram leadership fell to Abubakar Shekau who, amid heightened pressure from the Nigerian security services, used the opportunity to replace moderate members within the organisation with comparative hawks. Shekau, like Yusuf before him, retained centralized control, with two sub-deputies and the original Shura council in place. Reporting from the period indicates Shekau's preference for "a loose command-and-control structure, which allows it to operate autonomously" but even the local area cell commanders were members of the Shura Consultative Council and answered directly to Shekau (Onuoha 2014, 161).

Boko Haram returned to action in 2010, after a short hiatus, with a violent attack on the central prison in Bauchi. The group would destroy or damage 15 of 18 prisons, 106 of 122 police stations, and 10 of 17 military barracks across Nigeria's northeast in quick succession – a spate of attacks that degraded its state opponent, while also freeing Boko Haram members and sympathizers from detainment. Shortly thereafter, Boko Haram commenced a period of territorial expansion. By 2013 and 2014, Boko Haram had "toeholds in Cameroon, Chad and Niger … where it recruited, rearmed, pillaged, kidnapped, carried out revenge attacks and, overall, promoted its idea of a West

[48] Casualty figures are drawn from the Galtimari Committee's report, after a Borno State government inquiry, and is likely the most accurate. Hundreds more were killed in neighbouring states, but accurate figures are difficult to confirm. Cited in Adam Higazi, "Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria," in *Collective Mobilisations in Africa: Enough Is Enough* (Leiden | Boston: Brill, 2015), 306.

African 'caliphate"'(International Crisis Group 2020, 2). In July 2014, Boko Haram took control of the city of Damboa in Borno state and, by August, claimed to have established its own "caliphate" with the town of Gwoza as its capital. At their peak, Boko Haram controlled more than 20,000 kms of territory within Nigeria. According to data collected by the Armed Conflict Location Event Database (ACLED) and the International Crisis Group, Boko Haram continued to increase the number of attacks in Cameroon and Niger, evidence of its continued regional expansion (International Crisis Group 2020, 2). As Table 6 highlights, Boko Haram's 2010-2014 period features low levels of coercion against the group, and – evidenced by the strong and coordinated territorial-seizing operations, strong cohesion, and internal coordination – was a function of the group's robust centralised command under Shekau.

TABLE 6: SUMMARY OF CONFLICT DYNAMICS (BOKO HARAM I)

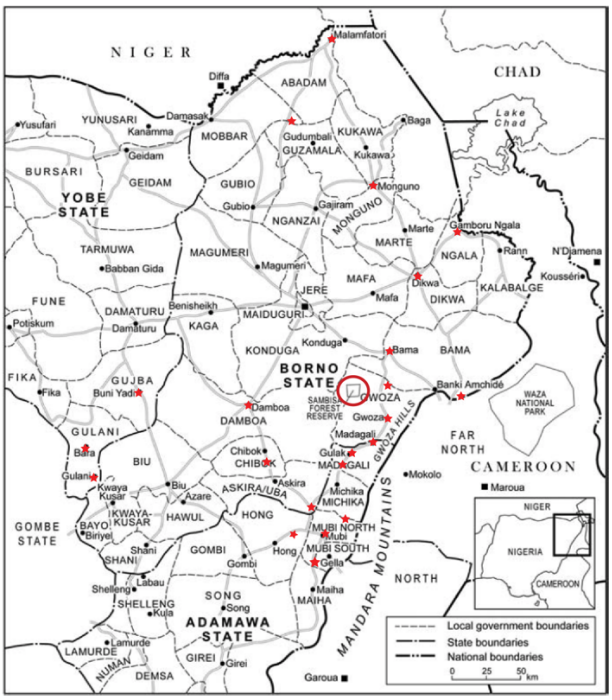
	2010-2014
Coercion	
Group is the only non-state actor in conflict	✗
Group is attacked by both state/non-state actors	✗
Group is perceived to be strong (viz. opponents)	✓
Group actively targets state/opponents with violence	✗
Cohesion	
Members share common ideology	✓
Members have prior experience in conflict	✗
Members received political education/training within the organisation	✓
Organisational Outcome	Centralisation (Retained)

Increased Coercion

By 2014, however, Boko Haram's attacks had spurned renewed attention from the Nigeria and neighbouring states. Domestically, security services had already suspended habeas corpus – the traditional burden of proof requirement to justify legal imprisonment – and Nigerian security

forces rounded up and imprisoned Muslim youths on allegations of involvement with Boko Haram. Amnesty International reported as many as 20,000 people were imprisoned on suspicion of supporting Boko Haram beginning in 2010 (Amnesty International 2016), arguing that "prison, rather than the mosque, has in effect become the place of recruitment"(Pérouse de Montclos 2014, 172). In 2014, however, Nigerian officials and their counterparts in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, announced the creation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). This coalition would feature 8,000 military personnel and leverage cooperative cross-border security operations to confront Boko Haram.

FIGURE 3: MAP OF TERRITORY CONTROLLED BY BOKO HARAM (2012-2015)



Source: Map created by Philip Stickler, Cartographic Unit, University of Cambridge.(Similar base map is used in Higazi 2015) Data from ACLED.(Raleigh et al. 2010) Nigerian data compiled by author.

The MNJTF increased the external pressure – namely coercion – against the group,[49] further augmented by the rise of local armed groups known as Civilian Joint Task Forces, or CJTF – ranging from civil servants to students and traders – who armed themselves with machetes, locally sourced guns, and other homemade weapons, pledging defend their homes from Boko Haram militants. For example, Maiduguri's forces numbered 8,000 men and patrolled the city in November 2014, collecting and relaying information about Boko Haram's activities with the government, and operating where state forces seemed either incapable or unwilling to act (Okeowo 2014). Together with the improved multi-government offensive, the armed resistance degraded Boko Haram's control in the region and, helped to drive Boko Haram out of the 27 cities the group occupied at the peak of their power in 2014.

These successes were followed by an increase in the number and scope of counterinsurgent (COIN) operations, including Operation Lafiya Dole (conducted by Nigerian forces); as well as three serial MNJTF operations: Gama Aiki ("Finish the Work") in between June and November 2016. Operation Lafiya Dole, specifically, featured coordinated campaigns against Boko Haram strongholds around the Sambisa Forest, where Boko Haram fighters had taken refuge. The operations marked improved reconnaissance, intelligence, and surveillance missions while featuring aerial operations complemented by coordinated ground strikes, as Nigerian (and subsequent MNJTF) forces cut off the vital supply lines and routes of evasion which often allowed Boko Haram to slip across the nearest border. Notably, the MNJTF operation concluded with the Baga-Sola 2 battalion attack in November 2016, which reported to have prompted the surrender of 240 Boko Haram fighters. From 2014, the level of coercion against Boko Haram steadily

[49] Perhaps unsurprisingly, these changes followed the 2014 Chibok kidnappings, where more than 300 young girls were abducted from a school by Boko Haram. This event drew international attention and direct appeals from prominent Western political elites and celebrities. In addition, local defense forces throughout the north and northeast emerge starting in 2013.

increased, culminating on December 24, 2016, when the Nigerian military leadership announced the capture of Boko Haram's last enclave in the Sambisa Forest (Reuters 2016).[50]

Decreased Cohesion

Reporting on Boko Haram also offers evidence the group struggled with internal cohesion – as early as 2011. That year an individual claiming to represent Boko Haram contacted the BBC's Hausa service saying: "if the government was to give back the group's mosques in Maiduguri and Bauchi and allow its members to worship in peace, the group would give up its arms "(Walker 2012). This message was subsequently dismissed by other Boko Haram members, with one source stating: those "internal divisions have been eliminated" (Walker 2012, 17). Around this time, reports suggest 11 group members were also killed leaking information about Boko Haram. Both the response and reported purges reveal important details about Boko Haram's internal monitoring and punishment schemes and its ability to eliminate 'internal divisions' speaks to Boko Haram's capacity to remove potential veto players.

However, strategic decisions by Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, continued to generate intra-group tensions. In 2012, after the bombing of Kano killed approximately 200 civilians, a faction led by Khalid al-Barnawi rebranded themselves as Ansaru and pledged to continue Boko Haram's fight with greater care in their use of violence (Zenn 2014). In publicly distributed leaflets, Ansaru called the Kano bombing "inhuman," and al-Barnawi later released a video emphasizing how "Islam forbids [the] killing of innocent people including non-Muslims"('Profile of Khalid Al-Barnawi' 2015).[51] Here, internal disagreements over strategy appeared to breed opportunities for internal rivals to both challenge the group's leadership and led "factions within the group [to] break

[50] For clarity, Boko Haram was not "defeated" in 2016, and subsequent Nigerian military operations -- Gama Aiki II in early 2017 and Amni Faka ("Peace at All Costs") in 2018 – demonstrate the group's resilience and resistance, even if their forces have been degraded, in the Nigerian state.
[51] The 1 June 2012 speech, translated from Hausa, is published in Pérouse de Montclos 2014, 297–302.

off, causing the locus of power … to shift" (Prorok 2016, 73). Notably, the Ansaru split suggests Shekau's failure to purge an intra-organisational rival and signals his waning control over internal cohesion. Evidence of low cohesion emerges again in 2016 where, amid rising pressure from MNJTF forces, Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi – the eldest surviving son of Boko Haram founder, Mohammed Yusuf – split to form a new group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

To add to this, internal cohesion would have been additionally taxed by changes in group recruitment in this period. The post-2014 'recruits' were predominantly young and unmarried, usually kidnapped from their villages during Boko Haram raids (Higazi 2015). These dynamics would place the onus on Boko Haram leadership to cultivate, indoctrinate, or monitor the new spate of members to ensure coordination and increase cohesion – capabilities that would be degraded with Boko Haram members largely on the run from government and MNJTF forces during this period. The reduced internal monitoring and disciplinary mechanisms are likely to have increased potential for adverse selection problems and further taxed internal cohesion (Higazi 2015). Table 7 below summarizes the observable implications for this paper's theoretical mechanisms.

TABLE 7: SUMMARY OF CONFLICT DYNAMICS (BOKO HARAM II)

	2009-2014	2015-2018
Coercion		
Group is the only non-state actor in conflict	✗	✗
Group is attacked by both state/non-state actors	✗	✓
Group is perceived to be strong (viz. opponents)	✓	✓
Group actively targets state/opponents with violence	✗	✓
Cohesion		
Members share common ideology	✓	✗
Members have prior experience in conflict	✗	✓

Members received political education/training within the organisation	✔	✗
Organisational Outcome	Centralisation (Retained)	Decentralisation / Fragmentation

Summary of Cases and Analysis of Effects

For Boko Haram, the post-2014 period meant renewed government interest and boosted military capacity which increased the level of coercion against the group. After Boko Haram lost territorial control, COIN operations steadily degraded the group militarily, driving them from safe-havens and largely keeping the organisation on the move throughout northern Nigerian. Second, the disorganized relocation and reduced safe havens changed the form and practice of recruitment, forcing Boko Haram to rely on forced recruitment to replenish their forces. The latter effect had deleterious effects on group cohesion. According to the theory in this paper, the increase in coercion and decrease in cohesion will serve as dominant triggers to decentralize. The empirical details largely substantiate this claim.

The Boko Haram case is notable, however, as the combinatorial effects of increased coercion and decreased cohesion, also appears to trigger downstream organisational fracture and fragmentation. Specifically, Boko Haram produces the splinter groups Ansaru (2011) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (2016) and, later, breaks into two factions (2018). These observations suggest one of the unintended consequences of decentralization – which aims to preserve the organisation's integrity – may increase the risk of fragmentation under specific circumstances. For instance, fragmentation likely occurs when the intra-organisational veto players, unpersuaded by the offer of greater organisational authority, decide to defect with a sub-set of members. In this sense, decentralization – like many conflict processes – has dynamic and complex threshold effects.

In the case of Al Qaeda in Iraq, the dominant mechanism prompting decentralisation was the stark increase in coercion. The coercion was authored by both American and coalitions forces – the main counterinsurgent elements – and amplified by the emergent Shiite defense forces who sought to target AQI and other Sunni militants. The particulars of the AQI account, however, also highlight the iterative and compound effects of coercion and cohesion triggers. By 2005, and under increasing levels of violence, this recruitment process was greatly hindered while increasing violence prompted growing numbers of Iraqis to join counter-coalition groups. Here, the empirical evidence also largely substantiates this paper's theoretical hypotheses.

Discussion

Both empirical cases in this paper testify to the basic intuition and theoretical relationship presented in this paper. While the interaction between coercion and cohesion can appear complex, both characteristics appear to trigger decisions insurgent decentralization. However, the contextual realities of these cases also generate a set of important implications. First, while effective pressure against insurgent organisations may prompt decentralization, the process of decentralizing may also create more resilient and persistent groups. Returning to our understanding of insurgencies as participants in a two-level game: increased coercion and decreased cohesion pushes insurgent leaders to optimize for survival but potentially with the consequence of creating an extended and resilient actor that lingers within the conflict theatre – unable to win but unwilling to quit. In other words, prompting groups to adapt and survive is the catch-22 of counterinsurgent policy. As the case of Boko Haram makes evident, decentralisation – initiated to preserve group security or appease factions through power-sharing – may also be a mechanism through which insurgent organisations ultimately increase the potential for fracture and fragmentation. While this is intuitively straight-forward, our extant literatures on splintering or fragmentation of insurgent group does not engage with the logic or process of decentralization as presented in this paper. This

is both an important implication, and further area of research, for scholars exploring insurgent group adaptation.

Some readers may wonder whether groups that expand in size must, by definition, also decentralize. In other words, could decentralization be driven by factors beyond coercion and cohesion? I would contend that this kind of scalar expansion in group size, and the careful distribution of task-responsibilities, is more akin to task specification – as discussed in the theory section – than of decentralization as defined here. For example, it is possible for a group to grow without the elite leadership 'giving up' control. For instance, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka steadily expanding their ranks throughout the 1970s and 1980s, growing from 50 recruits to as many as 15,000, while preserving a strong centralized power structure around their leader, Prabhakaran. However, the nature of this expansion was moderated – in part – by the strategy of recruitment and the internal processes of socialization that remained central for LTTE operations throughout this period. One area of future research, however, will be to expand the methodological lens and case-selection criteria to include negative cases – instances where groups under high levels of coercive pressure and waning levels of cohesion, either fail to decentralize authority (in response) or decentralize authority in ways the fundamentally weaken, degrade, or destroy their organisational capacity. While the adverse selection problem of recruitment may be one factor in explaining the breakdown or fragmentation of insurgent organisational structures, my research suggests that insurgent leaders – and the strategies of adaptation they select – will be increasingly vital to help explain the variation of outcomes observed empirically.

Thus, one of the dominant, if unaddressed, aspects of the decentralization puzzle is the role of insurgent leadership. As discussed in paper III, *Architects of Conflict*, leadership style and personality help shape insurgent organisational structures. Thus, and as highlighted by that paper's typology, some leaders are more sensitive to the audience costs associated with distinct demographic

segments within their groups. In these instances, these leaders may be *more likely* to decentralize authority – specifically through the power-sharing response – to safeguard their own role as group leader. Conversely, goal-limited 'crusader-type' leaders – whose risk appetite is higher – may also be more resilient to coercive threats, marketing higher levels of violence as a necessary crucible for the group's ultimate aims. Theoretically, this may leave them less likely to activate the security response and decentralize their group structures. In short, the empirical evidence I present in paper III lends considerable support to the intuitions in pursued in this paper and opens fertile space for further research.

