ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	WINTER SOLDIERS AND MOONLIGHT REBELS: INSURGENT DEVOTION IN CIVIL CONFLICT
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How do rebel groups cultivate devotion? Civil conflict scholars have found that when rebel groups fill their ranks with ideologically committed soldiers they are able to operate more effectively in several ways. However, the mechanisms by which rebel groups attain such devoted followers remains unexplained. I propose that insurgencies are able to cultivate devotion when they successfully deploy an ideology that balances between explanatory power and complexity. An ideology that manages to make sense of a political environment with minimal complexity provides adherents with certainty, which is a source of substantial utility. I articulate a theory of ideological potency and propose an associated function that expresses how much utility an individual will derive from that ideology via its certainty mechanism. I then analyze and compare the Provisional Irish Republican Army, the Viet Minh and Renamo insurgencies to demonstrate how variation in the extent to which they effectively balanced between explanatory power and complexity in their ideologies can explain variation in their capacity to attract, generate, control, and sustain devoted soldiers.

WINTER SOLDIERS AND MOONLIGHT REBELS: INSURGENT DEVOTION IN CIVIL CONFLICT

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the winter of 1776 - the darkest days of the American revolution - Thomas Paine wrote; "these are the times that try men's souls." The aspirant nation faced a terrible crisis. Strategic and material conditions were rapidly deteriorating and the colonial army lacked the funds to buy loyalty or the might to extract it by force. Paine knew that their only hope was genuine devotion to the rebel cause. "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot" he proclaimed "will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."

He hoped with these words to galvanize the soldiers whose devotion was more than fleeting - whose commitment to the principles of the revolution would allow them to endure. In the end, there were enough winter soldiers in the colonial ranks to keep the ragged army together. Why were the early American leaders able to attract and sustain such devoted fighters? Why did these soldiers choose to make such extraordinary sacrifices on behalf of those leaders? Many books have been written to answer this question for America's insurgent

birth, but relatively little work has been done to answer the same question for the countless modern insurgencies that hope to follow in its footsteps.

Lawrence McKeown was one of these winter soldiers when he fought against the British government on behalf of the Provisional Irish Republic Army (PIRA). Perhaps more than anyone I have known, Laurence is a man who has demonstrated his capacity for conviction. In 1981, he starved himself for 70 days on the H-blocks of Long Kesh Prison in Belfast and lived to tell the tale. He would, by his own account, have willingly died of starvation had his family not authorized medical intervention. When a person is convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are right, they are capable of the most miraculous and most monstrous things.

McKeown was willing to endure this unimaginable suffering because the British government had revoked the special political status of members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and were instead treating Laurence and his fellow volunteers as criminals. For him, and many others like him, the criminilization of republican prisoners was tantamount to the criminilization of centuries of resistance against British occupation. There was not a shred of doubt in his mind that his sacrifice was worth it. Certain as he was of the justness of the republican cause, Laurence was capable of great things.

Laurence is nearly 70, but he is energetic and seems like a much younger man. When I initially declined his offer to buy me a Guinness, he gave me a look with just enough of a whiff of judgement to convince me to change my mind. He is razor sharp but does not take himself too seriously, and he is clearly well-liked at his local bar. None of this is particularly

remarkable, except in its normality. Based on what I'd read about him and the ubiquity with which his contemporaries insisted that I meet with him, I had expected something altogether superhuman.

He was, instead, ordinary; an unusually gripping and charismatic person, to be sure, but otherwise quite human. The interview Laurence was kind enough to give me provided valuable data for the validation of the theory that will serve as the centerpiece of this dissertation. But it was his profound normality that stayed with me most. Laurence serves as the perfect crystallization of a fact that has bothered me for the better part of my adult life: we cannot explain extraordinary behavior - whether for good or ill - through recourse to dehumanization or deification. There is nothing in Laurence that made him capable of his remarkable sacrifice that does not also exist in each of us.

I do not believe we sufficiently understand why and under what conditions people will choose to forego their personal safety, comfort, and enrichment on behalf of a cause. I certainly do not understand it well enough for my own liking. I see too much in myself that would shrink from the kind of sacrifices that hundreds of Irish republicans and countless millions of others have made on behalf of something larger than themselves. But because Laurence is not superhuman, I know that I too am capable of those things under the right circumstances.

But what are the right circumstances? If there is not some inhuman quality to individuals who are willing to sacrifice on behalf of a cause, then one must wonder what explains the evident variation in that willingness across time and place. This question lies at the heart

of politics. Political organizations of every kind depend on individuals who make the choice to sacrifice some combination of time, money, scruples, or security for the movement. This is particularly true in war, when the stakes are highest and the potential consequences to participation include a painful death - or worse.

Rebel groups in civil conflict, such at the PIRA, have the unenviable task of overcoming this commitment dilemma under some of least permissive conflict dynamics: that is, they have to convince people to kill and risk death against an incumbent state that usually out-guns, out-mans, and out-legitimizes the insurgent organization. Prospective rebel soldiers must therefore make the choice to forego their more parochial interests for organizations that typically have the odds stacked against them.

To explain why some groups are more capable of inducing this choice than others, it is necessary to improve our understanding of ideology. When soldiers choose to put a cause over their own personal interests, they often (although not exclusively) do so in the name of an ideology. That ideology can take a theoretically infinite variety of forms - be it communism or nationalism or religion or ethnicity or any other set of ideas - but in each case the soldier is choosing to believe something about the world that subsumes their pecuniary goals.

Some groups are able to wield ideology such that their followers prioritize the political project of the organization while other cannot. In order to understand why, we must unpack ideology and examine its structural characteristics. This dissertation seeks to address a critical gap in the current literature on ideology and civil conflict by articulating a theory of ideology. Specifically, it seeks to explain what structural features produce a psychologically

potent ideology. In turn, it provides critical insight into how rebel groups cultivate devotion.

In brief, I argue an ideology is most effective at generating devoted soldiers when it balances between the competing needs to explain and simplify a political environment. Ideologies are, at base, a navigational tool. They solve an intrinsic complexity problem by imposing artificial order on the world. This "order" permits expedient decision-making and provides emotional stability in the face of otherwise overwhelming complexity. As such, ideologies have to achieve two basic goals: they have to explain enough of the world to be useful navigational tools while simultaneously simplifying reality to a manageable resolution.

These two goals are in tension with one another: all else equal, explaining the world more comprehensively requires more complexity. Ideologies are maximally potent when they balance explanation and simplicity. The more effectively an ideology balances explanation and simplicity, the more effective it is as a navigational tool and the more it provides emotional stability. The best-balanced ideologies therefore generate severe levels of emotional dependence and induce a commensurate willingness to make sacrifices on its behalf.

The optimal balance of these features is a function of contextual dynamics that determine how averse an individual is to complexity. Some individuals will pay a very high premium in explanation in order to avoid complexity, while others will tolerate more complexity in order to more comprehensively explain an environment. While the level of complexity aversion varies by individual, it is also subject to systemic environmental features that change the baseline level of aversion across a population. This in turn shifts the optimal ideological balance for insurgent organizations. In the following pages, I articulate and validate this

theory of ideology.

The dissertation proceeds as follows: in chapter 1, I discuss the extant literature on ideology and devotion in civil conflict. I argue that, while ideology features heavily in studies of civil conflict and there is compelling evidence to suggest that ideology is a key determinant of conflict outcomes, ideology itself is often treated like a black box - taken for granted or as exogenous to the conflict. I advance a theory of ideology to address this gap in our understanding and formalize the theory in an ideological utility function.