In addition to the careful reassessment of the role of leadership, understanding the strategic domain for insurgent adaptation should prompt future scholarship to better incorporate complementary, but unapplied, insights from the fields of political science and comparative politics. Most pressingly, scholars should look to integrate the literature on coup-proofing – leadership strategies adopted to stave off or preserve authority in contentious, often authoritarian, states – into our study of insurgent organisations. Rebel leaders, like political elites within militarist nation-states, serve as dominant actors whose authority rests on the control and use of coercive or violent instruments. In both contexts, rival elites – or veto players – are likely to present existential threats to the current leader. Regarding insurgent groups in this paper, I outlined two leadership strategies for addressing the competing veto player – purging or placating the threat. The former involves coercive removal of the agent, while the latter involves selective empowerment (and diffusion of authority) to encourage the agent to remain within the organisation. The coup-proofing literature can help scholars expand this leadership handbook, outlining how practices of 'stacking' (selecting individuals with close ethnic, tribal, sectarian, social, regional, or historic ties) positions of authority within the organisation (Nepstad 2011; McLauchlin 2010); counterbalancing (ostensibly elevating rivals of their rival through the creation of parallel structures to offset the veto players potency) (Greitens 2016); or the provision of material

incentives (diffusing tensions or competitive incentives by rewarding veto players with higher salaries or transfers of goods or services as a means of creating loyalty devices) (Albrecht 2015). The strategies may be differentially valuable to insurgent leaders seeking to manage internal cohesion.[52] In short, by seeing organisational adaptation as a fluid process informed by the elite decisions, we can better contextualize and explain how and why decentralization occurs – and with what consequence.

Conclusion

In sum, this paper offers two central contributions to the study of insurgent organisations. First, this paper unpacked how variation in the internal balance of power (centralized and decentralized) within insurgent organisations is connected to outcomes in terms of performance and capabilities. As the extant literature argues centralisation is related to increased insurgent group performance, this paper interrogates why, and under what conditions, insurgent groups choose to decentralize. I then explain how organisations decentralize according to two mechanistic logics: the security response, in response to heightened levels of coercion from opponents; or the power-sharing response, reacting to diminishing levels of group cohesion. I then explore the plausibility of these two mechanisms through two qualitative cases: AQI in Iraq and Boko Haram in Nigeria. For AQI, the empirical record illustrates that the group remains tightly centralized around their leader, al-Zarqawi, until increased aggression from coalition forces and local anti-AQI elements combined with heighted internal tensions over al-Zarqawi's use of violence, prompted the leader to relinquish and decentralize operational authority. For Boko Haram, a similar increase in coercion against the group – from multinational military and local defense forces – and internal divisions over the conduct and strategic direction of the group also led the group to decentralize. In summary, this

[52] In line with the theoretical argument advanced in this paper regarding the consequence of veto players, these strategies of pacification may also have deleterious outcomes. For example, selective inducements create grievances and ultimately degrade the authority relationships between the veto player and their subordinates (Albrecht and Ohl 2016). These and other insights will be vital as scholars explore how leadership styles and strategies influence practices of organisational adaptation.

paper illustrates how an increase in coercion and decrease in cohesion become critical drivers for insurgent organisational change.

III

ARCHITECTS OF CONFLICT

Insurgent Leadership and Dominance in Intrastate War

Introduction

Leaders are central for both the formation and performance of any insurgent organisation. While elites have traditionally received scholarly attention – primarily from political scientists, sociologists, and historians – military and political leaders have received most of the focus. However, both military and political leaders serve in heavily structured or institutionalized settings. Whether constrained by history, law, or political precedent, military and political leaders occupy distinct positions within formal institutions – institution that shape and condition much of their behavior. Insurgent leaders, on the other hand, are the architects of their own institutions. Due to the lack of structural constraints – presumably even fewer amidst civil war – the causal importance and contribution of an individual insurgent leaders should be higher, and more consequential, than leaders in many other environments. This paper argues differences in terms of leadership characteristics are critical factor in explaining insurgent group performance, specifically the propensity for some groups to achieve dominance over competitor organisations in crowded civil wars

Crowded conflict environments, involving more than one insurgent group fighting against the state, present fertile – but complex – environments ripe for exploring the myriad features of insurgent group behavior and performance. Krause, writing specifically about national movements, highlights the complications for any reformist or revolutionary political movement that includes multiple organisations or groups (Krause 2018). In these theatres, the strategic or tactical environment is subsequently defined by the complex interactions of all groups within the conflict or protest environment. This theory-building paper develops a new and novel typology of insurgent groups leaders by generating three ideal types: crusaders, strategies, and opportunists. These ideal types vary in terms of leader motivation (goal-limited vs. situationally responsive); how leaders approach information (open or closed); how they select elites (loyalty vs. proficiency); and

their vision of the contest (exclusive vs. inclusive). I test the plausibility of this typology in the context of the Sri Lankan civil war, studying three of the dominant pro-Tamil insurgent groups between 1970 and 1990, and explore how leadership differences help explain why one group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), gained dominance over their competitors. I close this paper by discussing the wider implications for a leader-centered assessment within security studies literature.

Literature Review

The sociologist Max Weber noted, in Politics as a Vocation (1918), that leadership should be understood by exploring the three forms of authority: traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic (Weber 1968). Traditional leaders leveraged aged customs and customary forms of authority to generate support or compel allegiance. Rational-legal forms of authority, however, drew power from rules and institutions that could – by force or threat – constrain or encourage behavior of its subjects. Most compelling, however, was the idea of charismatic leadership which relied on – and flowed from – the character of specific individuals. Some individuals, in Weber's estimation, were uniquely capable of generating fealty or respect and subsequently shape the behaviors of their followers in systematic ways. In other words, Weber placed the individual leader – and their charisma – at the center of study and explored how their ability to generate a relational connection with members was generative of authority.

For later scholars, leader-centric analyses offered a chance to construct several conceptual and descriptive typologies. Harold Lasswell explored "revolutionary" leadership by distinguishing between theorists, agitators, and administrators (Lasswell and Lerner 1965). Brinton followed with his own typology of idealists, formulators, propagandists, agitators, and organizers (Brinton 1965). Hoffer distinguished between "men of words, fanatics, or practical men of action" (Hoffer 1951), following Hopper's distinctions between agitators, prophets, reformers, statesmen, and

administrator-executives (Hopper 1949). Other scholars trained their interest on how political leaders structured their advising staff or the decision-making process, tracing their influence when political elites confronted crisis, particularly amid escalations which could lead to war (Allison 1969). Other academics focused on an individual's experience, usually their service in the armed forces or instances of childhood trauma. These critical events, scholars argued, shaped an individual's relationship to risk and reward (Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015).

The quantitative turn in social science, however, appeared to limit or erase the causal importance of individual leaders on macro-level outcomes, often leading to one of three conclusions. First, that individuals "do not matter" or "count for little in the major events that shape international politics"; second, individuals may matter from time to time, but *way* they matter is rarely generalizable; or third, that the study of individuals – fraught with unobservable features – was "theoretically hopeless" (Byman and Pollack 2001, 108). Materialist accounts, similarly, framed leadership qualities, such as Weber's *charisma*, as reliant upon, or derivative of, material underpinnings (Bob 2005, 215). And thus, these disagreements remained fueled by ontological polarization, as scholars adopted either the "naïve view of political outcomes as merely the projection of leaders' personalities" or the "equally simplistic view that individual personalities have no effect" on political outcomes (Greenstein 1969, Chapter 2). The study of individuals, and their specific or unique impacts, quickly ran into the "problem of other minds" problem, common in philosophy and ethics, that questioned our ability to discern any useful truths given our inability to see into and observe the internal working (or logics) of the human brain. By the end of the 20th century, "leaders and leadership roles were largely absent from serious scholarship focused on international relations" (Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015).

The most sustained accounts of insurgent leadership, however, come from the strategic counterinsurgency literature. Prorok, for instance, finds leaders are less likely to negotiate – and

more likely to gamble to win – in conflicts they personally started, increasing their duration (Prorok 2016). Brenner, studying the Kachin and Karen rebellions in Myanmar, found stable authority depended on social identification and recognition of the group's social order – an order often framed and communicated by movement's leader. Lewis similarly finds that information, distributed strategically, is critical for early-group survival (Lewis 2020; 2012). Specifically, leaders are important for disseminating *rumours* about their nascent groups, at once increasing their credibility while insulating them from dangerous retaliation from the state (Lewis 2020).

Much of this literature revolves around the centrality of leaders for organisational performance. For instance, Johnston finds that removing an insurgent leader increases government chances of victory, reduces insurgent attacks, and lowers the overall level of violence (P. B. Johnston 2012). Similarly, Tierney finds that killing or capturing a rebel or insurgent leader makes it 389 percent more likely the conflict will end; conflicts are less likely to end while rebel groups are led by their founder; and state leaders responsible for starting a conflict are more likely to end it than their replacement leaders (Tiernay 2015). In other contexts, the death or arrest of movement leaders prompted factionalisation and decay (Crenshaw 1991).

Subsequent work has sought to explore the relations between leaders and their groups, finding leadership decapitation or assassination is most dangerous for groups with underdeveloped institutions (A. Long 2014). Similarly, Jordan finds that bureaucratized insurgencies – where bureaucratization is proxied by organisational age – generate redundancies that increase resilience in the face of leader decapitation (Jordan 2014). As Palmer notes, while studying Peru's Shining Path, revolutionary leadership as critical for explaining the ensuing conflict, with their leader's role as a university professor as "the most important factor in turning [his] university from a force of local development into an incubator for guerilla war" (Palmer 2017, 434). Most recently, insurgent group outcomes – specifically the risk of fragmentation – appear shaped and informed by intra-

group elite's beliefs in the capabilities of their leader – where leaders with prior military experience appear more capable of maintaining internal cohesion (Doctor 2020).

For Byman and Pollack, however, "[e]xplaining international relations while ignoring Hitler, Bismarck, Napoleon and other monumental figures is like trying to understand music without Michelangelo or Mozart" (Byman and Pollack 2001, 145). The two scholars sought to revive the study of leadership by suggesting personalities of critical decision-makers are likely to be *especially* important when power is concentrated, when the situation is novel, ambiguous, unstable, or complex – instances where leaders lack precedents, clear expectations, or routines – and when the "situation is laden with symbolic or emotional significance" (Winter 2013, 425). Yet, while these conditions are almost always present during intra-state conflict, the study of insurgent leadership has been inconsistently explored. In sum, extant scholarship illustrates *that* leaders matter, and have been particularly remiss in ignoring the role of insurgent leadership amid the complexity and plasticity of intrastate conflict. In line with Doctor (2020), I endorse the premise that rebel leaders are not 'created equal' and that it is the variation in their leadership capacities that exerts influence on the organisations they build and the conflicts they wage.

Theory

This paper asserts that differences in specific leadership characteristics matter. This project specifically explores four leadership characteristics – approach to mission; relationship to information; selection of elites, and vision of the contest – which are understood to exist on a spectrum. Given the lack of extant focus on insurgent group leaders, I build this framework by leveraging the work of Hermann, Preston, Korany, and Shaw (2001) as a baseline conceptual map, and deductively reason through the implications of these leadership characteristics in the context of intrastate conflict. Using these details, I build a typology that describes three distinct leadership styles: crusaders, strategists, and opportunists.

Approach to mission: goal limited vs. Situationally responsive

Individual leaders will adopt approaches to their mission that range from goal-limited to situationally responsive (SR). For clarity, all leaders will demonstrate aspects of these two approaches, but it is useful to draw distinctions between the two domains to describe a leader's propensity to favour one approach over the other.

Goal-limited (GL) leaders tend to "interpret the environment through … their beliefs, attitudes, motives and passions" (Hermann et al. 2001, 87). These leaders often present as devout and personally committed to their cause, embodying the commitment they demand of their fellow followers. Their goals tend to be closely aligned with their beliefs about personal integrity and gain personal popularity as a function of their total devotion to their cause – complete with uncompromising philosophies and high levels of charisma. Goal-limited leaders commonly adopt strong founding ideologies or revolutionary principles, and these principles shape social codes and processes within the organisations they lead. Intuitively, goal-limited leaders are least likely to negotiate and would often rather be defeated in pursuit of their goal than compromise for an intermediate benefit or outcome. Goal-limited leaders often challenge or 'dig-in' when confronted with constraints or obstacles and may select strategies of "bashing the enemy" or scapegoating, using force and intensity to push against an obstacle until it yields – if it yields. Effective confrontation can galvanize members of the organisation. If unsuccessful, though, the increased risks can corrode internal consensus. This kind of leader will advocate that, through force of will and commitment, all obstacles can be overcome, all opponents defeated, and only stronger adherence to the mission is appropriate.

By contrast, situationally responsive (SR) leaders are "flexible and open-minded" and tend to balance their mission goals against the constraints they encounter. These leaders may understand

leadership as a performative act requiring them to "play many roles" at once (Hermann et al. 2001, 87). Situationally-responsive leaders may be more concerned about the audience costs of their decisions – compared to goal-limited leaders – leading them to "tailor their behaviour to fit their demands" (Hermann et al. 2001, 87). Sensitive to their specific contexts, these leaders are more empathetic to their surroundings, interested in how their constituents see or interpret events, open to bargaining or compromise, and tend to focus on one challenge at a time (Hermann and Milburn 1977; Snyder 1987; Hermann and Hermann 1989; Kaarbo and Hermann 1998). These qualities a leader appear more technocratic or managerial and as they derive security and authority by maintaining positive assessments from fellow members and subordinates. In other words, "[t]hey are not high risk takers" and, only by mobilizing their constituents to "support a particular activity are they likely to move forward" (Hermann et al. 2001, 88). SR leaders also tend to interpret obstacles as prompts to re-evaluate strategies and junctures for adaptation. These responses suggest SR leaders are more moderate than their goal-driven counterparts, leaving the former open to charges of risk aversion or a willingness to adopt incremental or staged strategies of contestation. SR leaders will tend to alter their strategies according to their expected consequences, potentially even selecting "popular" strategies even if they diverge from earlier principles or commitments. These features do not preclude SR leaders from adopting an "all or nothing" strategy – provided conditions are right – but SR leaders are more likely to preserve a wider menu of alternative strategies if the constraints and balance of power or risk are not in the leader's favour.

Relationship to Information: Open vs. Closed

All conflict settings are complex information environments, but leaders play a vital role in shaping how information is collected and used. Leaders differ in their desire to procure information. Here, I distinguish between leaders who are "open" or "closed" to information. For clarity, this orientation refers to how leaders treat or engage with information that might challenges their stated

position, strategic footing, or group aims. This information may include news of counterinsurgent (COIN) successes or victories, or information about organisational errors and failures.

Leaders open to information believe more and better information is an asset for decision-making. These leaders are known as cognitive "cue-takers" or "naïve scientists" who remain sensitive to how others (particularly critical stakeholders) understand, learn about, or process information in their strategic environment. These leaders are more likely to draw information from a variety of sources, working to "define the problem and identify a position by checking on what important others are advocating and doing" (Hermann et al. 2001, 92). Information is vital for updating group preferences or interests or calculating risks in a changing environment to better allow leaders to define strategies to "fit the situation" (Hermann et al. 2001, 93).

Conversely, some leaders remain "intent on finding that information in the environment that supports their definition of the situation or position" (Hermann et al. 2001) – a comparatively narrow or circumscribed willingness to process information. While these leaders may receive updates or source details, they tend to overlook or discredit unpalatable or contradicting information and may work to create environments in which information that threatens the group's claimed or stated mission is either ignored or discredited. Often, these leaders adopt an adversarial attitude towards information as a means of preserving their reputation – for instance, by asserting their proficiency and success in times where their organisations are suffering strategic losses. Relatedly, leaders who adopt a closed information philosophy may also design (or structure) top-down intelligence gathering institutions which filter information to confirm the leader's expectations and reify their worldview. In the realm of cognitive psychology, these leaders are defined as "cognitive misers" – individuals who fit the information to extant schema or frames of

reference. This approach to assessing information in their conflict environment may lead to systematic errors of strategy or tactics.[53]

Selection of Elites: Loyalty vs. Proficiency

Insurgencies incur high risks and leaders must select individuals to share the burden. However, a leader's criteria for elite selection varies. In this section, I distinguish between two selection schemes: loyalty and proficiency. While it is plausible that competent or highly trained members are *also* highly trusted by a specific leader, the selection criteria for fellow elites will tend to prioritize one quality over the other.

Leaders who privilege loyalty will tend to select elites with consonant beliefs and similar worldviews. Under these conditions, the criterion for selecting co-elites is their loyalty to the group's shared cause and, by extension, their loyalty to the leader. Leaders who select their co-elites according to loyalty will tend to build organisations that show little deviation between the leader's individual beliefs or stated mission and the "norms and institutions (rules) to facilitate [these] personal [i.e., organisational] goals"(Hermann et al. 2001, 87). As leader's select their elites according to this loyalty function, job security for these members will tend to be contingent on their continued support of the leader.

Alternatively, leaders may select co-elites according to their proficiency within a specific domain or their standing within a specific target audience. Here, leaders will seek to identify individuals according to the skills, characteristics, or resources the leader can thus leverage in service to the group's mission. This does not mean loyalty is unimportant, just that loyalty will not be the central

[53] For example, in Vietnam in the 1950s, an American colonel with the Central Intelligence Agency bristled when the new ambassador altered their weekly status report meetings from open discussion to "more disciplined" briefings about developments in the conflict theatre. The meetings would usually end with the ambassador opining about "what the situation really was like and what each of use was to do about it."53 The colonel recognized the danger in shuttered information, particularly given the insurgency environment is "highly complex" leading leaders to failure if they wore "blinders and gags."(c.f. Boot 2018, 239)

criteria for granting these members authority within the institution. Leaders looking to widen the base of support for the group may select co-elites who serve as patrons for a specific constituency as they bring additional support from local or relevant populations that can augment the group's power. Further, leaders may also select co-elites according to their effectiveness on the battlefield, as this will reflect positively on the leader's ability to deliver on their stated mission.

Vision of the Contest: Exclusive vs. Inclusive

Leaders define the scope and scale of their political movement. In short, they specify which and whose grievances matter. As such, leaders vary as to whether they frame their contest against the status quo as inclusive or exclusive. Leaders who adopt an exclusive vision of the conflict often select a specific identarian feature (ethnicity, class, or ideology, for instance) that tends to "own" the conflict's central grievance. If framed as exclusive, the leader will tend to eschew partnerships or alliances with any actor or entity outside the subscribed group and delimits the specific audience to which the leader is both serving and responsible. Conversely, some leaders will see their contest as inclusive of different audiences. These leaders may advocate for the mass mobilization against the state – or their status quo opponent – and may be willing to position themselves in cooperative or collaborative arrangement with other actors who share the same enemy. This inclusivity may increase the size of the insurgent force but carries potential trade-offs in terms of a leader's continued ability to appease multiple actors within the movement at once.

Taken together, these four criteria illustrate how leadership styles vary. By exploring differences in leadership across these categories, I generate three ideal leadership types seen in Table 8. The next section of the paper explores each of the leadership types in detail.

TABLE 8: LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS AND TYPES

	Approach to Mission	Information	Selection of Elites	Vision of Contest
Crusader	Goal-limited	Closed	Loyalty	Exclusive
Strategist	Goal-limited	Open	Mixed	Inclusive
Opportunist	Situationally Responsive	Open	Mixed	Inclusive

Leadership Styles and Expected Outcomes

The Crusader

The crusader is a goal-limited leader who challenges constraints and remains comparatively closed to information. Crusaders may focus on expanding their own power and influence – and that of their group – while remaining averse to collaboration, choosing instead to push others to accept their message, join their cause, or forcefully subject them to their command and control. Crusaders may also be more likely to increase the cost of conflict – either in terms of violence or non-violence – which tends to attract additional attention from opponents. Crusaders may also be more likely to act first, which can play an important role in setting the pace and intensity of the conflict. Due to their willingness to accept higher risks, crusaders are more likely to select co-elites or cadre members according to loyalty, drawing heavily on concepts of honour, familiarity, loyalty, and trust. As crusaders are adamant in their support of the mission, often at the cost of adapting strategy to obstacles, they prefer to surround themselves with individuals who demonstrate high levels of fealty to their command. Further, the selection of elites based on loyalty can shrink the space for disagreement or contest between the executive group members, as deputies will be less likely to broadcast information or facts that contradict the beliefs or ideas of the leader for fear of

reprisal. Crusaders are also more likely to frame their contest in exclusive terms, privileging their group's grievances as central, formative, and unique – elevating the normative importance of their claims.

The Strategist

The strategist is a goal-limited leader who challenges constraints but remains comparatively open to information and inclusive in their vision of the contest. Strategists define their mission in terms of a problem (i.e., achieving a specific end) but will act to ensure their manoeuvrability (adaptability) and are more likely to commit to a strategy of incremental change. Some strategists may also perceive that their grievances are best addressed through relationship building and expend energy persuading others to act in parallel. Strategists will be more likely to support and develop strong information networks – institutions that furnish critical data to weigh the costs and benefits of subsequent actions. Unlike crusaders, strategists may shift from their original strategic designs, particularly if new information suggests a shift would be advantageous. Strategists tend to be sensitive and reactive to changes in the strategies of competitors, and will, not unlike skilled chess players, act to both move their own group into an advantageous position or position themselves to deny said advantage to their co-competitors. Strategists, by design, can be both proactive and reactive, but tend to be less risk acceptant than crusaders but riskier than opportunities.

The Opportunist

The opportunist is a situationally responsive leader who respects the constraints of their environment but remains open to information. When focused on a problem, these leaders will be most reactive, altering strategy to adapt to the current situation. These leaders are calculating and well-explained in extant literature that understands leadership as a kind of instrumental performance: leaders carefully select the right "identity" for the situation. This role-playing, however, can be difficult to preserve over time, and member allegiance can be increasingly difficult

to preserve in conflict environments, where the risks of commitment to a group are high (i.e., at risk of death) and where multiparty conflicts often demand leaders to stake out unique positions with respect to their competitors. Here, opportunist leaders may stand for everything, leaving them open to critics that this adaptability is no better than standing for nothing. Their mixed approach to elite selection also offers the flexibility of staffing their organisation quickly but may come at the cost of cohesion, collective competence, and efficiency. However, these factors – and adaptability – may ensure opportunists to survive or endure within the conflict environment for longer periods of time.

Importantly, the conceptual typologies explained above offer lenses through which we can explore the consequent effects of rebel leadership. Specifically, these typologies allow me to generate hypotheses regarding how these leaders shape their organisations and influence their group's performance. To explain the mechanisms at work, the next section briefly explores how leadership styles may influence expected outcomes.

Using the leadership styles explored above, I deductively explore how these characteristics are likely to influence a group's ability to assert dominance over rival groups. This paper does not define dominance merely in terms of the level of violence, but through a more holistic assessment of the capabilities and threat credibility of the group. Thus, a dominant insurgent group is one that is perceived by other conflict actors as most capable of both confronting the incumbent (opposition) forces or most able to stipulate the terms of the conflict itself. In the section below, I explore how taking leader typologies seriously allows us to explain dominance patterns in crowded conflict environments.

Crusaders vs. Competitors

When two crusader groups clash, material superiority serves as the best indicator for subsequent dominance. Stated simply, the actor with the greater number of resources – either in terms of human capital or military materials – is likely to demonstrate the highest degree of credibility and thus be perceived as dominant within the conflict environment. When crusaders clash with strategists, I presume crusaders will have the advantage as they tend to be better at deploying violence due to their strong levels of loyalty, their tendency to push through or challenge obstacles, and their stubborn commitment to the mission. As crusaders are goal-limited, they are likely to be more consistent in their messaging – and presence – within the conflict space. However, strategist leaders may attempt to offset the crusader's advantage by fervently courting public support to undercut the crusader's claims as movement leader. In addition, opportunists may be more willing and able to generate alliance or cooperative arrangements with other insurgent groups, and crusaders may find themselves fighting both their central opponent (the state) as well as all other non-state actors. Not unlike International Relations balancing theories, these groups may form temporary or non-adversarial compacts to raise their collective strength considering an emergent crusader (Bull 1996; Waltz 1979; Morgenthau and Thompson 1993).

Strategists vs. Competitors

As with the crusader's explanation above, dominance will tend to go to the materially stronger strategist when two strategist groups clash. Also, as strategists come into conflict with crusaders, the latter has the edge in establishing dominance, but strategists can seek an alternative route to dominance by leveraging higher levels of public support. Against opportunists, strategists are likely to establish dominance due to their openness to information and their selection of elites according to proficiency and skill. Strategists, compared to opportunists, are likely to benefit from their consistent commitment to the cause. In short, they are likely to be more effective on the battlefield and more accurately responsive than their opportunist competitors.

Opportunists vs. Competitors

The clash between two opportunists will, like the examples before, tend to result in dominance for the materially stronger entity. To recall, crusaders will also tend to establish dominance in competition with opportunists, unless the latter can generate strong working alliances to balance against the group. Against strategists, opportunists will have to overcome the credibility gap – as strategist's goal-limited approach will likely aid them in establishing dominance. In a contest with opportunists, however, there are no clear or set patterns for dominance. The eventual outcome may depend on material capabilities or the two characteristics that differ between the groups: opportunists are closed to information and have loyalty-based authority structures, but the specifics of these domains will likely differ from group to group. Depending on the environment, the precise differences – their space across the spectrum on these characteristics – may help explain how one leader's specific characteristics and selected strategy offers an edge for establishing dominance.

The Complexities of Multi-Party Conflicts

As the above section outlines, there are clear advantages for specific leadership types. However, many conflicts – and specifically the cases studied in this paper – feature more than two insurgent organisations. To explain these outcomes, scholars must work to isolate whether the mechanisms that explain a group's potential advantage in one (dyadic) inter-group exchange would complement or contradict their ability to pressure a second, or third, conflict opponent. For example, in the fight between a crusader, a strategist, and an opportunist, the crusader could – by the logic of this theory – prevail through the outbidding mechanism (superior material capabilities). However, to be certain of this outcome, we would need to explore how the alternative strategies employed by their competitors, such as the strategist (working to increase their public support) and the opportunist (creating strategic alliances against the crusader) might interact. My typology should

allow scholars to identify which alternative strategies of confrontation emerge while providing a framework to tease out how those strategies interact to generate the observed outcome.

For example, and expanding on this hypothetical, the opportunist's alternative strategy might be to find parties interested in forming an alliance – and because alliances are not always palatable for the strategist – the strategist is likely to invest their energy in sparking and expanding their public support as a means of unseating both the crusader and outcompeting the opportunist. In addition, it is plausible that the opportunist might align with the crusader if the situation permits. This arrangement would likely be condition on the crusader's willingness to have an alliance partner, and even the opportunist would have to remain subservient to the crusader's mission. Crusader groups would plausibly be interested as the addition of the group would increase the material capacity (human and physical capital) of their group. In short, as this example suggests, even multiple party conflicts can be explored using this framework. The typology, different leadership types, and the discussion of mechanisms in this paper provide guidance for scholars eager to explore the likely outcomes of these multiparty conflicts. For clarity, table 9 provides an overview of the actors likely to emerge dominant amid clashes between any two leadership types. Importantly, the table also includes what I call "underdog strategies" – tactics the ostensibly weaker party might take to try and upset the dominant actor. While this kind of strategic theory building is not the central focus of this paper, it offers a fertile space for future research.

TABLE 9: EXPECTED DOMINANCE OUTCOMES [MECHANISM]

Leadership Type(s)	**Crusader**	**Strategist**	**Opportunist**
Crusader	Materially Stronger Wins	Crusader [Outbid] *Strategist alternative strategy: Build public support*	Crusaders [Outbid] *Opportunist alternative strategy: Ally or Bandwagon*

Strategist	Crusaders [Outbid] *Strategist alternative strategy: Build public support*	Materially Stronger Wins	Strategists [Consistency]
Opportunist	Crusaders (Outbid) *Opportunist alternative strategy: Ally or Bandwagon*	Strategists [Consistency]	Materially Stronger

Methods and Case Selection

To capture and explore how leadership styles influence insurgent groups in conflict, I select one historical conflict – Sri Lankan civil war – and train my attention on three participating pro-Tamil insurgent groups: the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE); the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Forces (EPRLF); and the People's Liberation Organisation of Thamileelam (PLOTE). This case selection serves as a plausibility probe for my leadership typology and the related dominance hypotheses. In part, this methodological orientation mirrors what Ermakoff defines as the "genetic approach" – where scholars can "apprehend causality through the systematic investigation of generative processes"(Ermakoff 2019, 591). Thus, dominance in civil war is the outcome of interest, which can be linked through the generated effects of different leadership styles. As this paper leans heavily on mechanisms-based arguments, my outcome of interest (dominance) must also be "explicated in terms of arguments involving actors, their interactions, and the outcomes of these interactions" (Ermakoff 2019, 593). These micro-arguments lead to intermediate conclusions about specific group leadership types.

Focusing on a single country and conflict – the Sri Lankan civil war (and specifically the period 1971-1990) – allows me to control for exogenous elements and hold the political, social, and economic features constant. For example, the three cases are drawn from the "Big Five" Tamil insurgent groups which emerged during the same five-year period, received similar offers of

external support after the violent anti-Tamil violence of July and August 1983, drew their support from the same ethnic identity groups, and were led by individuals who were members of the Tamil student movement, protesting grievances against the Sri Lankan state. These commonalities tend to narrow the scope of alternative structural explanations for variation in terms of group performance.[54] This paper features empirical materials culled from primary documents published by the groups, memoirs written by members within the Tamil movement, reportage and interviews with insurgent members and leaders during the period, and a wealth of secondary source material written about the civil war. Where possible, I consult sources for details regarding unstated affiliations or biases across these primary materials and remain cognizant of bias that permeates much of the early writing about the LTTE.

Empirics

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

Leadership Vision

The LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, was born on November 26, 1954, in a Jaffna hospital in northern Sri Lanka. His family lived in the coastal village of Valvettiturai, where he was raised by a deeply religious mother and disciplinarian father. The favoured of family's four children, Prabhakaran was known as "durai" – meaning "master" – due to his early discipline. Like many of his Tamil contemporaries, Prabhakaran had a tendency to look north, to India, in search of political and social role models. Notably, instead of finding guidance in Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of political change through non-violence, Prabhakaran found common cause in the stories of Bhagat Singh and Subash Chandra Bose – the latter being an Indian nationalist who conspired with Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan to extract India from British control during WWII. "I shall fight for

[54] I use "narrow" intentions, as material or external factors (such as third-party support) vary according to group and time, but this variation can be more systematically traced within this conflict environment and timeline within a single conflict.

the freedom of my land until I shed the last drop of blood," Bose wrote.[55] At 16 years old, Prabhakaran was already advocating for Tamil independence, was mobilizing youths under the umbrella of the Tamil Students League and, at the age of 21, assassinated the Jaffna mayor, Alfred Duraippah in July 1975. Early Sri Lankan government intelligence on Prabhakaran reported he was "ambitious and power-hungry," that he "hated taking orders from others" and that these qualities were "matched by the charisma of a natural leader"(Anonymous 1987).