In chapter 2 and 3, I use original interviews with more than 25 former members of the PIRA - along with many other historical sources - to demonstrate how the Provisional Irish Republican Army deployed a well-balanced ideology and therefore successfully cultivated devotion. In Chapter 2, I explain how the PIRA out-competed its predecessor organization, the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA), to become the de facto representative of the republican movement in Northern Ireland. I argue that they achieved this feat in a matter of a few short years in large part because they deployed an ideology that was simultaneously simpler and a better fit for the environment of Northern Ireland in the late 1960s.

In Chapter 3, I explore how the PIRA adjusted the balance of their ideology in the early 1980's to meet a changing world and prepare their soldier for a sustained conflict. In essence, they tolerated the injection of additional complexity in order to expand the aperture of their explanatory power and maintain the fit of their ideology in a rapidly changing environment. This transformation was not executed flawlessly: it created a schism in the organization that led to the disaffection of some portion of their support base.

However, it achieved the critical effect of preserving the balance of the ideology for a wider cohort of supporters while permitting the PIRA to move into the realm of non-violent politics. Critically, this transition demonstrates that the specific content of an ideology can be less important than the extent to which its component features produce *balance* between the competing needs of explanation and simplification. I augment this analysis with an exploration of the Viet Minh and Renamo insurgencies to corroborate the conclusions of the Northern Irish case and to provide evidence of the external validity of the theory. The Viet Minh successfully deployed a potent ideology and therefore exhibited high levels of devotion in its soldiery, while Renamo failed to capitalize on what might have been a well-balanced ideology and therefore suffered from symptoms of low devotion throughout its campaign.

I have selected these cases for examination and comparison because they satisfy several important conditions. First, they represent Diverse, Extreme, and Crucial cases.[1] That is: they manifest important variation along both the independent and dependent variable; they represent extreme variants of their respective types (highly effective ideological deployment vs. highly ineffective ideological deployment); and they are crucial in the sense that, if the theory cannot explain their respective successes and failures, it is not valid. In addition, these cases each have sufficient primary evidence to support the underlying psychological mechanisms at play (albeit imperfectly) and each featured a prominent and readily identifiable ideology at the center of the conflict. They therefore present an opportunity to examine whether and how rebel groups within these conflicts are able to leverage ideology to cultivate

[1] Gerring, 2009.

devotion.

The PIRA, the Viet Minh, and Renamo are not the only organizations that fit these conditions, but they have idiosyncratic features that make them particularly appealing as analytical subjects. In the case of the PIRA, a well-studied and profound shift in the ideological and organizational composition of the organization mid-way through the conflict permits direct comparison of two differently balanced ideologies that nevertheless managed to operate effectively in environments that differed only by time. Renamo, because of its peculiar inception and maintenance at the behest of foreign powers, is one of the few protracted and well-studied rebel groups that did relatively little to advance a cogent ideology. It therefore provides an opportunity to examine how a poorly balanced ideology hinders the cultivation of devotion. And the Viet Minh (and its direct successor, the Viet Cong) was arguably the most successful insurgency of the 20th century. If my theory cannot explain their success, it has critical flaws.

I am not the first to argue that ideology was a relevant factor in these or other civil conflicts. Ideology is, of course, a well-studied feature of war and politics. Scholars have posited a wide variety of mechanisms by which ideology exerts its influence on a conflict, including by instilling a sense of self-efficacy,[2] strengthening social bonds,[3] and linking a cause to particularly resonant emotional narratives.[4] Each of these theories has validity and I do not intend to set my thinking against any of them. Rather, this theory contributes to the literature on ideology in civil conflict in two critical ways.

[2]Wood, 2003.
[3]Hoover Green, 2018; Staniland, 2014.
[4]M. B. Petersen, 2015.

First and most importantly, I argue that it is necessary to understand ideology as an interaction between the explanatory power it provides and the complexity it must employ to provide that explanatory power. I explicitly introduce simplicity as a feature of ideology and conceptualize it as a structural characteristic with which other features interact and compete. Ideologies do strengthen social ties and they do connect political movements to resonant emotional frames and operate in many other ways, but the extent to which they are capable of doing these things is contingent upon the complexity of the argument. As with theories of science, the simplest explanation tends to win, all else equal. The task of rebel groups is to *balance* between explanatory power and simplicity to provide the most holistically powerful ideology. It is this balance (or lack thereof) and an attendant presence (or absence) of devotion that I explore in the comparative analysis below.

Second, I demonstrate that it is crucial to look beyond the doctrinal features of an ideology when examining its role in civil conflict. It is essential to explore how the content of a revolutionary frame interacts with insurgent organizational structure, communication tactics, and the broader conflict environment to determine the extent to which rebel ideologies satisfy their core navigational function for individual soldiers. As we will see, Renamo espoused an ideology that could have, on paper, served as the basis for a functional map. However, their failure to deploy it in a manner that maximized its psychological utility prevented them from successfully cultivating devotion. As the case of the PIRA demonstrates, the psychological environment changed over the course of the conflict such that a maximally simple ideology was appropriate a the outset but eventually required re-calibration towards

greater complexity as the need for simplicity abated.

Critically, this theory is generalizable to any political organization that hopes to manipulate common preferences to attain a devoted following. There is no reason to suspect that the preferences I articulate are specific to insurgents or soldiers. The task going forward will be to explore how variation in culture, history, geography, and politics mediates the intensity of these preferences and to examine how different kinds of organizations pursue strategies that are fitted to their specific time, place, and purpose.

Chapter 2

A Theory of Ideology in Civil Conflict

Ricky O'Rawe joined the Provisional Irish Republican Army in 1971. He was born in West Belfast, a bastion of Irish Republicanism, in a community saturated by violence; Protestant mobs burned Catholic families out of their homes and murdered them in the streets. British soldiers patrolled Catholic neighborhoods ostensibly to keep the peace, but in Ricky's mind (and the minds of many others in his neighborhood), the soldiers were really only there to protect British sympathizers and further oppress the Irish. Catholics were treated as second class citizens in their own towns, denied equal access to good paying jobs and to most forms of legitimate political expression.

Amidst this injustice, a new branch of the mythological Irish Republican Army had emerged from the ossified remnants of its predecessor and had at last begun to do the one thing that Ricky and countless others of his generation wanted more than anything: take the fight to the Brits. When he determined at the age of 17 that he would do whatever it took to protect his community, there was not a shred of doubt in his mind that the "Provos"

(as the PIRA was known colloquially) were the people most likely to succeed in driving the British out of Ireland.

Ricky would have done essentially anything for the IRA. When his superiors elected to shoot him in the leg for committing a robbery without the approval of the organization, he did not merely accept the punishment: he believed then and believes today that it was a necessary and justified response. During his time at Long Kesh prison, he spent three and a half years on the "blanket protest", refusing to wear clothes or otherwise participate in any way with the attempted criminalization of the republican movement. When IRA leadership ordered him to commit the robbery that would eventually send him to Long Kesh, there was never any doubt in his mind that he would follow the order essentially without question.

In his book *Blanketmen: An Untold Story of the H-Block Hunger Strikes*, Ricky recalls the apparent misgivings of the other IRA volunteer who was to commit the robbery with him. "Dollhead", as he was known, was certain that they were going to be caught. "Mark these words, Rick: if we rob this bank, we'll not be back [home] for a long time - if we come back at all."[1] Despite his certainty that the mission was doomed, Dollhead showed up at the top of Whiterock Road as agreed upon on the day of the robbery. Ricky was not suprised. "[Dollhead] was always going to do this operation" because "his sense of duty to the IRA would allow for nothing else."[2]

During one of our discussions, I asked Ricky what the IRA had done to deserve such unwavering loyalty from Dollhead and others like him. The question brought him up short.