On March 5, 1976, Prabhakaran and an associate successfully raided the People's Bank in Puttur, outside Jaffna, leaving with 500,000 rupees in cash and another 200,000 worth of jewellery – money that would go into the building of the LTTE, christened two months later on May 5, 1976. Amidst increasingly stark anti-Tamil politics, Prabhakaran's reputation within the Tamil Youth league was that of "a patriotic nationalist" determined, above all else, "to resist Sinhala racist oppression that aims at the destruction" of the Tamil people (Balasingham 2003b, 335). Prabhakaran also found purpose and power in the moral authority of the mythic image and model of the ascetic Tamil hero – cherished culturally as a chaste but committed warrior devout in his protection of the Tamil people. The Tamil needed a protector, and Prabhakaran looked to construct an organisation fit for this purpose. The commitment to Tamil independence, and the defense of his people, demanded, in his mind, the strictest adherence to discipline, which became Prabhakaran's "central concept in life"(Balasingham 2003a, 337). He would later famously instruct his bodyguards to "kill him the moment he betrayed the cause of Tamil Eelam"(Klem and Maunaguru 2017a, 647).

[55] Interestingly, Bose was a devout Indian patriot, but left a troubled legacy when he joined the Japanese and German forces during WWII ostensibly to rid India of British rule. This commitment to instrumental alliances and partnerships – and the fluidity of strategy in service of one's ultimate end – is reflected in the character of Prabhakaran's leadership of the LTTE, particularly in the mid-1980s where the LTTE shuttle between the Sri Lankan and Indian states to court the best arrangement for the LTTE and, in Prabhakaran's account, the wider Tamil population. For fuller treatment of Bose. For Bose's influence on Prabhakaran, cf Swamy, Elusive Mind; On Subhas Chandra Bose (1897–1945): He is said to have adapted ideas of personalized power and sacrifice from early twentieth-century European militant movements to the Indian context. Cf. Klem and Maunaguru, Insurgent Rule as Sovereign Mimicry and Mutation, p. 644). According to Schalk (Historisation, 47), Subash Chandra Bose was known as "honourable leader" (his nom de guerre), but this title was also granted to A. Iracarattinam who was Prabhakaran's personal mentor in the early years in Vatamaracci (one section of the Jaffna peninsula); A.I went to South India in the 1970s to "mobilise people to participate in the Ilam struggle, but he died in 1975."

The vision of the LTTE's struggle was captured in their first constitution, written by Prabhakaran, which stipulated the Tigers' key goals and conditions: to establish a casteless Tamil society by armed struggle, that LTTE were members for life[56] and were not to "taint" their loyalty to the group with family ties or love affairs; and that individuals who quit the LTTE, joined, or formed other Tamil groups would be executed (Narayan Swamy 1994, 59). Prabhakaran's strict discipline and rigid character was not mere performance – he led other senior members of the LTTE from the front, instead of directing the conflict from behind the scenes. His "man of action" persona was an important part of Prabhakaran's image, and throughout his life he would often reiterate his first military operation – personal assassination of former Jaffna mayor, Alfred Duraiappa in 1975 – and his commanding role in the July 1983 ambush on the military convoy in Tinneveli (or Thirunelvely) – which prompted the deadly anti-Tamil riots of July and August of that year – as evidence of his formative role and willingness to risk it all for the pro-Tamil political movement.[57]

By most accounts, Prabhakaran was a militarist, a man who "uses military means for political ends" and he was known to admire Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, he saw the role of the politician as limited: Tigers would always be most potent when in battle, not at the negotiating table (Moreau and Mazumdar 1987). News reports, and the LTTE's own publications, referenced details of Velupillai Prabhakaran that betrayed a common theme in his coverage as the "charismatic" and "elusive man"(Anderson 2011). This ethereal presence was important and strengthened his position as a "folk hero around whom all types of legends are spun."(Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 172) According to Dagmar-Hellman:

> He is married, with two children, fiercely faithful, practicing and exacting strict discipline by shunning alcohol, tobacco, and forbidding his men and women from having extra- or pre-marital affairs. These norms of conduct are based on

[56] The constitution also stipulated the LTTE would be dissolved once a Tamil state was formed. Cf. Narayan Swamy 1994, 59.
[57] V. Prabhakaran, 'Prabhakaran on LTTE's Eelam Ideal', *Tamil Times*, July 1986, Vol V, Edition No, 9 editions.

and justified by the traditional Tamil and Hindu classics"(Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 172).

When the wife of Prabhakaran's close associate first met Prabhakaran in the late 1970s, she observed he was "indefatigably dominated by and committed to the political objective of the liberation of his oppressed people and that he firmly believed the establishment of a separate Tamil state as the final and only solution to the Tamil national question" (Balasingham 2003a, 41). Further, his "high moral character" verging on puritanism, was informed by his belief that this "exemplary behaviour in personal life" was a "crucial factor if a leader is to retain authority"(Balasingham 2003a, 41). Prabhakaran's personality also ran to the obsessive and controlling, with stories of him running his fingers over the tops of desks and shelves in search of dust in LTTE offices, or carefully removing bits of fluff or dirt from the arm rests of chairs while sitting for interviews. He even drew up his own housekeeping schedule in one of his Madras safehouses after finding the communal bathroom in disorder.

The goal-oriented, and single-minded, quality of Prabhakaran's leadership was evidenced both on and off the battlefield. Throughout the 1980s, there were several peace talks (aborted or otherwise) that could have given the LTTE the edge (politically) as Prabhakaran and the LTTE elites believed they held (and would continue to hold) the edge militarily. Yet Prabhakaran often refused to accept any agreement that did not explicitly guarantee the autonomy and independence of a LTTE-controlled Tamil state. Even as the Indian government continued to call for the LTTE to step down and turn over the remaining arms – a condition that emerged from the Indo-Lankan accords of 1987 – Balasingham repeated the LTTE creed: "[Prabhakaran] and his fighters would be prepared to die for a noble cause rather than to surrender in humiliation and dishonour"(Pālaciṅkam 2004, 129).

ASSESSMENT: GOAL-LIMITED

Relationship to Information

Prabhakaran saw himself as a military tactician. Understanding the importance of real-time information about the enemy, and how vital controlling information control would be for the LTTE, Prabhakaran was consistently open to information and systematically invested in intelligence-gathering institutions. In the early years of the organisation, LTTE intelligence-gathering relied strongly on local connections between Tigers and the Tamil community. This crudely efficient LTTE intelligence service managed to obtain vital information about rivals' movements and their dispositions – with Tamil youths also surreptitiously gathering information about friends, family, and members of the community without raising alarm.

More explicitly, the LTTE engaged the public directly, requesting any updates or information on Sri Lankan security forces movement or details regarding potential informants working for the state. The "public is the best source of information for LTTE" and the LTTE relied on this critical "word of mouth" by employing messengers driving bullock carts, farm labourers and other locals to source and share information. They also ran an efficient radio communication network using Japanese radio equipment, which permitted a wider geography over which to collect intel (Singh 2002, 82).[58] After the 1977 anti-Tamil riots throughout Sri Lanka and again after the "anti-Tiger" crackdown in 1979, most Tamil civilians saw the militant groups as necessary for their survival, often referring to them (generally) as "our boys" (Narayan Swamy 1994, 104).

[58] Over time, however, the depth and scope of LTTE intelligence services increased dramatically, and – by the mid-1990s – the decentralized networks that monitored, issued warnings, and consequently acted to punish civilians found to have violated LTTE protocols were sufficiently strong that "constituents and civil servants generally follow[ed] LTTE instructions" and the group could rely on passive coercion to maintain organisational integrity. (Cf. Lilja, Trapping Constituents, p. 318).

Prabhakaran's own preference for independent information – particularly to verify rumours – was evident again in 1983. An LTTE's attack on the government convoy in July of that year had triggered a dramatic round of anti-Tamil riots – a spate of violence that drove Indian authorities to covertly offer military assistance to the nascent Tamil militant groups. Upon learning of the Indian government's plan, Prabhakaran dispatched one of his senior cadres and trusted advisors, Anton Balasingham to Madras to "study the situation and inform him of the real facts"(Pālaciṅkam 2004, 55). Further still, Prabhakaran worried about the potential vulnerability in the Indian pledge to train all Tamil militant groups and urged Balasingham to establish a direct line of communication with the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), Indian intelligence, instead of using Chandrahasan, who Indian authorities designated as the intermediary between the other Tamil militant groups and the Indian state (Pālaciṅkam 2004, 56). Prabhakaran was sensitive to the threat of political manipulation, and both sought (and then worked to source) information that was diverse and independently verified.

That same year, Prabhakaran founded and staffed the Tiger Organisation Security Intelligence Service (TOSIS). This central intelligence agency was independently resourced, operated separately from the military wing of the group, and answered directly to Prabhakaran himself (Richards 2014; Schalk 2016). In subsequent years, Prabhakaran also coordinated at least two other intelligence outfits: a second team in Chennai, headed by Thalayasingham Suivakumar (known as Anton Master) and Beta-2, which was based in Jaffna, and was supervised by Mahattaya. Within Jaffna, LTTE commander Kittu also ran a local intelligence unit under the leadership of Vasu.[59] Much later in the conflict, particularly after arrival of the Indian Peacekeeping Force in 1987, civilian women in the eastern provinces of Sri Lanka were employed in vital intelligence gathering activities. women also began to engage in intelligence gathering activities" (Richards 2014, 27).

[59] According to reporting, TOSIS would relocate to Vanni in 1987, and absorb all intelligence services.

These institutions were given priority within the LTTE, and Prabhakaran ensured they were run by his most trusted commanders.

ASSESSMENT: OPEN TO INFORMATION

Selection of Elites

From the LTTE's formation in 1976, Prabhakaran appointed an initial committee of five senior members, retaining a position on the leadership council (Narayan Swamy 1994, 59). These members were primarily drawn from Prabhakaran's closest associates, including childhood friends (Biziouras 2012, 557). For instance, Sathasivan Krishnakumar, known as Kittu, who served as an LTTE military commander, was Prabhakaran's cousin. These classically "strong ties" are seen as critical for building the trust and robust upper management of the LTTE. Extant scholarship has explored how central the so-called "social bases" of the LTTE explain the distribution of individuals – particularly at the highest level and in positions of authority within the group (Staniland 2014b).

Specifically, these social bases are thought to overlap with, or mirror, the caste distinctions often studied among the Tamil militant groups (Staniland 2014a, 166). Prabhakaran was a member of the Karaiyar caste known as a fisherman caste, whose traditionally moderate status among Tamils was improved by their centrality for economic and market exchange between Sri Lanka and neighbouring states. The Karaiyar tended to be geographically located in the country's north and northeast, in cities such as Prabhakaran's hometown of Valvettiturai. Adding to Prabhakaran's mythic standing, the Karaiyar caste had been known as historically important and effective warriors, plundering the sea and defending their coastal territories (McDowell qtd in Staniland 2014b, 171). In moments of acute crisis, where the Tamil population sought defenders, these representations of the Karaiyar may have been increasingly resonant.

However, extant analysis often essentializes (or amplifies) the caste effects that operate in and between Tamil groups. Staniland seems to affirm these strong caste differences – and their importance – when he writes "although the Tigers incorporated other Tamil social blocs, particularly from the east, these new members generally did not become key commanders (Staniland 2014b, 169). But this assertion can be misleading, particularly when we try to explain whether Prabhakaran's decision to include fellow Karaiyar caste members was a function of their shared caste identity, or because he had simply known these individuals for longer.

Further, because "trust" is a condition of familiarity and intimacy, Prabhakaran's selection of fellow Valvettiturai Tamils may alternatively be explained by geography and personal experience. In the ancient port town, with a few thousand inhabitants and strong interlinkages between families, there were few ways to keep one's activities secret, and information about any of the locals was easily gleaned. This "small town" effect means many of the early members of the LTTE – drawn from this pool – would have been friends or family, whose origins, and politics – particularly their relation to state forces – were relatively clear. For Prabhakaran, this information would have been vital for selecting early members when the group was most vulnerable.

Prabhakaran's selection criteria for elites is also reflected in his wider approach to LTTE membership. "If there was a young man in a village with some talent for underground work, he would be sounded out by an emissary who tried to persuade the person to throw in his lot with the LTTE," and this hands-on practice by Prabhakaran continued for a number of years after the group's formation (Narayan Swamy 2003, 94–95). Prabhakaran's discipline and approach to organisation-building stressed quality over quantity: "With just 50 good people I can do a good job, instead of having a bloated but useless 500," he told an early LTTE associate. Prabhakaran was "very strict on the quality and character of his men and women."(Narayan Swamy 2003, 94)

In conversation with Anton Balasingham, Prabhakaran communicated his interest in the LTTE's steady growth, but "was not enamored by the idea of over-inflating the ranks of the organisation by embracing every enthusiastic youth" citing "discipline was more crucial than expansion" and that "abnormal growth" would cause serious problems leading to group disintegration (Pālaciṅkam 2004, 60).[60]

The importance Prabhakaran placed on loyalty and trust in selecting his fellow elites was also reflected institutionally. In 1983, with an eye for training and vetting recruits, Prabhakaran ordered Basheer Kaka, the LTTE commander in Trincomalee, to set up a training base in Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu specifically for young recruits – 15 years and under. These Tamil youth would be selected, trained, and educated, before being mixed into regular training regimens when they reached the age of 16. The comparative "purity" of these young recruits led Prabhakaran to select the first cohort of these young recruits for privileged or special details, including as bodyguards for Pottu Amman (TOSIS head) and for Prabhakaran himself (Richards 2014, 22).[61]

In conclusion, Prabhakaran's selection of elites was based on trust, familiarity, and shared experience. While there was careful attention paid to the utility of each individual and their potential skill set (i.e., how they could be best used by the organisation), trust remained a central condition for selection by Prabhakaran.

ASSESSMENT: LOYALTY

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[60] While the immediate effects of this disciplined approach may be seen as disadvantageous, as the LTTE added fewer cadres to their ranks relative to competitor groups, Balasingham notes this period also corresponded with a "massive structural transformation from a small underground guerrilla organisation into a well-organized national liberation army" c.f. Balasingham, War and Peace, p. 61.

[61] Ironically, one of these graduates in the first batch of young cadres was Karuna Amman, who would become the longest serving regional commander (first in Batticaloa and then later in Amparai District, starting in 1987 and extending until his defection from the LTTE in 2004. Colonel Karuna's defection and collaboration with the Sri Lankan security forces contributed to the steady weakening, and eventual defeat, of the LTTE in 2009.

Vision of the Conflict

The LTTE was also clear about their mission. Published in 1978, the LTTE's public pledge stipulated Prabhakaran's own vision the inevitable conflict: to "achieve these revolutionary tasks we firmly uphold that armed revolutionary struggle is the only viable and effective path open to us to liberate our homeland" and is "the extension of the political struggle for liberation"(Rajasingham 2002, 49).[62]

Prabhakaran saw and positioned himself as a devoted Tamil nationalist, fervently committed to the emancipation of his people. This positioning had benefits in the crowded marketplace of Tamil militant groups. First, it compelled recruits of all stripes (i.e. regardless of their ideological affinity) to reach out to the LTTE, and, second, amid clashes with between the Government of Sri Lanka and Tamil civilians, this narrative allowed Prabhakaran to frame the LTTE's use of force against the government as both judicious and inevitable: "If [President] Jayewardene was a true Buddhist, I would not be carrying a gun,"[63] Prabhakaran said, in one of his rare interviews during the 1980s. Prabhakaran's position against the Sri Lankan government extended, through a form of traitor's zero-sum logic, to the Sinhalese public. An interview with one LTTE commander in the mid-1980s stated, "We love the Sinhalese people, you know… They are also innocent," before adding, "When [the Sinhalese] support the government, they don't accept [the Tamil] homeland and our self-determination" (Anderson and Anderson 1988, 223).

As the LTTE evolved, so too did Prabhakaran's messaging around the purpose of the group. The LTTE was, first and foremost, formed to forcibly secure a political territory for the Tamils. As

[62] This definitive statement – the abandonment of the so-called parliamentary (non-violent) route – is critical as, just a year earlier (November 1977) the LTTE worked closely with the TULF (Tamil political party) with Amirthalingam, the TULF leader, pleading with Prabhakaran and the LTTE to minimize their use of violence: "I'm not asking you to give up violence, but you should cool down" (C.f. Swamy, Tigers of Lanka, p. 65).
[63] Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran: The First Profile of the World's Most Ruthless Guerrilla Leader*, 102.

Balasingham notes, "over the years we were to learn that Marxism had no real mass appeal in the Tamil social formation where religion, particularly Hinduism, has become a deeply entrenched ideology steeped in the socio-cultural life of the Tamil people" (Balasingham 2003b, 44). While Prabhakaran was personally agnostic about the potential merits of the Marxist-Leninist undertones of many Tamil groups, the LTTE's political education engaged with Marxist revolutionary thinking only as a means of legitimating the claim that "armed struggle [was] the highest mode of political struggle" (Balasingham 2003a, 45).

The LTTE's insistence of the centrality of the armed struggle was a key distinguishing factor, particularly after the Indo-Lanka peace accords of 1987, when the other three insurgent groups adopted (or signalled their potential support for) parliamentary or political approaches to address the plight of the Tamil people. Prabhakaran's belief in the necessity of armed revolution meant he interpreted these other Tamil groups as turncoats: Tamil groups who chose the political route were essentially cavorting with the enemy, they were confirmed "traitors" to the Tamil cause.

In summary, Prabhakaran increasingly saw (and framed) the conflict in Tamil nationalist terms, offering the LTTE a kind of revolutionary outbidding strategy – one that intensified and became more advantageous to the LTTE as the conflict evolved. Specifically, other groups – which began with and retained more thorough trappings of the Marxist-Leninist ideological agenda – were made to look vulnerable or traitorous as they appealed to both Tamil *and* Sinhalese constituents in the state. In short, groups that believed class would be a sufficient and mobilizing factor (Marxist-Leninist groups) for collective mobilization grew less competitive during the conflict. In this context, the LTTE's steady assertion that Tamils could not trust the Sinhalese, and that their salvation would only come through a commitment to forceful and exclusive defence of the Tamil cultural and political future, illustrates how Prabhakaran held, and institutionalized, an exclusive framing for the Tamil struggle.

ASSESSMENT: EXCLUSIVE

LTTE Summary Analysis

LEADERSHIP STYLE	GOAL-LIMITED
RELATIONSHIP TO INFORMATION	OPEN^{+}
SELECTION OF ELITES	LOYALTY
VISION OF CONFLICT	EXCLUSIVE
LEADERSHIP TYPE[*64]	CRUSADER

Eelam People Revolutionary Left Front (EPRLF)

Leadership Style

The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (or EPRLF) was officially christened in the town of Kumbakonam, in Tamil Nadu, India in 1981. While the group originally consisted of three main authorities, its central and strategic leader was Kandasamy Pathmanabha (also known as Ranjan), who got his start in radical politics nearly a decade earlier as the member of the Tamil student and youth fronts (Jayatilleka 2014, 16). According to Dayan Jayatilleka, a member of the Political Bureau of the Sri Lankan Mahajana Party (SLMP), Pathmanabha was "one of the founders of the very first socialist oriented organisations within the Tamil National Liberation Movement, called Eela Liberation Organisation (ELO) in 1974. For analysts of the period, Ranjan was a "classic example of Tamil youths who left their homes in the late 1970s attracted by militancy" and, like many, ended up "finding salvation ultimately in Marxism (Narayan Swamy 1994, 103).

[64] I assume leadership typologies will demand some flexibility in application. Thus, I consider the analytical analysis subject to an assessment of "best fit." For example, LTTE leadership was open to information (+) – which diverges from the proposed ideal "crusader". In latter summative analysis, I explore the implications of this divergence on expected outcomes.

Early accounts reference Ranjan's entrepreneurialism, suggesting that he was one of the "first to break with the bourgeois and Parliamentary policies of the Tamil United Front"(Jayatilleka 2014, 16) – earlier than Velupillai Prabhakaran (the founder of the LTTE) and Uma Maheswaran (first with the LTTE and then founder of PLOTE). This break from "parliamentary policies" led Pathmanabha "into the countryside and among the working people" which pushed the young Tamil leader further to the political left, encouraging him to reframe his understanding of the struggle for Tamil Eelam in ways that "workers and peasants … suffering from caste oppression" may also find common cause in calls for revolutionary reforms or changes to Sri Lankan politics (Jayatilleka 2014, 16).

Ranjan's experience with the peasantry shaped his belief in combining Marxist/Socialist theory and practice as a means of addressing the plight of the Tamil people. In the early years, he became an advocate for "armed expropriations" – the use of force to reclaim state profits taken from the people. In practice, this led him to organise the Puloly bank robbery in 1974, allegedly the first in the history of Tamil resistance. The robbery was so surprising to state security services they launched an extensive investigation and Ranjan was shielded from the Sri Lankan authorities by the people in the region, allegedly "deepened his love … and respect for the common people" (Jayatilleka 2014, 16).

Pathmanabha used his time to set up a General Union of Eelam Students (GUES) committee in Madras, leaving leadership to Comrade Suresh, before returning to Sri Lanka and canvassing for support in Jaffna as well as the "hill country" where he sought to recruit "Tamil youth from the Plantations and those from the Colombo schools for the cause of Tamil National Liberation"(Jayatilleka 2014, 17). These early movements show the Pathmanabha had "departed completely from any kind of narrow Tamil nationalism or chauvinism," and endorsing a wider class-based modus operandi for the struggle in Sri Lanka (Jayatilleka 2014, 17). Even close

associates, like Jayatilleka, reported that Ranjan erred because his strategic thinking was too strongly informed by his "adherence to fundamental principles of Marxism and Leninism and revolutionary internationalism" (Jayatilleka 2014, 18) which were "located in Comrade Pathmanabha own style of leadership"(Jayatilleka 2014, 18). In fact, these same sources suggest the "belatedness of the EPRLF's attempt to develop a powerful military apparatus was also due to [Ranjan's] own philosophical conviction that what was most important was a *mass* struggle, *mass* organisation, and a correct political orientation (Jayatilleka 2014, 18).

The EPRLF leader did alter strategy in 1987, though, with the Indian-Sri Lankan accords that August. One of the Accord's central proposals was the November 1988 Provincial Council Elections. Importantly, the EPRLF was the only group that agreed to stand for elections ... [thus] India had no alternative but to cooperate with it" (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 186).[65] Their electoral success offered some thin hope for EPRLF's desired conclusion: one step closer to their proposed national democratic revolution. Ranjan had to moderate their repertoires of protest in 1987 as the EPRLF sought to transition from pro-Tamil group into legitimate political party. This transition forced Ranjan to relax – and renounce – some of the EPRLF's strict Marxist doctrine (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2019, 174). While moderation is a common political maneuver, particularly for positioning in post-conflict or post-crisis elections, the EPRLF's softening ideological position stood as evidence of their opportunism and lack of commitment to the militant cause – particularly in the eyes of other Tamil groups.

Ranjan's leadership weakness was both an inconsistent strategy of contestation, combined with his limited ability to manage and moderate the EPRLF's strategy. For example, his stubborn adherence

[65] For context, the presence of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) does generate a kind of band-wagoning effect among the EPRLF, PLOTE, and TELO rebels – groups whose own groups may be losing pace compared to the LTTE and see the Indian forces as a means of curtailing LTTE advances. Evidence of Tamil National Army, against the LTTE. This detail, however, only strengthens the argument regarding LTTE's positioning and their resulting legitimacy benefits: VP and the LTTE were adamant and consistent in their messaging that the Indian presence was another form of oppression against which the LTTE was the sole defender of Tamil Eelam territory and its people.

to ideological maxims, and – towards the end of the 1980s – a fundamental miscalculation of political implications of attempting to leverage the support of the Indian Peacekeeping Forces in a hasty two-pronged strategy of politics and security provision, illustrated Ranjan's willingness to alter strategic course, but his inability to adapt effectively. Further still, Ranjan's opportunism at the leadership level offered diminishing returns, as the side-switching and eagerness to placate (or merely survive) in moments of crisis, bled the EPRLF of the public support from the Tamil people as well as the oppressed and suppressed economic class they sought to represent.

ASSESSMENT: SITUATIONALLY RESPONSIVE (MIXED)

Selection of Elites

Direct reporting on the EPRLF's organisational roster is sparse, however, records suggest the group's central figures were fellow students and young Marxists whom, together, formed the early nucleus of the EPRLF. Given Ranjan's foreign schooling and his canvassing throughout northern Sri Lanka and southern India, the common connections he developed followed ideological lines: fellow supporters of a Socialist revolution.

Support for this claim can be found in the work of Dagmar-Hellman, who spent the 1970s and 80s studying Tamil organisations in detail. She found the EPRLF was "the most radical and militant in respect to ideology" and the group who had carefully cultivated a set of revolutionary principles, which structured how the group attracted its members and shaped the organisation's repertoire of action. The EPRLF, for instance, tended to find comparatively more value in political education, or indoctrination, both internally and among the Tamil community, than in armed appropriations against the state or Tamil opponents. Under this ideological framework, Ranjan's vision for the EPRLF – akin to a traditional Leninist vanguard – was distinct from many of their

Tamil counterparts. In short, by prioritizing political education and *mass* organisation, the EPRLF sought create political change through revolutionary politics instead of strategic violence.

This does not mean the EPRLF's Marxist framing failed to produce a modus operandi – and code of conduct to be followed. However, unlike the LTTE, this organisational approach appeared less concerned about the monitoring or management of member behavior. Importantly, the individuals drawn to the EPRLF seemed also to differ from those attracted to the LTTE. For example, while LTTE cadres "had an inherent sympathy with socialist views" wrote Adele Balasingham, "none of them articulated Marxist positions" (Balasingham 2003b, 45). Further, the LTTE recruits even appeared physically different than their EPRLF contemporaries, as the latter tended to 'look' like Marxist revolutionaries – with "long beards and scruffy dress" – which seemed to define the young members (Balasingham 2003b, 45).

Geographically, the EPRLF drew predominant support from the east – a region more economically impoverished and unequal than others in the country.[66] Within these regions, students, and members of the "depressed classes" remained the dominant demographic for the EPRLF. The strategy was to "educate" the impoverished in Jaffna and surrounding northern provinces of their common struggle as the economically marginal. As one EPRLF fighter noted in 1982:

> In villages, we held study classes … [where] we discussed subjects like the national question, the international situation, what Eelam should be, Sri Lankan political parties, the Indian Tamils… With a focus on the "essential questions",

[66] Staniland admits this conclusion must be drawn from "sparse" evidence: the social base of the group is "a combination of students and some eastern lower castes" (Staniland 2014, 167).

> "we insisted on the importance of politics and ideology" causing "many of the new recruits to threaten[] to leave us"(Narayan Swamy 1994, 106).

This collective mobilization strategy signaled clear differences in the leadership styles of the EPRLF and the LTTE, as well as the other pro-Tamil groups. The inclusive vision of the mission suggested Ranjan was pitched to appeal to a wider set of supporters. This also meant that his selection of elites relied more heavily on ideological alignment – in the language of this paper, proficiency instead of trust – than personal loyalty or trust. In sum, a condition for membership – and ostensibly inclusion in the higher echelons of the group – was an individual's commitment and alignment with the Marxist revolutionary ideology.

ASSESSMENT: PROFICIENCY

Vision of the Contest

Ranjan was practicing Marxist who saw the ills of Sri Lanka, and the Tamils by extension, as a function of the colonial and later neo-imperial forces across the international economic system. His support, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, for both the Palestinian and Eritrean liberation struggles is testament to his global Marxist perspective (Jayatilleka 2014, 17). For him, the poor – those remanded as mere labour in the capitalist system – shared grievances that could be harnessed to drive social and political change. In Marx's words, the "spectre" of communism was now haunting Asia and Ranjan's personal philosophy illustrated his commitment to solidarity in service of mobilization in a "people's war in which not only students but the lower classes [and lower castes, in Sri Lankan society], works and peasants would be involved" (Wilson 1988, 129). He believed this solidarity was sufficient to serve as central framing for the EPRLF's mission and positioning during the emerging Sri Lankan conflict.

Under Ranjan, the EPRLF supported a fight "not merely as a struggle for the Tamil race, or a Tamil homeland, but the struggle of a suppressed people against an imperialist, neo-colonial, or neo-fascist oppressor" (Biziouras 2012, 616). In other words, a fight that was as relevant for the "Sinhalese masses" whom, in these terms, were as "suppressed and exploited" as the ethnic Tamils. This ideological framing meant the EPRLF "explicitly favour[ed] cooperation with non-Tamils" and that their goal, more generally, was not simply an "independent Eelam" but for a "national democratic revolution" across Sri Lanka (Biziouras 2012, 613). Thus, the EPRLF was committed to a Marxist-Leninist programme which, instead of "instant or violent revolution," sought to inspire "gradual change with the help of all national elements" (Biziouras 2012, 613).

ASSESSMENT: INCLUSIVE

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EPRLF Summary Assessment

LEADERSHIP STYLE	SITUATIONALLY RESPONSIVE[67]
RELATIONSHIP TO INFORMATION	UNKNOWN
SELECTION OF ELITES	PROFICIENCY
VISION OF THE CONTEST	INCLUSIVE
LEADERSHIP TYPE	STRATEGIST

People's Liberation Organisation of Thamileelam (PLOTE)

Leadership Style

Uma Maheswaran had always presented as a dedicated pro-Tamil reformist. In 1977, in the aftermath of the Sri Lankan general elections, Maheswaran, whose real name was Kadirgamapillai

[67] The EPRLF leadership demonstrates both goal-limited and situationally responsive characteristics, however given Ranjan's late-conflict adaptation of approach, his leadership style lingers closer to the situationally responsive end of the spectrum.

Nallainathan, helped set up refugee camps for Tamils displaced in the north. From the Vellalar caste, known for their extensive land ownings, he – unlike many of his contemporaries – hailed from the most privileged caste in Sri Lankan society. His standing, and strong network across Tamil Nadu, India, also included personal connections to M.G. Ramachandran, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, who would become a central supporter of the Tamil fight for independence (Jayasinghe 1989, 29).

In 1978, Uma Maheswaran joined Prabhakaran's Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam, and was invited to serve on the central committee, then consisting of nine cadres. While older and well-connected, Uma was the only senior LTTE member who was not a long-time friend of Prabhakaran (Narayan Swamy 1994, 60). However, his personable character made him popular among committee members. Authority – and seniority – was critical for Maheswaran and he required members to call him "thalaivar" – Tamil for "leader" – in contrast to Prabhakaran's preference for "thamby", meaning younger brother (Narayan Swamy 1994, 80).

Like Prabhakaran, however, Maheswaran believed violence was key for gaining momentum and shifting the political status quo in Sri Lanka. Maheswaran was also one of the first members of the Tamil militant movement to travel to Lebanon for training with the Palestinian Liberation Popular Front (PLPF). In those early years, Maheswaran and Prabhakaran collaborated closely, eager to amplify the impact of the newly christened Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). On January 27, 1978, the two men travelled together to the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo, tracking, and then firing two shots into M. Canagaratnam, a Tamil MP who had won on the TULF ticket pivoted to support UNP government. The act, unique in its brazenness and dangerous given it was committed in the state capital, was intended as a warning. The politician survived but the attack raised alarm among Sri Lankan government officials, who would offer 100,000 rupees as reward for information leading to the unknown assailants' arrests.