[1] O'Rawe, 2016, p. 11.
[2] O'Rawe, 2016, p. 14.

He paused to consider it for a moment, and then said "ya know, that's actually a very good question."[3] In answer to my question, he eventually concluded that the PIRA was simply the place you went if you wanted to fight the British. As he himself put it, "being in the IRA was almost the objective rather than the means."[4] In his mind at the time, the PIRA was synonymous with the genuine republican struggle. He struggled, however, to explain how the organization had become so fused with the cause. He understood, of course, why republicanism as a movement would command loyalty, but he had not explicitly considered why the PIRA *as an organization* should have been the recipient of that republican fervor.

He is not alone in this uncertainty. Most of the former fighters I interviewed for this project spoke about the PIRA, at least in retrospect, as being the only legitimate representative of republicanism. When they committed themselves to the cause, they therefore also had to commit themselves to the PIRA. Just like Ricky, most of them could not explain in explicit terms how the PIRA came to assume this position of unique association with the broader rebel movement. This gap in knowledge extends to the academic literature on civil conflict which, while recognizing the importance of ideology, often treats it as "black box" or an exogenous feature of the conflict.

This chapter lays out a theory of ideology in civil conflict that seeks to address the critical gap in our understanding. I believe that the PIRA was able to attract and maintain such devoted soldiers because it was able to provide them certainty in a chaotic and frustrating environment. It articulated, communicated, and manifested a vision of the world that man-

[3]O'Rawe, Ricky. Interview conducted by Michael Cowan on January 19, 2022
[4]O'Rawe, 2016, p. 13.

aged to explain the conflict in Northern Ireland - at least in the minds of a sufficiently large proportion of the population - with very little complexity. The PIRA made their followers feel as they though understood their world and provided a clear set of principles upon which to condition behavior.

Insurgent organizations are able to cultivate devotion when they deploy an ideology which successfully balances between the competing needs to explain and simplify a political environment. Ideologies that strike this balance are so desirable because they offer certainty. Certainty in turn provides emotional stability. A sufficiently powerful ideology produces a degenerative effect whereby an individual becomes increasingly dependent upon the ideology to feel as though they understand their world, and therefore dependant upon it to feel stable. In this state, individuals are most likely to incorporate the political goals of the rebel movement into their utility calculations and therefore to make sacrifices on behalf of that movement.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows: first, I explore the literature on ideology in civil conflict to demonstrate that 1) ideology is a core feature of conflict outcomes and 2) current theorizing on the subject does not explain the underlying causal mechanisms driving variation in the capacity of rebel groups to wield ideology to cultivate devotion. Second, I specify the axioms of my theory and the causal propositions that emerge from those axioms. Third, I fully articulate a theory of ideology in civil conflict and propose a utility function for ideology that will help scholars understand why some groups or more capable than others of deploying belief in such a way as to attract and maintain devoted

fighters. Finally, I discuss the observable implications of the theory and advance a research methodology for validating its core mechanisms.

2.1. Current Literature on Ideology in Civil Conflict

Below, I provide a brief synthesis on the relevant literature to locate my theory and model in the political science scholarship. I will argue that: 1) the literature on traditional (i.e. state) military cohesion identifies the cohesion of the primary group as a key element of broader military cohesion; 2) the literature on insurgent cohesion and defection reveals key unexplained variance in the capacity of organizations to induce costly behavior on the part of individual soldiers and; 3) the literature on social movements and insurgent mobilization suggests the important of framing in explaining that variance. This latter point will inform the theory I employ to answer my core research question and the attendant agent-based model I discuss here.

2.1.1. ***Cohesion in Traditional Militaries***

To begin, I will provide a brief overview of the literature concerning cohesion in traditional (i.e. state) militaries. MacCoun (2006) identifies two different types of cohesion. He defines the first, social cohesion, as "the nature and quality of the emotional bonds of friendship, liking, caring, and closeness among group members." He defines the other, task cohesion, as "the shared commitment among members to achieving a goal that requires the collective efforts of the group.[5]" MacCoun emphasizes the importance of task-based cohesion given the regimented nature of military life. However, I believe both dimensions of cohesion here matter for insurgent military outcomes. Parkinson (2021), for instance, presents compelling

[5]MacCoun et al., 2006.

evidence of the centrality of these emotional bonds in the generation of cohesion.

Siebold (2006) provides a useful overview of the "standard" model of military cohesion, which consists of peer (horizontal), leader (vertical), organizational, and institutional bonding. The peer and leader dimensions constitute "primary" group cohesion, while the organizational and institutional dimensions constitute "secondary" group cohesion. Each of these dimensions has both an "affective" and "instrumental" component, the former of which concerns emotional and psychological attachment to the military while the latter concerns the likelihood of such affective connections converting into behavior.

Military cohesion occurs when all four dimensions conspire to "bond" soldiers to the unit." Siebold defines bonding as "the social relationship, both affective and instrumental . . . between service members and their group, organization, and service institution.[6]" Siebold argues that "the locus of bonding is in the relationship, not in the actions or interactions between the service member and the group, organization, or institution." These bonds are formed and augmented by "internal and external factors of social control (e.g. law, regulation, doctrine, norms, habits, and socialization) that stabilize relationship patterns and provide a sense outside and above a person that there is something more than just a collection of individuals.[7]" The goal of this dissertation is in part to elucidate the mechanisms by which these "external factors of social control" - and the ideological factor in particular - operate to create that "sense outside and above" insurgent soldiers.

Shils and Janowitz (1948) provide further insight into the interpersonal mechanisms of

[6]Siebold, 2007.
[7]Siebold, 2007.

cohesion in their seminal analysis of military cohesion in the Wehrmacht during World War II. The authors attempt to explain the remarkable degree of unit cohesion and fighting effectiveness the Wehrmacht displayed "through a series of almost unbroken retreats over a period of several years" and despite its numerical and strategic inferiority.[8] Shils and Janowitz argue that German soldiers remained loyal in times of intense duress when their primary groups remained cohesive and therefore satisfied the basic "organic needs" of the troops (i.e. their need for esteem, affection, comradery, and purpose). The primary group resisted disintegration when it was able to foster a "hard core" of intensely patriotic and fervently militaristic officers and enlisted men, around whom the rest of the unit could cohere[9].

While Shils and Janowitz find that "secondary symbols" (i.e. explicitly political motivations, ethical or religious scruples, and patriotism) played a relatively small role in the majority of German soldiery, they were of profound significance to the hard core. Moreover, a personal and widespread devotion to Adolph Hitler "was maintained in the German Army throughout the war" and "was an important factor in prolonging German resistance.[10]" In brief, the Wehrmacht soldiers were loyal because their primary group serviced essential psychological needs. The primary group in turn was able to provide these needs because it was resilient to disintegration due to a highly politicized, indoctrinated hard core of soldiers, imbued with a zealous certitude and fierce devotion to Hitler.

Wessely (2006) argues that this framework remains the predominant theory of military

[8]Shils and Janowitz, 1948.
[9]Shils and Janowitz, 1948, p. 55.
[10]Shils and Janowitz, 1948, p. 55.

cohesion in contemporary literature. Men fight, he says in summary, "not because of ideology, but because of their membership [in] the tight-knit, self-sustaining and self-supporting unit whose creation is the principal ambition of infantry training.[11]" By contrast, men cease to fight "when the primary group disintegrates or fails them and they are freed from their their group obligations of service and sacrifice." Much of the literature on military cohesion is concerned with how best to strengthen the primary group and which forms of cohesion emerge from such strengthening.

2.1.2. ***Belief and the Rebel's Dilemma***

The hard core's influence is made more critical by the intrinsically challenging insurgent collective action problem. Lichbach (1995) summarizes the dilemma nicely: the probability of successful revolution is low, the contribution of any individual revolutionary is quite small, the benefits of revolution are diffuse, and the costs are highly concentrated.[12] Individual soldiers face powerful personal incentives for non-cooperation and are uncertain about the commitment of other soldiers. This uncertainty compounds the cooperation dilemma because soldiers "fear their compatriots will let them down because they will not endure fighting."[13] Lack of certainty and trust in a unit degrades cohesion.

Insurgencies have several options for overcoming the rebel's dilemma. They can, of course, pay for loyalty or simply coerce people into fighting for them, but these are sub-optimal and often prohibitively expensive strategies. The literature finds clearly that ideological

[11] Wessely, 2006.
[12] Olson, 2003; Lichbach, 1998, p. 6.
[13] McLauchlin, 2020, p. 16.

devotion is a particularly effective and low-cost cooperation mechanism. This is true both for recruitment and retention processes, and for the capacity to control soldiers in the field.

2.1.3. ***Recruitment and Defection***

The literature on defection during civil conflict, from both state and rebel militaries, also provides important framing for my theory. Kalyvas (2008) provides one of the earlier examinations of insurgent defection, arguing that incumbent territorial and resource control can induce ethnic defection by demonstrating superiority but that revenge can also be a "particularly strong incentive."[14] He emphasizes the endogenous nature of defection in civil war and that preferences alter over the course of conflict. This is a common theme in the ensuing literature.

Jentzsch et al (2015) explain desertion and side-switching as a function of the initial motivation of the soldier in question, the behavior of the insurgent group, and the experience of warfare. Insurgents who joined for ideological reasons are less likely to demobilize or side-switch than those who joined for other reasons (primarily material) and this effect is mediated by the behavior of insurgent groups and the experience of conflict.[15] The authors find that ideological motivation is better at negatively predicting side-switching than demobilization, but also find that when ideologically driven soldiers witness their organization committing atrocities in contravention of their stated ideological mission, the likelihood of side-switching and demobilization hugely increase.[16] They find that ideologically motivated soldiers are less

[14]Kalyvas, 2008, p. 1063.
[15]Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 810.
[16]Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 811.

likely to side-switch when warfare becomes intense and costly and that indoctrination can impart these effects on otherwise non-ideological soldiers.[17]

McLauchlin (2014, 2015, 2019, 2020) has written extensively on insurgent defection. In his 2020 book on the subject, he argues that "a crucial way to keep soldiers fighting is through a norm of cooperation in a military unit, a social rule saying that each will fight if others do."[18] He conceptualizes defection essentially as a cooperation failure, and, as with so much of the cooperation literature, he centralizes trust as a key component of overcoming cooperative dilemmas. Trust in turn is predicated on access to reliable information about the intent and behavior of other members in a group with whom you do not share close pre-existing bonds.

Soldiers overcome interpersonal information deficits about extent of commitment by acting in ways that impose costs on themselves, thereby credibly signaling intent. Soldiers can signal their genuine commitment to the cause by: 1) participating in pre-war networks dedicated to the insurgent movement; 2) volunteering of their own free will and submitting to discipline without conscription; 3) enduring grueling training processes and; 4) participating in early combat.[19] McLauchlin also points to social ties, stereotypes (e.g. "ethnicity X is loyal because it's in our blood"), and factionalism, but argues that these forces less effectively convey information about commitment than costly action signals.[20] Their effect, furthermore, is conditional on the willingness of soldiery to perform costly signaling.

[17]Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 811.
[18]McLauchlin, 2020, p. 16.
[19]McLauchlin, 2020, p. 29.
[20]McLauchlin, 2020, p. 30.

McLauchlin's work is at the cutting edge of the defection literature, but I believe there is an unanswered question at the core of his theory that I hope my work can help address: namely, how do organizations successfully convince individual soldiers to take the actions that impose personal cost and thereby send credible signals of intent? Why, in other words, do soldiers make the costly signals in the first place, and how do they choose which organizations to make them for?

Where McLauchlin's theory rests on principles of cooperation at the group level, I believe it is necessary to generate a theory of individual motivation to explain variation in the initial impetus to perform costly actions on behalf of an insurgent organization. It is possible, for instance, that the role of ideology identified by Oppenheim et al influences the willingness of soldiers to perform costly signaling, but without a cogent theory of individual motivation we will not be able to say why this would be the case or what other forces we might expect to have the same effect.

Koehler et al (2016) similarly adopt a cooperative framework and centralize information deficits in their understanding of defection, although they focus on defection from the Syrian military to rebel groups. The authors found that strong social ties with family, friends, and community provided potential defectors with information that was critical to catalyze grievances into action and to overcome trust barriers with receptor rebel groups after defection.[21] Where social networks encouraged desertion, disaffection could convert into defection. Kier (1998) similarly finds that social networks could readily produce defection

[21]Koehler et al., 2016, p. 453.

in the Confederate Army during the US Civil War.[22]

Albrecht and Ohl (2016) examine patterns of loyalty, insubordination, and defection in the context of three Arab Spring uprisings. They employ a principle-agent model to examine how vertical and horizontal structures of the respective militaries did or did not engender loyalty and cohesion. They find that "under authoritarian regimes, it is not organizational features per-se that guarantee loyalty, but rather the nature and quality of principle-agent relations mediated through communal ties in the military hierarchy."[23] We see again the essential significance of the primary group in understanding cohesion and loyalty, but Albrecht and Ohl (as with most of their peers) do not directly address how insurgencies achieve cohesion and loyalty at that level of analysis.

2.1.4. ***Insurgent Mobilization and Control***

Finally, there exists a sizable literature that deals explicitly with mobilization and control of insurgent organizations. Findings in this body of work deal generally with how insurgent organizations convince soldiers and other membership to behave in a way that is maximally advantageous to the group. While this literature does not directly address unit cohesion, it has important lessons for addressing variance in the willingness of soldiers to engage in costly signalling behavior. I will begin with frame theory, which plays a prominent role in this literature. Benford and Snow (2000) provide a useful overview of frame theory in the study of social movements. They argue that "framing" is the"signifying work or meaning

[22]Kier, 1998.
[23]Albrecht and Ohl, 2016, p. 49.

construction" in which elite agents engage as a means of defining reality for constituent groups whom they hope to mobilize and control.[24] Framing is active (in that it is done consciously by manipulative actors), it is procedural (in the sense that it is a dynamic and evolving process), and it is contentious (in that proposed frames may differ from and challenge extant frames).[25]

Shesterinina (2016) applies this framing approach to civil conflict explicitly, arguing that mobilization decisions in the Georgian-Abkhaz war were a function of collective threat framing organized by actors across social structures. Potential combatants relied on "the familiar social structures of family, friendship, local relation, and national authority for essential information on how to . . . act in response" to threats articulated by the framing process.[26] These frames allowed individuals to overcome the "mass confusion surrounding the first days of war."[27] Frames "fill in the content of *what* the interests of a collectivity are and *how* to act in support of these interests."[28]

Schmidt (2020) also uses framing theory to study rebel group cohesion in Colombia. Schmidt focuses on the contentious nature of frames, arguing that revolutionary groups and narco-terrorist organizations competed with one another to define for the target population "what it means to wage revolution" and that the FARC's revolutionary frame had greater "resonance" and therefore was more effective at providing command and control[29]. Leaders,

[24]Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614.
[25]Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614.
[26]Shesterinina, 2016, p. 411.
[27]Shesterinina, 2016, p. 411.
[28]Shesterinina, 2016, p. 417.
[29]R. Schmidt, n.d., p. 13.

according to Schmidt, must "'sell' ideas to their members" so that their frame can come to predominate the popular imagination and thereby move the population in a direction advantageous for those leaders.