Shortly after, however, Maheswaran's strengths – his personable nature and cajole fellow LTTE members – began to create tensions with Prabhakaran. Thus, the birth of PLOTE is, in no small part, also the story of an acrimonious professional divorce between Prabhakaran and Maheswaran. When he began PLOTE, Maheswaran leveraged his LTTE connections for recruitment, reaching out to Indian Tamils who had encroached on so-called "Crown Lands" in Vavuniya and other northern Sri Lankan territories. Unlike the LTTE framing, however, Maheswaran also sought the support and participation of Indian Tamils who saw emancipation through alignment with Gandhian and Sarvodaya movements – approaches that were primarily non-violent (Jayasinghe 1989, 29). Similarly, Maheswaran's organisation, compared to the LTTE, was less focused on strict rules or codes of conduct. Instead, Maheswaran spent his energy looking to exploit potential opportunities throughout the conflict. Maheswaran central obstacle was the popularity and notoriety of the LTTE, and he set about to reshape the public perception of the conflict in ways that disadvantaged Prabhakaran.

PLOTE's strategic flexibility, for a time, worked in their favour. Maheswaran was able to leverage support and contacts from Tamil Nadu, as well as provide for his group materially – PLOTE was most actively involved in robbing Sri Lankan banks during the early 1980s, amassing considerable financial wealth. In fact, PLOTE seemed to place higher strategic utility of these attack and seizure events, collecting arms and cash, while refraining from using violence against their state or military targets. However, by PLOTE's annual congress in 1985, Maheswaran and his followers were "divided over the group's political programme, strategy, and terrorism" (Wilson and Cantirakāntaṉ 2000, 127). Others bristled at allegations Uma had commissioned as many as 38 murders – some committed against PLOTE members who had run afoul of the leadership (Wilson and Cantirakāntaṉ 2000, 127). By 1986, additional purges from within the organisation stoked considerable "anger among senior activists, leading to further deadly clashes" – with leadership

targeting the aggrieved within the group (de Silva 2014, 451). In a sense, while the strategic adaptability was effective at procuring the necessary resources, the inconsistencies in action and strategy drew criticism from group members about the group's ultimate purpose.

This uncertainty was complicated further by Maheswaran's tendency to play both sides (Tamil and Indian) to provide PLOTE the upper hand. Often, this game would backfire. In 1985, for instance, PLOTE cadres prepared to receive a shipment containing 1,500 Chinese-made rifles, some 300 handguns, and several radios from Japan. But Indian customs, who had not been alerted, interdicted the shipments and – given the large quantity and sensitivity of the materials – reported the event to the Indian Prime Minister's office. Contacts within the Indian security services bristled at the bravado of Maheswaran, and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi refused to turn the materials over to the group. Maheswaran had also started to agitate other Tamil political supporters in India – inconsistently siding with and then against key figures that provided resources for groups fighting for the Tamil cause. Finally, Maheswaran was implicated in a series of private meetings in 1989 with the Sri Lankan government – the same "fascist" forces he had pledged to combat – where he was alleged to have offered his assistance in hosting regional elections in the northern and eastern provinces. Maheswaran's explained that his assistance to the Sri Lankan government could be purchased on two conditions: first, the unconditional release of all Tamil political prisoners; and second, the cessation of military activities by the Indian Peacekeeping Forces (Editors 1988). In short, Maheswaran's personal preference for angling to access and impact was useful for PLOTE's survival but spoke to his preference for opportunism – adaptation over direct confrontation and resolve.

ASSESSMENT: SITUATIONALLY RESPONSIVE

Selection of Elites

Scholars have often asserted that Tamil groups mirrored, or at least mimicked, caste-sensitive recruitment. For this reason, some early analysis of PLOTE – and indeed of Maheswaran's influence over different geographies of support – was due to his comparative popularity with his co-ethnics, the Vellalar Tamils. Fuglerud, for instance, noted strong support for PLOTE from the Vellalar members in the early 1980s (Fuglerud 1999, 35). Various scholars and analysts have highlighted the importance of caste a useful guide for explaining how specific groups recruited among affinity groups. The Vellalar Tamils were particularly powerful within Jaffna, as "politics, on all levels from parliamentary debates to village bickering, had until recently been the domain of the energetic land-owning Vellalas" (Raheja 1988, qtd in Fuglerud 1999, 24). According to this logic, Maheswaran's standing as a Vellalar was critical for drawing support and resources from the strongest economic caste in Sri Lanka. However, there is little sustained study – and thus evidence – of whether this caste affinity hypothesis is empirically reflected within the organisation.

What is clear, however, is that PLOTE's formation – splintering from the LTTE – meant Maheswaran personally selected several trusted high-level cadres from the Tigers. These individuals were naturally positioned as leaders within the new organisation, suggesting it was loyalty, not caste affiliation, that explains Maheswaran's choice of PLOTE elites. Subsequent recruitment of members – to the extent recorded – seems to have drawn upon the Tamil youth. Jude, a young fighter interviewed by de Silva, joined in 1984, as one of 47 boys from his village, near Trinco[malee]" between 1983-1985, and was moved west to Vavuniya and then to Mannar before catching a boat across the Palk Strait to India to join a PLOTE training camp (de Silva 2014, 448). Further, Maheswaran's decision to eliminate many PLOTE members personally – ostensibly for violating his trust – speaks to the priority he placed on loyalty. In sum, Maheswaran appears to have privileged loyalty over proficiency when selecting officials and elites within PLOTE.

ASSESSMENT: LOYALTY

Vision of the Conflict

Unlike the exclusive vision of Prabhakaran and the Tigers, however, Maheswaran "believed the unity between the Sinhalese and Tamil working class was necessary to overcome the system which oppressed them" and even lectured – in the early days of PLOTE – against the dangers of Indian intervention and subversion (Candappa 2013). In these ways, PLOTE's vision of the contest was similar to EROS and the EPRLF, two other professed Marxist-Leninist organisations. In the early stages of the conflict, Uma also published "The Lessons of Bangladesh" which called for nominal unity between and among Tamil and Sinhalese groups in their contest against the capitalist system – an argument he would repeat as he organised the first underground radio station, *The Voice of Thamileelam*, which broadcast in Tamil, Sinhalese, and English intended to raise awareness about this common struggle (Candappa 2013).

Maheswaran often adopted the "hard Marxist-Leninist line" which meant "advocating a social revolution of the workers and peasants" which, by some accounts, struck the public as curious, given the dominance of Maheswaran's fellow caste members – the economically advantaged Vellalars – among PLOTE's roster (Wilson and Cantirakāntaṉ 2000, 127). Maheswaran's inclusive vision of the struggle was also evidenced by his practice of highlighting the loses of life suffered by Sinhalese civilians throughout the conflict. This extensive (and wider) suffering was not merely evidence that the Tamil resistance was necessary, but that all Sri Lankans should fight against the "fascist" government forces. PLOTE (like the EPRLF) explicitly favoured cooperation with the Sinhalese masses (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1988, 616).

In the words of Hellmann-Rajanayagam, however, PLOTE's 'vision' for the contest would shift as they grew increasingly aware of the growing influence of the LTTE. Maheswaran sought to shift the narrative of the Tamil movement to whittle away the legitimacy of the Tigers' approach. Specifically, as the LTTE established temporary territorial control over the Jaffna peninsula, one scholar noted:

> PLOT[E] claim that LTTE have merely taken over the administrative structure from the Sri Lankan government keeping Sri Lankan civil servants and administrators and even accepting salaries from the Sri Lankan government (alluding to the fact that the LTTE allowed government pensions to be paid to former civil servants in Jaffna) while claiming not to submit to the authority of the same government"(Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1988, 613).

One of the bittersweet outcomes for PLOTE, however, was that this inclusive vision of the conflict was effective, for a period, at motivating widespread recruitment, but the organisation struggled to effectively train and utilize this human capital. The result was a relatively large but fragmented organisation. This would be particularly debilitating in the latter stages of the conflict: as "hundreds of young men swelled the ranks of PLOTE, Uma's lack of direction and his dalliance with dubious Indians and Sri Lankans caused disaffection in the group" which led many to quit (Narayan Swamy 2003, 132). By 1985-1986, PLOTE was low on money and arms, as their leader "looked content to stay in India and issue periodic press statements" condemning their Tamil opponents, largely the LTTE, for their unending hit and run attacks (Narayan Swamy 2003, 132). Added to this, PLOTE's internal factionalism led Uma and his lieutenants in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka to begin "torturing and killing real and suspected dissenters"(Narayan Swamy 2003, 132). Ironically, Maheswaran's inclusive vision begat a litany of intra-organisational disciplinary

challenges and his response – rough justice – mirrored the precise behavior he had criticized Prabhakaran for six years earlier.

ASSESSMENT: INCLUSIVE

PLOTE Summary Assessment

LEADERSHIP VISION	SITUATIONALLY RESPONSIVE
RELATIONSHIP TO INFORMATION	UNKNOWN (OPEN)[68]
SELECTION OF ELITES	LOYALTY
VISION OF THE CONTEST	INCLUSIVE
LEADERSHIP TYPE	OPPORTUNIST

Case Summaries and Results

The next section begins with a summary of the analytical findings (Table 10 below) before outlining the leadership characteristics and the outcomes for each of the groups within the conflict.

TABLE 10: SUMMARY OF SRI LANKAN CASES

GROUP	LEADERSHIP TYPE	SUMMARY OF CATEGORIES	OUTCOME
LTTE	CRUSADER	Leadership: Goal-limited Information: Open Selection of Elites: Loyalty Vision of Conflict: Exclusive	Dominant from 1984-end of conflict)
EPRLF	STRATEGIST	Leadership Style: Situationally Responsive Information: Unknown Selection of Elites: Proficiency	Main LTTE competitor

[68] The empirical analysis failed to provide sufficient evidence to specify PLOTE's "Relationship to Information". If pressed, however, inferential assessment suggests PLOTE's leadership was comparatively "open" to information – a feature that would assist in his strategy of adaptation to constraints.

		Vision of the Contest: Inclusive	(1984-1986); never dominant;
PLOTE	OPPORTUNIST	Leadership Type: Situationally Responsive Information: Unknown Selection of Elites: Loyalty Vision of the Contest: Inclusive	Main LTTE competitor (1984-1986); never dominant

Note: Red text indicates where the groups diverge from the idealized leadership typology. The blue text indicates missingness in terms of the final assessment.

According to the expected outcomes (see Table 9), groups led by crusaders are more apt to be dominant in crowded conflict environments and in competition against either strategists or opportunists. The empirical evidence confirms this hypothesis holds true in the case of Sri Lanka. From 1984, the LTTE accedes to the dominant position and does not relinquish this position until their ultimate defeat, at the hands of the Sri Lankan government, in 2009. LTTE dominance is confirmed by Sri Lankan government reporting and foreign observers throughout this period (Anderson and Anderson 1988). Further, official American assessments, disclosed in leaked cables between the Sri Lankan embassy and Washington staff, also confirm the LTTE's prominence throughout this period (US Embassy Staff, Sri Lanka 1989). In addition, the LTTE's strength is evidenced by their 1986 decision to attack all other Tamil groups vying for the Tamil population's support. A combination of Prabhakaran's exclusive vision of the contest, his commitment to violence before politics, and his robust (and trusted) cabal of fellow LTTE elites allowed the group to differentiate itself from the other "Big Five" Tamil organisations.

My typology asserts that crusaders are likely to rise to dominance when pitted against any group led by alternative leadership types. When crusaders encounter other crusader groups, however, the differentiating factor will likely be material capabilities. In this respect, the LTTE gained an added advantage, as Prabhakaran proved to be a cunning strategist and, contrary to the idealized typology here, leveraged his capabilities to create a robust information and resource-procurement

infrastructure for the group. In short, the LTTE's dominance is well-explained by the mechanisms featured in this conceptual typology of insurgent leadership.

Shifting to the EPRLF, this paper's expected outcomes also hold – strategists outperform the opportunists, while falling short of the dominant LTTE. EPRLF, which is the only "strategist" among the Big Five Tamil groups, serves as the main LTTE competitor and remains stronger than PLOTE, TELO, and EROS in the post-1983 period. Importantly, strategists notably differ from crusaders across two domains: their logic of elite selection and their leader's vision of the conflict. In the first case, strategists tend to be cue-takers and are more likely to fill elite or top-level positions according to proficiency. While these qualifications are laudable, this selection criteria can intensify the adverse selection problem – recruiting self-interested and poorly disciplined recruits whose actions can be detrimental to organisational preservation. Combined with the inclusive vision of the conflict, and strategists must contend with a wide array of member interests, a less cohesive set of core members, and – as a result – an organisation that demands steadfast maintenance and enforced discipline.

Perhaps most interesting, however, is that this typology also explains why the EPRLF – as a strategist – was unable to contend using the alternative strategies. First, the EPRLF leader's initially "goal-limited" approach, later modified to pivot, made the EPRLF maladaptive. Instead, as the empirical evidence demonstrates, the EPRLF's late-stage shift in strategy costs them public support – which is assumedly the only alternative competitive strategy a strategist leader can employ against a crusader-led organisation. The EPRLF's partnership with the Indian peacekeeping forces, and their decision to abandon the pure Marxist project, appeared to show EPRLF's weakness and low trustworthiness. Combined with LTTE practices of framing the EPRLF as traitors or sell-outs, these features were ultimately corrosive of any legitimacy or

credibility.[69] Thus, the typology explains why the EPRLF failed to achieve dominance against the LTTE, it also highlights how the leader's attempts at modifying their strategy also degraded their capacity for employing the alternative strategy for contesting dominance. In short, the empirical evidence shown through these cases lends support for the hypotheses that emerge from the conceptual leadership typology presented in this paper.

Discussion

The Sri Lankan case selection was particularly beneficial in terms of outlining the scope of leadership style. While not intentional or anticipated, the insurgent group cases offer one leader for each of the typological categories – allowing the paper to present differences systematically, and to reason deductively, through the associated insights. While a single conflict case is insufficient to robustly test the framework, this initial research offers introductory findings that can be verified through systematic expansion and application of this typology outside of Sri Lanka.

Further, the empirical findings highlight that leaders rarely fit neatly into the specified categories – nor would we expect them to. The conceptual typology in this paper operates according to the process of "best fit" and the residual aspects of their categorization, for instance, can help explained the specific nuance of group behavior within the empirical cases. For example, LTTE is a crusader – with all the relevant consequences – except for their openness to information. The typology developed in this theory suggests that openness to information would be more likely to present in groups that are malleable or adaptable to their surroundings, and where the group remained open and cultivate sources of information. However, the LTTE's extensive investment in intelligence networks, surveillance practices, and the leadership's eagerness to gain information about their operational environment, is strongly associated with Prabhakaran's interest in codes of

[69] Full details regarding the EPRLF's ability to generate legitimacy and credibility in this period is captured in Paper 1: Agents of Order, in this dissertation.

conduct and compliance. These individual-level differences generated organisational level outcomes, which further strengthened the group and assisted its subsequent rise to dominance in the conflict.

This initial theory-building process also revealed one of the key challenges for this project remains data availability. Due to the four characteristics measured, researchers may struggle to identify clear indicators to classify an insurgent leader within the appropriate typology category. In part, this is centrally a struggle over what counts as an observable and what these observables indicate. For instance, a leader that is "open" to information *may* invest in their own information gathering structures and processes. The decision to invest in these structures reveals their interest in receiving more information to assist with planning and assessment. However, reducing the measure to observable investment or construction of information gathering institutions may conflate "openness to information" with material or financial capabilities. In other words, materially robust or rich leaders may have the luxury of building these intelligence networks where smaller groups or resource-limited insurgents will not – agnostic of whether one leader views information as valuable as another. For the purposes of theory-building in this paper, however, I assume interest precedes investment unless evidence suggests otherwise.