Gould (1995) uses frame theory to examine rebel movements in revolutionary France. He argues that framing played an essential role in the delineation of battle lines and rebel mobilization in both the 1848 and 1871 revolutions, but that the nature of the frame shifted between the two conflicts. Where class provided the dominant frame in 1848, housing and urban development policy in the intervening years shifted the dominant frame to one of community and neighborhood solidarity. Organizations that successfully tapped into that new frame were more able to mobilize and control soldiers.

Costalli and Ruggeri (2015) argue that framing of certain ideologies are particularly effective at mobilizing and securing support during civil war. In their study of Italian resistance World War Two, they find that "political entrepreneurs . . . use ideational resources to build collective action frames" and that these frames are a critical mechanism for "translating private grievances into public grievances and providing individuals with specific group identities as well as specific ways to transform the current state of affairs."[30] They also find that frames which centralize indignation and a radical approach to politics are particularly effective mechanisms for mobilization and control.[31] Petersen (2002) similarly finds that resentment is a uniquely powerful motivating emotion in the generation of ethnic violence.[32]

Green (2018) does not explicitly reference frame theory but explores similar dynamics in

[30]Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015, p. 120.
[31]Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015, p. 120.
[32]R. D. Petersen, 2002.

her examination of the determinants of insurgent control over violence. She studies insurgent organizations in Sierra Leone, El Salvador, and Liberia, concluding that rebel groups can best control patterns of violence when they make "adherence to group norms 'desirable per se.'"[33] The most successful organizations internalize the group's goals in the minds of their soldiery, a condition that Green describes as "the theoretical endpoint of armed group socialization" and a "near-synonym for preference change or predisposition change."[34]

Commanders achieve this endpoint of socialization through intentional indoctrination practices during recruitment, military training, political education, and disciplinary processes. She focuses particularly on political education, arguing that when organizations institute an ethos of restrained violence, they can produce restrained soldiers. Green therefore proposes that the durability and nature of horizontal ties are manipulable during the course of conflict with the right indoctrination procedures. She does not, however, propose an individual-level theory by which we can make sense of which types of indoctrination strategies are likely to be most successful and the underlying mechanisms driving the attendant unification of incentives. Further, Green notes that significant intra-movement variation exists in the capacity to achieve socialization. This variation remains unexplained.

In these and other works which employ frame theory, we see that political organizations compete with one another to successfully define the emotional and ideological dimensions of a conflict such that they can more effectively control the flow of battle. We also see that successful framing in this manner has powerful motivational consequences on the part of

[33]Hoover Green, 2018, p. 39.
[34]Hoover Green, 2018, p. 39.

those that ultimately subscribe to the frame. The proper frame can induce participation in some of the most egregious behavior in a civil conflict and can apparently provide impetus to endure great risk and personal sacrifice on behalf of a revolutionary movement. Frame theory, I assert, provides an avenue through which to explore why individual soldiers choose to engage in costly behaviors on behalf of an insurgent organization. I will discuss this in more detail in the theory section. Critically, frame theorists conceptualize a contentious and competitive process over the setting of these frames. The dynamics of this competitive process remain unexplored.

2.1.5. ***Literature Summary***

This review of relevant literature suggests an important gap in understanding. We see that rebel loyalty is a function, at least in prominent part, of the coherence of the primary group. We see in turn that the coherence of this group is dependent on the strength of horizontal social ties and the uniformity of norms and preferences. Soldiers with strong social ties and common attitudes are more likely to make the kinds of costly signals that are a necessary precondition for trust, comradery, and the further strengthening of social bonds - but these costly signals are not necessarily geared towards goals of the organization unless conditions exist to orient the social ties towards a specific political project. Conscious and contentious framing processes are clearly integral to these social ties. We do not understand, however, variation in the capacity of organizations to achieve these framing effects. This is in part because we do not yet understand the individual-level tendencies and preferences that organizations capitalize on to bend soldiers to their way of seeing the world. And we

do not yet understand common features of ideology that distinguish a potent one from their less powerful alternatives.

2.2. A Theory of Degenerative Ideology in Civil Conflict

These studies collectively find that soldiers will fight harder, longer, more effectively, and for less pay if they believe in the cause. The most effective insurgencies generate a hard core of ideologically committed soldiers. These soldiers in turn help produce cohesive fighting units that are simultaneously bound to a broader political project.

However, we do not understand what differentiates a group that is capable of harnessing a powerful ideology from one that cannot - or, indeed, what truly differentiates a potent ideology from its anemic counterparts. I theorize that rebel groups are best able to cultivate devotion when they deploy an ideology that uses minimal complexity to sufficiently explain an environment. According to Sanin and Wood (2014), ideology is a "set of . . . systematic ideas that identify a constituency, the challenge the group confronts, the objectives to pursue on behalf of that group, and a (perhaps vague) program of action."[35] It is therefore useful to conceptualize ideology as a map. Its function is to make sense of a time and a place and to therefore permit navigation of an otherwise inscrutable landscape. Like a map, ideology is most valuable when it provides just enough detail to permit safe traversal without obscuring the path from here to there.

A map that merely gave a straight line to a destination without regard to the cliffs, swamps, and predators that stand in the way would be worse than worthless. However, a map that revealed every root and rock over which one might stumble on their way would necessarily lack the perspective required for navigation. The best maps strike a balance

[35]Sanín and Wood, 2014, p. 214.

between the detail necessary to avoid pitfalls and the clarity required to keep the destination in sight. The most potent ideologies strike the same balance. In doing so, they become invaluable psychological tools with which individuals make sense of their environment and maintain emotional stability. The more holistically valuable an ideology, the more dependent upon the ideology an individual becomes and the more willing they are to make sacrifices on its behalf.

In this thralled state, soldiers are of greatest use to the insurgent organizations that can successfully adopt, construct, distribute, and maintain a psychologically valuable ideology.[36] Soldiers that depend upon an ideology for their intra-psychic stability constitute the "hard core" of a rebel movement and help generate the socialization processes which underpin unit cohesion. Just as importantly, they ensure that the bonded unit is furthering the goals of the organization because the logic of their commitment is centered on the rebel cause.

I define the hard core as any individual soldier, regardless of rank or social standing, who derives utility from the ideology of the rebel movement in sufficient amount to meaningfully influence that soldier's preferences. In other words, a member of the hard core is anyone who's decision-making is influenced in substantial measure by the political goals of the organization, as such, rather than any pecuniary reward that may emerge as a consequence of achieving those goals. It is not necessary that these individuals be in a leadership role per se or that they have any particular set of skills. Rather, it is only necessary that they

[36]Note here that I am speaking in generalities about a process that can occur. Not every soldier is equally vulnerable to emotional dependence on an ideology, nor is there some binary condition of dependence. Soldiers will vary both in the extent to which they rely on ideology for intra-psychic stability and in how thralled they become to a powerful one.

demonstrate a willingness to make sacrifices on behalf of the organization's ideological goals, thereby initiating the socialization processes discussed above. A 16-year-old soldier can begin doing this the day they join the movement if they are sufficiently committed - although the extent to which they are capable of serving as a member of the hard core does interact with other factors, such as their rank in the organization.