This paper also works to correct the materialist explanations of the outcome of the Sri Lankan conflict. For example, the contest between the LTTE and EPRLF. The eventual dominance of the LTTE, for example, is often explained in terms of material advantage. However, to see the outcomes as being reliant on mere material assets misses the mechanisms that operate between the leader and the group, as well as between groups. In fact, materials accumulated at the cost of strategic or tactical independence may not advantage the group at all. Secondly, leadership is critical for understanding how resources are deployed within the group. In this light, leadership *modulates* the potential material advantages of a group. Thus, because leaders differ, material advantages

cannot sufficiently explain dominance of one group over their competitors. The proposed leadership typology does not *determine* the subsequent outcome but makes certain paths more likely during the conflict. In short, the theoretical and conceptual thrust of this work argues leadership influences outcomes in a probabilistic, not deterministic, sense.

Most importantly, this paper's novel theory-building framework has sought to "bring leaders back in" to our analysis of intrastate conflict. While leaders – their personas and messages – have received considerable attention in terms of mobilization of armed forces, particularly within the literature on political, ethnic, and violent entrepreneurs, there is little sustained scholarship that studies how variation in leadership types influence the performance of insurgent organisations. The leadership typology proposed in this paper offers a first attempt at highlighting the conflict consequences that result from these minor and overlooked differences. In the words of Ermakoff, "the search for analytical precision hones our attention to the 'noise' of history," and "these apparent 'small' details that actually can carry considerable analytical weight" (Ermakoff 2019, 594).

Conclusion

In summary, this paper argues differences in terms of leadership characteristics are critical factor in explaining insurgent group performance, specifically the propensity for some groups to achieve dominance over competitor organisations in crowded civil wars. Highlighting the current lacuna in leadership analysis within political science and International Relations, this paper presented a novel theory-building typology to explore how four characteristics of group leadership – leadership style, relationship to information, selection of elites, and vision of the conflict – shape the consequent patterns of dominance among insurgent groups in civil war. After generating these typologies, this paper outlined how clashes between organisations – led by different kinds of leaders – are likely to conclude. In the proposed typology, groups led by crusaders tend to

outperform (achieve operational dominance) groups led by either opportunists or strategists. However, the typology also offers insight into the strategies of contestation these latter leaders might adopt to increase their own advantage – even when confronting crusader-led insurgents. The paper then applied this theory-building framework to three of the "Big Five" insurgent groups in the Sri Lankan civil war and found that the typology accurately predicted the success of the LTTE and EPRLF groups compared to the other organisations, while also providing an explanation for the EPRLF's ultimate limitations compared to the LTTE. The final discussion and analysis also demonstrating how leadership mechanisms may both explain – and correct – extant explanations of insurgent group performance and dominance. Taken together, this paper has offered a unique theoretical contribution – and conceptual validation – for taking leaders seriously, paving the way for future fine-grained analysis of insurgent leaders and conflict outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This collection of papers has addressed a series of puzzles. First, paper I explored the relationship between insurgent group violence and their propensity to build public support. The answers explored in this paper – that a group's management of violence required investigation into the internal features of an insurgent group – provided the impetus for paper II: how, and under what conditions, do insurgent organisations adapt or change? Recognizing that processes of change are themselves an outcome of the complex interplay of exogenous and endogenous factors, the third paper tackles the role of leadership directly, asking how different leadership styles influence insurgent group performance? Together, these papers offer an attempt to build new theories to explain how leaders, the organisations they build, and the strategies they subsequently employ, are outcomes of nuanced causal processes – nuance often lost when we remand our vision to a single level or narrow perspective of analytical inquiry.

This diversity of levels of analysis, combined in a single collected dissertation project, is novel within the wider field. While scholars have argued strongly to understand conflict and its actors across myriad levels of analysis, their projects tend to remain rooted in and from a single vantage point. This project actively engages with, and across, these research topographies. As such, the willingness to work across this terrain means leveraging the comparative advantages of each project, and their methodological perspectives.

Paper I, which explores how insurgencies communicate through violence to gain public support, focuses on a mix of meso- (or organisational-level) and macro-levels of analysis, where variables like group discipline (meso) and relationship to external actors (macro) interact to shape how a group controls its patterns of violence. These two indicators help explain how an insurgent group manages their violence amid intrastate conflict, and consequently affects the pattern of public

support it receives. For example, training our focus on the organisational level of analysis is critical for disentangling how the forces of agency and structure interact. Seeing insurgencies as purposive organisations – guided internally to weather the changing conditions of their environment – allows scholars to take seriously the processes of change and the messiness of causal mechanisms in this research domain.

Similarly, paper II also engages at the level of the organisation (meso), orienting its analytical lens to how internal (cohesion) and external (coercion) characteristics prompt group change. While organisational structures are increasingly seen as important, perhaps most notably when it comes to devising counterinsurgency policies to confront violent groups, scholars know little about how insurgent structures change over time. Paper II foregrounds the importance of this puzzle, exploring extant logics that explain why insurgent groups tend to be highly centralized in the early stages of development, and why they change over time. My intervention is to suggest the prompt for organisational change emerges from an interaction effect between internal and external factors – and purposive decision-making agency on behalf of the leader(s). Given the environment of conflict, the menu of potential group changes may be numerous or limited – conditioned, in other words, by the affordances of the conflict environment. My work suggests that structural features do not nullify the role of agency or systematically blunt the dynamism of organisational adaptation, but structure how change is more likely to emerge in any given period.

The ghost in the machine in paper II, however, becomes the central element – and perhaps most understudied level of analysis – in paper III: insurgent leadership. My attention to the individual (or micro) level of analysis is critical because it highlights the importance of leaders – persons with executive authority and the ability, by exerting their authority, to initiate change and stipulate the behaviour of the insurgent organisation more broadly. This focus on insurgent leaders is critical not only because of the dearth of extant literature on insurgent leadership, but also because the

conditions that underpin an insurgent leader's positionality in conflict are precisely the conditions under which individual actors are critically important to – and most determinative of – the subsequent outcomes. In other words, leaders matter most when political-institutional structures are weakened: in times of crisis, when accurate information is onerous to procure, and when tensions, and expectations of action are high. In this way, insurgent leaders persist in an environment of perpetual crisis: conditions where the constraining elements of the status quo are weakest. These novel environments, where prior lessons or standard operating procedures tend not to suffice, are spaces where the actions of specific leaders have greatest impact. By interrogating the influence of leaders specifically my research illustrates how organisations, as social collectives, are built and evolve in ways specific to their leadership – sources of authority who observe, interact with, and respond to, the changing conditions of conflict. Thus, the specific characteristics of political leaders become more critical and causally important for explaining what kinds of effects or circumstances follow.

As Ermakoff notes, picking apart the logics and constitutive effects of contingency – a condition long thought to frustrate any theoretical accuracy within the social sciences –insurgent leaders are critical actors in our search for 'analytical precision' amid the 'noise of history' and where "'small' details … can carry considerable analytical weight" (Ermakoff 2019). Paper III's intervention is to assert that differences in characteristics for insurgent leaders have critical influence over the kinds of organisations they build and the strategies they adopt. By extension, leadership styles have real and visible consequences for a group's competitiveness and their likelihood of achieving dominance amid crowded conflict environments.

This project recognizes the interaction effects that flow between my explanatory domains and looks to highlight where differences at the level of the individual (the group leader) are vital for explaining subsequent differences at the organisational level (the insurgent group), which –

together – contribute to how audiences (the public and the state opponents) interpret or perceive the insurgent actors. In short, I am willing to mediate and negotiate the space between parsimony and complexity, working to capture how variables and mechanisms at different levels of analysis conspire to influence given outcomes. In short, each of these papers try and offer a grounded view of the causal mechanisms operating at each level of analysis. While these granular details can make telling a single causal story difficult, it is precisely this complexity that must be engaged for any scholar engaged in an examination of intrastate conflict. In other words, by failing to see how the micro- and meso-levels factors may interact, we risk drawing conclusions – or deducing anticipatory assumptions – that ignore the ability for both agents and structures to converge and bring out a range of potential outcomes. Thus, these papers seek to break new ground and unpack new relations between insurgent groups and the tactics they use, the organisations they adapt and maintain, and the leaders they follow.

In brief, Paper I argues that routine and predictable violence helps explain why some insurgent groups can build public support while others fail. The paper frames violence – and the use of violence – as a form of communication. In chaotic conflict systems, characterized by disordered levels of violence towards civilians, predictable patterns or routines of harm can generate credibility and legitimacy for the authoring groups. These groups, by extension, stand higher likelihood of generating public support. Paper II asserts that insurgent organisations will vary in how they distribute authority internally. Further, this variation will reflect a need, on behalf of insurgent leaders, to balance their mission goals (what they seek to achieve) with their organisational goals (how they remain operational). As such, the paper suggests insurgent organisations decentralize authority in an effort either to increase their own security or to preserve their organisational integrity. In sum, this paper offers the first known theory of insurgent decentralization and explores how two mechanisms (external coercion and internal cohesion) interact to prompt decentralization at specific junctures.

Paper III works to "bring leaders in" to our growing literature on insurgent organisations and builds a novel typology of insurgent leadership styles. The paper asserts that differences in leadership styles have effects for how the individual in command shapes the organisations they build and the strategies or behaviours their group adopts. Generating – and subsequently developing – a set of critical leadership characteristics, this paper introduces three resulting leadership styles – crusader, strategist, and opportunist – and explores the expected or likely outcomes of contests between different group leaders. Together, these three works offer keen analytical insights aid and advance our academic knowledge.

Contributions to the field

Most directly, Paper I reframes how we understand and analyse patterns of insurgent violence. Contrary to much of the extant literature, I propose violence is a critical tool for generating public support and, more centrally, that violence is constitutive of political order itself. Leveraging the work of Mancur Olson, this paper counters dominant narratives by suggesting the predictability of violence is more important than either its extremity or restraint in shaping the social dynamics amid conflict. Insurgent groups, positioned as enemies of the status quo, have a particular advantage when the incumbent state's use of violence is extreme and disordered – where civilians are subject to the unpredictable and high risks of indiscriminate violence. Under these circumstances, insurgents capable of managing their own patterns of violence – and making those patterns legible – are comparatively more likely to gain credibility and ultimately public support. In short, Paper I shifts the center of analysis from instrumental to normative, seeing violence – and its predictable deployment – as generative of legitimacy and, with that legitimacy, the potential for public support.

My research findings, in part, help calibrate or strengthen a set of intuitions and hypotheses in the sub-field of rebel or insurgent governance. Most directly, understanding the legitimacy-generating implications of violence helps explain why groups build and hold allegiance in contested political spaces. By making violence predictable, and thus reducing the uncertainty for the non-combatant or civilian public, insurgent groups can produce public support. Recent work has established how the Taliban is able to retain governing capacity without formal territorial control (Jackson 2021) – the latter long considered a precondition for governance. Subsequent work on civilian perceptions of coalition airstrikes in Afghanistan also confirms that the perceived disorder of these indiscriminate violent campaigns diminishes public allegiance to the state and their coalition partners (Dill 2019). Taken together, these findings suggest that my intuition about the window of opportunity and the dutiful and predictable use of violence by insurgent in these vital moments, may help explain how insurgencies may divine a kind of spoiler's advantage amid chaotic conflict spaces. Similar insights have only recently been captured by emerging scholarship (Pischedda 2020). In this light, the predictable deployment of violence becomes a tool for social governance, challenging us rethink whether territorial control is truly a prerequisite for resultant forms of insurgent or rebel governance.

Further, my research on multi-party or crowded conflict systems may also help calibrate how we understand the legitimacy debate within the rebel governance literature. This literature often quietly adopts a normative assumption that political contest is primarily a pitched battle between a challenger and the status quo power, for which victory will be determined by the acquiescence from, or the support of, the non-combatant public. In crowded conflicts, however, public support is rarely binary, nor is it zero sum. For instance, in many polities, an individual's relationship to their government is merely assumed, not empirically observed. In short, there are many self-sustaining and self-sovereign communities who receive and thus expect little from their state political architecture. In these environments, support for government – a priori – cannot be

assumed. Moreover, when the contestants for political legitimacy are numerous, support may not be unidirectional. Further still, the practice of civilian support in striated social environments – where civilians vote along communal lines with local elites – suggests that public support is the result of brokerage among key local elites and a bricolage of public interests. By extension, generating public support becomes a function of placating, appeasing, or appealing some local elite to ensure their support – and thus carry the support of their constituents. In short, the complexity of the battle for public allegiance, compliance, or support looks more like chess, not checkers. Understanding how violence, as a form of communication, insinuates itself in this game is critical for further scholarship.

Finally, with respect to rebel governance, the case studies in this dissertation attest to a classic philosophical debate between the importance of justice versus security. The study of revolutionary political change has evolved, academically, from the idea that these processes were driven by material forces, to an understanding that it was "values that work[] like a switchman in history" (Kim 1991, 5) and, in the 1960s classic by Ted Gurr, that those values were understood to be conditioned by a set of social expectations and, notably, the "discrepancy between [people's] value expectations and their value capabilities" (Gurr 1968, 1104). In other words, revolution was the solution to social injustice. However, as scholarship on revolution and political reform adopted this wider, and partly Western, assumption about the critical role of equity and justice in addressing political grievances, leaving the debate over an individuals' preference for stability over justice unsettled. In part, the empirical realities studied in paper I attest to how we might reassess the temporal specifics of justice and stability as public goods. Justice may be normatively mobilizing in comparatively stable political contests where the major grievances can be attributed to a single actor, often the de facto state or incumbent authority. For conflict systems with multiple contenders – where multiple actors tend to increase the uncertainty for non-combatants – stability or predictability may be more attractive and generative of public support than notions of justice.

The consequence here, however, is that insurgent actors who seek to produce a violent but stable and predictable status quo may be preferable to those actors advocating for a more "just" but chaotic interregnum. This nuance is often overlooked in previous theoretical works on the nature and practice of rebel or insurgent governance.

The second paper's key contribution is in highlighting the process whereby insurgent organisations adapt and respond to changing conditions in their conflict environment. By highlighting the effects of increased coercion and decreased internal cohesion, the paper introduces a set of adaptative responses intended to increase the likelihood of group survival. So doing, it highlights an often-overlooked conceptual distinction between insurgent group success and survival – the former referring to strategies that increase a group's potential to defeat their central threat (often the state), whereas the latter refers to strategies adopted to stave off organisational collapse. My work suggests the careful targeting of violence against insurgent organisations, for instance, may prompt an insurgent leader to decentralize their authority. This decentralization, however, may make the organisation more resilient. In this way, the project connects the internal machinations of an insurgent group with a web of potential conflict consequences.

As I highlight in the dissertation's introduction, paper II wrestles with Staniland's formative work on insurgent organisational design and durability. But, highlighting how intra-organisational politics will inevitably change amid the context of conflict, my findings suggest two crucial updates must be made to advance extant scholarship. First, the findings of paper I suggest Staniland's decision to sideline violence as a key theoretical variable was dangerous. If violence is, itself, a tool for legitimation, and that violence is a function of strategic decision-making at the level of the group elites, and the use and advocacy of violence will differ according to how insurgent leaders will select their co-conspirators or cadres, then removing violence from the framework is a critical oversight. Second, however, by proposing the process of decentralization as another strategic

decision – calculated according to the dynamics external and internal to the group – scholars would benefit from incorporating existing work on coup-proofing – long a staple within the study of military structures, particularly in authoritarian regimes. This coup-proofing literature is particularly useful as it provides insights into how strategic decision-making by leaders – to preserve their power or avoid institutional collapse – generate wider consequences that influence the organisation's durability. To date, the most competent incorporation of this material illustrates how leadership decisions to preserve power in ethnically divided militaries can have the effect of prompting – or increasing the likelihood – of civil wars in the context of African states (Roessler 2016). If we consider insurgent organisations to be similar amalgams of varying constituencies – an assumption Staniland makes in highlighting the strength of a group's horizontal ties as critical for explaining their evolution or dissolution – then the insights and intuitions from the coup-proofing literature will aid subsequent scholars in assessing both the utility and the hazard of leadership strategies for addressing – and redressing – the distribution of authority within insurgent organisations.

Paper III in this collection proposed a typology of insurgent leadership that highlights how variation at the level of the individual influences the organisations these individual's lead. One of the innovations here is to suggest that leadership styles can help explore the potential outcomes of complex multiparty conflicts, highlighting when leaders are willing to take higher risks, respond to conflicting information, or otherwise adapt their violent organisations. By "bringing leaders back in" this typology offers a framework for scholars to conduct more nuanced and dynamic comparisons amid the complexity of intrastate war. Most directly, this renewed attention to and awareness of the influence of specific leaders may work to clarify the extant literature on risk-acceptant versus risk-averse leadership types. I do not mean to suggest that an individual's relationship to risk is unimportant, but that relying on this dichotomous distinction may obscure the differences between choice and circumstance. In other words, risk-acceptance is a leadership

characteristic that assumes an individual – tasked with taking a position or selecting an option – is fully informed about the relative risk of the presented options. Does a leader take a high-risk gamble because they are personally bold, or because they were unaware of how much risk such choices entail? Here we can see how different mechanisms may lead to a similar outcome. By failing to understand the process, however, we draw incorrect inferences about which qualities influenced the subsequent strategic decisions.

Similarly, my leadership typology is not limited to merely differentiating leaders with previous military experience from those without – a characteristics which some scholars argue informs both the leader's appetite for risk and their ability to retain group cohesion (Doctor 2020). Instead, my framework explores how leaders choose to surround themselves (with the loyal or the proficient) and how these factors may influence their propensity to take risks as a means of preserving authority. Thus, by focusing on leadership – and how those individuals balance the interests and tensions that arise internally – we can more accurately explore how these factors might influence the durability of insurgent organisations. This micro-level of analysis is additionally useful because it connects the undrawn lines between related scholarly dots, particularly those that seek to explain insurgent group splintering or fragmentation.

To take one example specifically, Doctor (2020) finds the likelihood of insurgent group fragmentation is influenced by how *confident* group elites are in the capacities of their leader – a function, he argues, of a leader's prior conflict experience. However, delving into the empirical detail in my cases, I find leaders judged or treated to be most competent, and those who lead organisations where fragmentation rarely occurs, tend to construct strong internal institutions, cultivate robust forms of personalist reverence, and invest in significant information gathering (external and internal) to gain the clearest map of the ideological, social, and military battlefields. My findings do not suggest that prior military experience is unimportant. In fact, it may be an

important precondition (and preparatory form of training) for the establishment of strong internal insurgent mores and codes. However, my scholarship helps complete the causal story that connects these important variables (prior experience) with the actual outcomes of interest (fragmentation), while also revealing – particularly in the Sri Lankan cases – how prior experience alone is not sufficiently determinative for explaining the diverse outcomes of groups led by actors whose origins and experiences are often comparable.

Most directly, my findings – particularly on crusader-style leaders – suggests some leaders are comparatively more risk-acceptant and stubborn in their pursuit of group goals than others. Not only would these dynamics explain how crusader types are more likely to start intrastate conflicts, but they may offer a more holistic explanation for why some leaders are more willing to prolong their conflicts amid increasing costs. My research does not contradict recent work, such as Prorok, but it does provide a more complete alternative explanatory mechanism that explains why her independent variable (war-starters) and her dependent variable (low probability of negotiation) are causally connected. In short, my research helps explain why insurgent leaders mobilise for war, and why some subset of those leaders might be content to keep the war going when the going gets tough.

My focus on leadership is an attempt to apply the literature on political entrepreneurs within the context of insurgency and intrastate conflict. My typology also improves on extant but largely descriptive investigations into the logic of insurgent leaders. Enterprising and detailed assessment by Romain Malejacq, to take one example, explores how the personal characteristics and skills of specific Afghan warlords are critical for explaining their ability to survive over time – particularly where assassination or elimination by rivals is common. Here, Malejacq frames warlords as a specific kind of political entrepreneurs – actors who serve as *the* crucial agent for change,

"exploit[ing] moments of instability" in ways that have "transformative effects on politics, policies, and institutions" (Sheingate 2003, 188-190).

In this sense, I share Malejacq's assertion that these actors, imbued with network strength and personal capacity, can exert outsized effects on their environments. However, his ethnographic and biographic sensibilities generate a descriptive, not typological, framework for explaining a warlord's consequential effects on the wider conflict. While Malejacq is concerned about how individuals survive – brokering business and ensuring security through iterative exchange among parties to a complex conflict – I am more interested in how systematic differences in leaders are associated with specific conflict dynamics. By focusing on the individual insurgent leaders specifically, my work can distinguish, and dissociate, the individuals – at least analytically – from the systems they help to shape through their actions. In other words, the specific predilections of *individual leaders* then shape the actions those leaders undertake – irrespective of their position at the helm of state or at the lead in a jungle convoy.

Finally, and importantly, this dissertation – or any other quest for understanding – appreciates how the pursuit of knowledge is accretive. This project is a timestamped attempt to unpack these challenging puzzles in my short years at Oxford. Subsequent scholars, however, may use these papers as opening gambits for critical investigations to engage and clarify concepts, to road-test typologies, and leverage new insights to expand the margins of our understanding of political insurgency. Part of my contribution consists of stripping away – or burrowing beneath – the commonplace usage of concepts, such as public support, to understand what features are interacting and how those interactions can shed light on the relationship between combatants and non-combatants amid civil war. Further, my interest in violence as a form of communication – as a tool of rebel statecraft – is an attempt to offset the normative imbalance that comes from relegating non-state actor's violence as epiphenomenal or as mere observable implication in the

study of other conflict dynamics. Here, I work to recenter violence – even non-state actor violence – as a tool constitutive of political order. In other words, if *legitimate* and *credible* state authorities use violence as a means of vouchsafing their positions of authority and level of public support, then violence should have a similar function for non-state actors, particularly given the spasms, uncertainty, and state-building capabilities of civil war.

Perhaps most importantly, we must grapple with an ongoing reassessment of how we conceive of and study legitimacy for actors amid conflict zones or post-conflict environments. Legitimacy, in these spaces, tends to suffer from both conceptual fuzziness and conceptual stretching. We must continue to grapple with the iterative and truly local consequences of legitimation strategies. As Klem and Maunaguru point out, legitimation strategies often harness local customs and cultural touchstones to generate a dialogue between past and present to make claims about who might rightfully be empowered in the future (Klem and Maunaguru 2017b). These legitimation strategies consist of more than merely the non-violent reforms through which an armed actor builds rapport or engenders affection. Many of these strategies involve the instrumentalization of violence, the reification of costly sacrifice, and the fusion of struggle with demands for justice. In short, the practices that generate legitimacy and credibility may not be synonymous with the political reforms that sit at the normative center of the "hearts and minds" narrative often deployed in our modern account of insurgency.

My intervention is to suggest more careful attention be paid to the ways violence – predictable, legible, or routine – serves as a vital ingredient in the recipe for political order. For example, Balcells, in line with Mampilly, argues that a population's previous experience with government – and governance – shapes both its expectations and demands for subsequent political authority (Balcells 2017; Mampilly 2011). There is good cause to believe these expectations also shape how the population will adjudicate actors' uses and patterns of violence. Understanding political change

requires building conceptual and theoretical models that remain sensitive to iteration and engagement between the actors of interest across time and space.

This demand for temporally sensitive theorizing is, in part, why this project devotes critical attention to the processes of insurgent group change. The focus on process is intended to counteract one of the downsides of our quantitative turn in social science: the time-freezing effects of data collection. While researchers and scholars have devoted careful attention to the rigorous construction of datasets, the polaroid-effect—capturing entities at single moments in time – fixes a group's material, ideological, and constitutive factors in a particular historical instance. Specifically relevant to paper II, this time-freezing effect likely generates what I call an origin bias in how we assess an insurgent group's structural characteristics. As insurgent groups are only recorded on the dataset when they have authored sufficient levels of violence, and because these thresholds are often passed early in their development, and because early-stage development in insurgent organisations (likely) occurs under high levels of centralization, our datasets will overrepresent the number of centralized insurgent organisations in our conflict dataverse. Not only does this distort our understanding of organisational variation – something paper II seeks to evaluate over time – but these datasets are of limited utility for exploring how subsequent variation in organisational structures might occur. Thus, to advance our understanding of organisational change we require more focused qualitative explorations of how non-state actors emerge, grow, and eventually scale to compete amid intrastate conflict.

Finally, as the ambition fueling this project was to break new theoretical ground in the study of insurgent leadership and organisational dynamics, I placed emphasis on tracing how the myriad mechanisms operate in these complex domains. One consequence of this focus is the reduced ability – at least in these pages – to thoroughly test the proposed theoretical arguments. The next phase of my own research will be to effectively explore – through the careful selection of negative

cases – how effective my proposed theoretical mechanisms are when applied more broadly. In other words, understanding how abortive or unsuccessful insurgent organisations emerge and fail to adapt will be critical for clarifying and fine-tuning the mechanisms captured in this dissertation.

Policy Recommendations

While scholarly findings should be assessed conservatively, the presented work does offer guidance for future practitioners in the security domain. For one, these papers have shown that violence has nuanced normative weight – for both the insurgent groups that fight and the incumbent opponents they battle. Nowhere are these implications more striking – and consequential – than when reviewed in light of dominant Western policy-debates over the appropriate use of force in counterinsurgency. In these domains, the policy and practitioner discourses tend to internalize a version of the "Hearts and Minds" narrative that embeds, implicitly, specific social and political logics. My research does not suggest understanding of social and political dynamics are unimportant, but that scholarship that excludes assessment of violence may generate dangerous 'lessons learned' and stimulate further adverse stability outcomes. To take one more contemporary example, the "hearts and minds" approach to counterinsurgency fails to account for the defeat of the LTTE in 2009. In this instance, the government did not sponsor political reforms to placate or cajole the pro-LTTE public to shift their preferences away from the insurgents: the Sri Lankan government demonstrated a wholesale re-investment in indiscriminate, preponderant, and overwhelming force, combined with a cordon-style geographic isolation of the group – a practice which cut off vital material supplies to the beleaguered LTTE forces. In other words, force without moderation – and extensive collateral damage in terms of civilian lives – enabled the government to defeat the insurgency.

Importantly, this account highlights how contextual our understanding of violence's utility must be. As paper I highlights, an insurgent group's management of violence is critical for building

credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the public – particularly if that public has been subjected to extortionate levels of indiscriminate violence by the government. If preponderant indiscriminate violence is necessary for the defeat of the insurgent threat, as it was with the LTTE's defeat in 2009, what conclusions can we draw? For one, counterinsurgent effectiveness – much like insurgent resilience – is strongly influenced by the specific window of opportunities that present amid conflict. For instance, the early stages of the Tamil insurgency, when Tamil groups were small and the visibility of the insurgents minimal, the Sri Lankan government's overwhelming use of violence – the chaos-inducing spasms of violence – had the effect of generating windows of opportunity for small Tamil groups to write their own conflict playbook. In this period, the LTTE's routine or predictable repertoire of violence became critical for building credibility and legitimacy amongst an awakening – and increasingly intimidated – Tamil civilian population. In these early stages of the conflict, the Sri Lankan could not direct preponderant coercion against the LTTE alone, thus lessening the utility of the state's use of violence. By 2009, with the LTTE suitable developed and now the sole-opponent of the Sri Lankan state – and constrained to a specific geographic footprint – the LTTE was particularly visible to COIN forces. The subsequent violent onslaught by Sri Lankan government forces was capable of materially overwhelming the group, generating considerable civilian death, and ultimately eliminating many, if not all, remaining LTTE fighters. This empirical evidence suggests that future strategists, practitioners, and policymakers must better understand when windows of opportunity emerge for strategic violence – and what advantages either insurgent or incumbent actors may extort in those moments. In other words, the Sri Lankan case highlights what Hazelton records in her recent book on COIN practices: the cost of defeating insurgencies is stark and normatively high, demanding necessary harm and damages to civilian populations within which insurgents operate. If states pick the wrong window to adopt such stark punishment strategies – as the Sri Lankan government did in the 1980s – the result is not insurgent defeat, but a protracted (and in this case, 40 year) insurgent contest.

Relatedly, my research on group adaptation – through decentralization – highlights the stark trade-off for government COIN interventions: while increased coercion may be the only (time-sensitive) approach to defeating an insurgency, this form of pressure is a trigger for organisational adaptation. If decentralizing, however, increases a group's change of survival, then these attrition-heavy COIN practices may make insurgent organisations more resilient and resistant over time. In other words, decentralization may limit a group's ability to hurt the state while increasing the group's longevity. Extant research seems to miss the longer-term vulnerabilities that decentralized insurgent groups may generate and exploit as marginal actors within the political environment. As my previous work indicates, decentralised or marginalised insurgent groups may remain comparatively inactive and poised for years before, seeing a moment of state weakness or social unrest, springing back into action. After all, even a marginal insurgent group may offer comparatively higher benefits and pay greater dividends for members and leaders than scholarship currently appreciates.

Opening the wider discussion about decentralization and its processes also highlights radical implications for how we understand insurgent adaptation during conflict. As paper II notes, decentralization – driven by coercion or waning cohesion – can generate a kind of centripetal force: a steady increase and processual inertia (what I call the 'ratchet effect') that may inhibit the process of recentralization by insurgent leaders in the future. To take the Boko Haram example, insurgent leaders eager to decentralize may create additional internal threats in the form of veto players. Thus, for some groups, decentralization may be a Faustian bargain making cohesion even harder to maintain amid the pressure to adapt. One consequence of this is the increased chance of fragmentation and the birth of splinter organisations. Existing scholarship finds that the duration of conflict tends to increase as the number of conflict actors increases. If these dynamics are correct, then logics behind the decision to decentralize – including aspects as unique or contingent as a leader's personal preferences – can produce stark consequences for future stability for the group, the duration of the conflict, and thus the stability of the state. One clear avenue for further

research is whether and how our understanding of coup-proofing strategies might apply to the politics of insurgent group leadership.

Taking leaders seriously remains necessary for practitioner looking to explain, or influence, group-level changes in the context of civil war. In the discussion of decentralization above, the decision to either purge or placate potential veto players within an organisation will undoubtedly be conditioned by the leader's preferences and strategy. As paper III makes clear, we are only just beginning to explore the implications of individual-level differences for macro-level conflict outcomes. As Paper III asserts that leadership style should be understood as the outcome of a matrix of individual characteristics, the resulting typology seeks a richer and more empirically informed foundation than the current approach, where labels like "zealot" or "extremist" unhelpfully fill our policy-making discourse.

Uniquely, given recent developments in international politics, a renewed focus on leadership is increasingly warranted. With Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, to Chinese President Xi Jinping's steady accumulation (and centralization) of political and military power, there has been a steady rise in the prevalence of personalist regimes. Personalist leaders tend to mimic tendencies highlighted by my own "crusader" typology – strongly controlled, loyalty-driven, information-poor executive arrangements where strategic decisions can be made unilaterally and without deliberation. Understanding how these leaders operate, how they are likely to err, and what strategies of contestation they might be most vulnerable to, will be critical for developing relevant and informed insights for the study of politics, and international relations, more generally.

In closing, the three papers herein have sought to preserve the dynamism the intrastate conflict by focusing on the causal chains, mechanisms, and processes that drive agent and structural changes. The complexity of mechanisms and inputs illustrated throughout my papers indicates a realism

regarding our need to understand insurgencies as complex social organisations who seek to adapt, survive, and – ideally, for them – succeed over time. My hope is that the insights and associated intuitions that flow from this dissertation serve as fodder for my own and other scholars' future engagement in the study of insurgency and intrastate conflict.

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