2.2.1. ***Axioms***

This theory is based on the following axiomatic assumptions, drawn from core findings in political psychology, neurology, evolutionary biology, and political science. I hold these claims to be true and use them to derive a set of propositions which together constitute a theory of how ideology operates to cultivate devotion.

1. **Reality is incomprehensibly complex:** There is sufficient complexity in every subject that our minds cannot engage with the world without a filtering mechanism. Reality may, in fact, be infinitely complex; but whatever the true level of complexity, I assume that it exceeds our ability to process it. Unfiltered reality is therefore incomprehensible.

2. **Managing this complexity is adaptively essential:** Sentient organisms must make decisions despite the technical incomprehensibility of their environment. If we do not make decisions, we fail to find food or we get eaten by other organisms. There is also adaptive advantage in making decisions expediently, both to conserve neurological

caloric requirements and to attain reward or escape danger more quickly.[37] Cognitive tools that allow us to make expedient choices in complex environments are of essential evolutionary value.[38]

3. **Unfiltered reality induces anxiety:** Humans fear what they do not understand. Unfiltered reality is fundamentally incomprehensible and is therefore frightening.[39] Humans will tend to experience anxiety when exposed to decontextualized experience or when the possibility of exposure emerges.[40] We do not want to be in unknown territory for any great period of time, and so our brains compel us to seek safer ground by filling us with dread. Our brains will reward successful retreat from uncertainty with a sense of peace, contentment, and security. When we cannot flee from the thing threatening us with reality, rage motivates us to destroy the source of the threat.

2.2.2. ***Propositions***

The central prediction of my theory is that our dependence on certainty and our attachment to the tools we use to attain it produce a predictable and cyclical degenerative process wherein our relationship with our beliefs becomes increasingly unhealthy. When we reach a sufficiently pathological attachment to a simplifying framework, we will go to great and terrible lengths to act in accordance with its tenets or defend it from perceived threats. It is in this thralled state that we are of greatest use to the political organizations that can

[37] Christie and Schrater, 2015.
[38] M. B. Petersen, 2015; Artinger et al., 2015; Lopez and McDermott, 2012.
[39] Carleton, 2016.
[40] Schreiber and Iacoboni, 2012; Kafkas and Montaldi, 2015; Banks and Hicks, 2016.

successfully market themselves as the sole purveyors of certainty.[41]

Proposition 1: Ideology is a mechanism of certainty

Ideologies allow us to believe straightforward political statements about cause and effect. The specific content of an ideology provides the logic we use to select from competing variables of interest. More complex ideologies more closely approximate reality, on average, but less readily achieve their purpose of cognitive simplification. We believe, according to observation and received learning, that there is a way to things - an ordering to reality. We believe that there is a mode of behavior that is best suited to this ordered reality. We make decisions according to these guidelines. In doing so, we circumvent the intrinsic incomprehensibility of our environment.

Proposition 2: Ideologies therefore protect us from anxiety

Because ideologies "solve" the problem of incomprehensible complexity, they shield us from the anxiety associated with uncertainty. When we are operating within the auspices of an ideology, we are assured of our capacity to make decisions and are relatively comfortable. Without a simplifying tool, we risk being paralyzed by an infinitude of possibilities. In order to motivate us to solve this crisis of complexity, our brains provide powerful motivation to ensconce ourselves in the comforting certainty of an ideology. Outside the confines of a simplifying framework, we are adrift in a sea of uncertainty. The belief afforded by ideology is our port in a storm.

Proposition 3: Ideology will come into conflict with reality

[41]Per Greene (2018), soldiers can also be a danger to their organizations when they are in thrall to an ideology because their zeal can produce violence that is out of the organization's control and counter to its interests

The ideological heuristics we use to guide behavior are imperfect. Our simplifying tools can never accurately model reality because reality is incomprehensibly complex. Ideologies that provide simpler approximations of reality are more effective tools for attaining certainty but such certainty must come at the cost of accuracy. We will therefore inevitably encounter novelty. Novelty can come in any form. We may lose a job, lose a loved one, get cancer, experience trauma, or experience betrayal. Our political party might lose an election in stunning fashion or our ethnic group might fall on hard times while a hated rival rises to prominence. When we experience novelty, the heuristics with which they conflict come under threat.

A new thing, for which we have not previously accounted, suggests that our simplifying framework may have a flaw. This prospect is anxiety-inducing, because it threatens us with exposure to decontextualized reality. The more severe the dissonance between the novel fact and the belief, the more severe the attendant distress. This distress is likely to manifest as frustration, anger, and anxiety.[42] These emotions will in turn motivate us to address the dysregulation by either incorporating the new information into our view of the world or rejecting it outright to preserve the underlying ideology.

Proposition 4: Ideologies Tend to Ossify Over Time

When we encounter novelty, we will tend to reject it rather than revise our ideologies to incorporate it. Psychologists have explored this tendency, known as "motivated reasoning" and "motivated retrieval", in great depth. We know from this literature that the ideologies

[42]Dollard et al., 1939; Burnstein and Worchel, 1962; Rosenzweig, 1976; Carleton, 2016; Osmanagaoglu et al., 2018; McGilchrist, 2019.

we use to render judgements in low-information environments are biased,[43] that we retrieve information from our memory and generate hypotheses in accordance with those biases,[44] and react more negatively to (or are less likely to even acknowledge) incongruent information.[45] The result is a resistance to position switching and a reflexive tendency to defend extant positions vigorously against potential threats.[46][47]

Ideologies tend to harden over time because we tend to reject (or never even acknowledge) novel information rather than accept it and revise our ideologies accordingly. Every time we fail to adjust our maps, they become more absolute. We become increasingly comfortable forcing the world to fit our perspective rather than the other way around.[48] Our ideologies become less and less porous until almost no new information can penetrate them. We become increasingly shielded from the anxiety of uncertainty. However, this process does not actually strengthen ideology - although it may appear to. Rather, it makes us more vulnerable to anxiety and our ideologies more brittle.

Proposition 5: As Ideology Ossifies, Our Dependence on Them Grows

Humans do not become stronger by becoming safer. Cognitive behavioral psychologists have found strong evidence that clinical exposure is an effective mechanism for reducing anxiety[49] and that threat avoidance worsens anxiety.[50] More absolute ideologies make it less

[43] Tversky and Kahneman, 1974.
[44] Dougherty et al., 2010; Donovan et al., 2020.
[45] Hills, 2019; Vegetti and Mancosu, 2020; Donovan et al., 2020; Erisen et al., 2018; McGilchrist, 2019.
[46] Stanley et al., 2020; Erisen et al., 2018; McGilchrist, 2019.
[47] Lever, 1976.
[48] Brugnoli et al., 2019; Avnur, 2020; Nguyen, 2020; Santos, 2021.
[49] Abramowitz et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2020; Raeder et al., 2020.
[50] Maner and N. B. Schmidt, 2006; Berman et al., 2010; Lorian and Grisham, 2010; Lorian and Grisham, 2011.

likely that we will encounter novelty on a regular basis and therefore deny us opportunities to expose ourselves to uncertainty. As a result, we become more susceptible to its effects on our neurophysiology. As our ideologies become more inflexible, we become more and more intolerant of uncertainty. We are therefore more likely to reject novelty each successive time we encounter it. This dynamic produces a recursive reaction through which an initial impulse to reject novelty degenerates into an inability to tolerate any perceived violation.

At this point, the beliefs associated with a given ideology are essentially diseased. The organ we created to help navigate our environment becomes afflicted with rigidity, just as our arteries can become sclerotic. A pathological ideology is one that is subject to little or no revision, regardless of evidence. When ideology ossifies in this way, our emotional stability becomes increasingly dependent on its absolute impermeability. When we are in thrall to a pathological ideology, we depend on it to a great extent for our emotional stability. We will therefore go to great lengths to preserve its integrity. If we perceive threats to our beliefs or if we believe that acting on behalf of them strengthens their credibility, then we will act accordingly.

The psychological utility provided by the ideology will counteract other negative consequences of whatever that behavior might entail, including participation in violence or risk of personal harm. This is the condition of devotion: a willingness to make great sacrifices on behalf of a cause.

2.3. Ideological Utility

Initiating and sustaining this degenerative process is essential for rebel groups, since the end state of the degenerative cycle is devotion. Whether and how aggressively the cycle begins is a function of the initial psychological power of the underlying ideology. The more readily an ideology serves its navigational function - the more readily it therefore protects the adherent from uncertainty - the more quickly the adherent comes to depend upon it for emotional stability. It is these individuals who are most likely to constitute the "hard core" of the insurgency, since they are most likely to incorporate the goals of the organization into their utility calculations.

In order to better understand which kinds of ideologies are most likely to initiate the degenerative process I describe, it is necessary to understand what features of an ideology make it an effective navigational tool. Below, I articulate a utility function that describes the potency of an ideology. How large must this utility function be in order to constitute a "meaningful" portion of a soldier's preference generation process or to initiative the degenerative cycle? I am forced to provide an unsatisfactory answer here: it will depend on the soldier and the context and it is probably impossible to define a useful proportion even if it did not depend on those things. All that matters from the perspective of this theory is that there are self-evidently some soldiers for whom the political project of the rebellion is a powerful motivator and some for whom it is clearly not.

Among the former, there are some for whom the ideology of the group is but one of several competing factors that influence preference generation. For others, the ideology may

be an overwhelming consideration that trivializes all other sources of utility. One way or another, rebel groups have to convince soldiers that they should be willing to fight, kill, and potentially die at the command of organization leadership. To achieve this at relatively low cost, rebel groups want to maximize the number of individuals for whom the ideology of the group is a meaningful source of utility. They do this by appropriately striking a balance between explanatory power and simplicity, and thereby maximize the potency of their ideology.

But how do ideologies operate in an insurgent context, and how do organizations maximize the psychological value of their ideology to cultivate devotion? To answer these questions, consider a rank-and-file insurgent soldier whose superiors have ordered them to participate in the seizure of a town that borders rebel and government-controlled territory. The insurgent has dozens of choices to make in their execution of that order. They have to decide if they will participate at all, if they will participate zealously, if they will engage in activity outside the strict purview of their orders (sexual violence, torture, etc.), and if they will encourage others to do the same. In order to decide how to behave, the soldier implicitly uses a utility calculation to determine how much they are likely to receive in abstract value for a given set of actions. There are an infinite number of things that might inform this utility calculation:what decision minimizes the chance of their injury or death?; what decision maximizes their wealth?; what decision would their mother want them to make, or their priest, or their children?; what decision makes them feel best or best attends to their emotional needs (e.g. their standing in the primary group)?

The goal of insurgent organizations is to inject the political and military objectives of the rebellion into the utility calculation of as many soldiers - and with as great a magnitude - as possible. If many different soldiers factor the goals of the organization into their decision-making, then they are more likely to follow orders despite negative material consequences and to convince others to do the same. The more potent an ideology the rebel group can attach to its cause, the more likely to it is to influence any given soldiers utility calculation. To explore how a rebel group can increase the potency of their ideology, it is first necessary to explore the utility function for an ideology: in other words, what do soldiers get out of an ideology and which features of the ideology determine the price that someone will pay to adhere to its tenets?

I propose that there are two features which determine how utility an ideology provides, and therefore how likely it is to bind soldiers to its tenets: simplicity and salience. As with any model, soldiers want a theory of the world that explains the greatest amount of variation in their environment (salience) with the least computational burden (simplicity).

Simplicity

The first thing an ideology must do is simplify. They are a tool for navigating an otherwise incomprehensible environment and so must therefore provide a means of deciding which limited set of things to include in perception. Desirable ideologies are as simple as possible without critically sacrificing explanatory power. They are parsimonious and can be used readily to condition behavior. Given the anxiety associated with uncertainty, this is likely to be a powerful preference. Insurgent organizations can reduce the complexity of their

ideologies by using simplistic ideological frames and rhetoric. In particular, they will tend to use absolutist or universalist language in their claims-making to exclude all but a small sub-set of considerations.

However, not any simple model of the world will suffice. A rebel group cannot assert that all the woes of their country are caused by an excessively pink sky; the sky is not pink and the color of the sky can hardly explain why a particular ethnic group has fallen on hard times. Nor is there much to be done about the sky if it happens to be pink. The mere content of an ideology is not sufficient to satisfy the navigational requirement. Organizations must convince people that their interpretation of the world is the one they ought to privilege. To do this, they must maximize other features of their ideology.

Salience

The second characteristic an individual looks for in an ideology is salience. They want a model of the world that speaks to the problems their environment presents to them and that provides a means of addressing those problems. They want an ideology that resonates with their experiences and reflects the major institutions of their society. Ideally, the rebel group wants their ideology to attain metaphysical status in the minds of their followers; their interpretation of the world *is the world*, not a representation of it.

If they succeed, the ideology will begin to assume cultural significance within the context of the insurgency (i.e. it is more likely to become a "practical ideology" that justifies itself without specific reference to the underlying ideology). Increasing the salience of an ideology accelerates the degenerative process whereby individuals become dependent upon it for psy-

chological stability. This in turn strengthens the preference transformation that facilitates collective action.

It is critical to note here that salience is not merely a function of how well an ideology *actually* describes the world; rather, it is a function of both how well it actually describes the world and how much an individual *believes* it describes the world. Ideology is a map, but it is not a map of a physical environment where there is something approaching an objective "truth." If a physical map incorrectly states that there is a river between the reader and their goal, it will be relatively easy to determine that the map is inaccurate. Unlike a physical map, ideology does not route the way between here and there, but instead routes the way between here and an infinite number of possible futures.

It is not possible to know whether an ideology is providing accurate guidance because it is not possible to predict the future. Moreover, ideology is attempting to do something that is technically impossible: condense reality to a comprehensible structure with a limited set of considerations. Ideologies are always, therefore, incorrect. It is certainly possible to judge whether an ideology is a useful approximation of reality (which permits the concept of "fit" discussed below), but an ideology is never "true" in any objective sense. Individuals nevertheless proceed *as though they are true*, meaning that perception of the validity of an ideology is at least as important in the determination of ideological utility as whether that system of thought is materially true.

As we will see, it is essential that we look beyond the doctrinal content of an ideology when we consider its potency as a psychological solution to the problem of complexity. The

same doctrine communicated to two different soldiers in different contexts using different mediums of exchange and with different levels of intensity will produce entirely different utilities; therefore, those two soldiers will have different levels of attachment to the "same" ideology and will be differently motivated to make sacrifices on its behalf. The utility function I articulate below accordingly takes into account a wide range of tools by which insurgent organizations convince soldiers that their proposed map of an environment is the truth other than the mere content of the ideology.

Insurgencies can maximize the salience of their ideology in two ways; 1) they can increase its fit (i.e. the extent to which the doctrine of the organization and its associated behavior genuinely describes a political environment and provides relevant and actionable solutions; and 2) they can increase its resonance (i.e. the extent to which an individual or group within the organization believe that the ideology is a meaningful and accurate model of reality).

- **Fit**: Insurgent organizations can improve the fit of their heuristic by: 1) constructing or adopting an ideology that responds directly to extant social problems; 2) attempting to frame a social problem that is advantageous to their cause and deploying a heuristic to address it; and 3) targeting their recruitment and indoctrination efforts at populations that are particularly likely to think their message is relevant.

- **Resonance**: Insurgent organizations can increase the likelihood that their ideology resonates with their followers by: 1) embedding their ideology in pre-existing cultural modalities that already have significance and define daily life; 2) marketing the ideology aggressively in target communities (e.g. pamphlet distribution, radio broadcasts,

speeches and rallies, etc.); 3) integrating their ideology into the daily lives of their soldiers by making it a core component of organizational culture (e.g. recruitment, training, discipline, and promotion); and 4) convincing people that the ideology they wield is relevant to their environment through propaganda and coercive re-education campaigns.

These two features - simplicity and salience - interact to form a ratio of ideological function. The extent to which that ratio translates into utility is a function of one additional consideration: the extent to which the individual in question has an aversion to complexity. Recall that this theory is built upon the axiomatic assumption that complexity induces anxiety because it functionally exposes us to uncertainty. But everyone has a different tolerance for feeling uncertain, a different threshold point beyond which additional complexity induces intolerable anxiety. The optimal ratio between simplicity and explanation for any given individual will depend on this level of complexity aversion. Higher levels of aversion to complexity mean that people will accept less nuanced or explanatory ideologies in the name of simplicity. Lower levels of aversion to complexity mean that people will accept higher levels of complexity in order to more completely explain their environment.

2.3.1. ***Utility Function***

Given these features, we can construct a utility function for ideology. The utility of any ideology I is a function of four parameters: P, R, k, and α. We denote "fit" as P, which represents how well-fitted the content of a heuristic is to a given time and place. We denote "resonance" as R, which represents the extent to which individuals perceive that an ideology

is a meaningful model of the world. We denote "simplicity" k, which represents the number of dimensions or considerations that an ideology takes into account. The effect of model complexity is mediated by how averse an individual is to the cognitive burden and uncertainty generated by excessive complexity.

As mentioned, some individuals are made more uncomfortable by complexity than others and will therefore pay higher premiums to attain simplicity. Let α be an individual's aversion to complexity, with higher values indicating an increased preference for simplicity. Unlike P, R, and k, α is not a feature of the ideology; rather, it is a feature of the individual perceiving the ideology and interacts with the other elements to produce total utility.

Note the following constraints:

- $0 \leq P \leq 1$: Higher values of P denote better fit, with a "1" indicating perfect fit and a "0" indicating no fit at all
- $1 \leq R$: Higher values of R denote greater salience, with a "1" indicating baseline salience and a higher values indicating progressively greater salience
- $1 \leq k$: Higher values of k denote greater complexity, with a "1" indicating baseline complexity, since systems of thought must be at least uni-dimensional.
- $0 < \alpha$: Higher values of α denote greater aversion to complexity, with a "0" indicating no aversion to complexity at all.

Therefore, the utility for an individual's ideology is denoted as:

$$u(I) = u(P, R, k, \alpha) \tag{2.1}$$

Ideological utility increases in P and R and decreases in k and α. For simplicity, we take a utility function where $u(I)$ is multiplicative in these parameters.

$$u(I) = \frac{PR}{k^{\alpha}} \tag{2.2}$$

Rebel groups want to maximize fit (R) and salience (P) and they want to minimize k at fixed levels of α. If fit is 0, ideological utility is equal to 0 because a model that is entirely unfit is entirely useless. At baseline values of salience (1) the numerator simply captures the fit of the model. As salience increases above 1, the effect of fit is magnified multiplicatively by the magnitude of R. The denominator is simply the complexity of the model raised to the power α, where $0 \leq \alpha$. If $\alpha = 1$, then the adherent does not punish additional complexity at all. If $\alpha = 1$ then each additional dimension increases the denominator by 1, thereby punishing total utility in a reverse linear fashion as complexity increases. If $\alpha > 1$, then each additional dimension decreases utility exponentially. Increases in α above 1 increase the cost of complexity exponentially.

In other words, the numerator of the utility function is the ideology's explanatory power (actual and perceived) while the denominator is the complexity the ideology must bring to bear to provide that explanatory power - conditioned by the individual's aversion to complexity. The larger the ratio between numerator and denominator a rebel group can achieve (and, therefore, the more effectively they balance between explanatory power and simplicity) the more psychologically desirable the ideology becomes and the more likely it is that any individual soldier will incorporate the political goals of the organization into their preference calculation in sufficient magnitude to constitute a member of the hard core.

Critically, the numerator and denominator of this function are likely to be in tension with one another: all else equal, increases in fit tend to require a commensurate increase in complexity. Increasing complexity to increase fit does not necessarily do the rebel group any good insofar as utility is concerned (based on the assumptions of the proposed utility function) because the potency of the ideology is enhanced by the greater explanatory power but *diminished* by the greater complexity required to provide it. Depending on how averse to complexity an individual or population is, such a trade-off may actively harm the potency of the ideology.

However, because the utility of an ideology is a function of both perceived and actual fit, rebel groups can take steps to circumvent this dilemma between complexity and explanation. They can, in effect, *compress* their ideologies through a combination of rhetorical and operational tactics. The insurgent struggle to control the ideological space is, viewed in the proper light, a compression arms race. The group that can encapsulate the greatest swathe of their environment using the least intellectual resource in the minds of their followers will provide their followers with high levels of certainty. This, in turn, will allow them to cultivate and maintain devotion more effectively than their competitors.

2.4. Observable Implications and Measurement Strategy

If this theory is correct, it should be possible to observe an empirical relationship between insurgent organizations engaging in ideological compression and the successful cultivation of devotion. I have described the kinds of strategies and activities that are likely to increase or decrease the different features of ideological utility above. Organizations that take steps to minimize the complexity and maximize the salience of their ideology should experience a variety of positive outcomes associated with devotion. I expect to observe these effects at the individual and structural levels.

At the individual level, we should see evidence of certainty. We should see that soldiers *know* that their cause is right and understand their role in the broader movement. We should see that they are consequently prioritizing the goals of the organization in their risk assessments and decision calculus during the conflict. I expect to observe this most readily in testimonials and interviews with combatants or ex-combatants who were members of organizations with a particularly well-balanced ideology. It may also be possible to infer the prevalence of organizational goals in decision calculus if we observe behavior that is difficult to explain in the absence of devotion (extraordinary courage, unusual levels of obedience, a willingness to endure through ostensibly intolerable conditions, etc.). At the structural level, I expect devotion to manifest as low defection and desertion rates, high morale, high degrees of control over soldiers in the field, high rates of voluntary recruitment, and the institutional capacity to endure through battlefield losses relative to organization's with less potent ideologies.

In other words, it should be possible to observe the emergence of a hard core of soldiers who include the ideological goals of the movement in their utility calculations with sufficient magnitude to overwhelm or compete with other pecuniary considerations. While there are quantitative data available to measure some of these outcomes, the mechanisms I articulate here are complex, and require a more holistic understanding of conflict episodes to properly explicate. Accordingly, the most appropriate methodology to assess the empirical validity of the theory is comparative historical analysis (CHA). CHA allows for textured examination of causal processes and will provide evidence of the specific strategies and tactics that organization's pursue to maximize the potency of their. It can also provide holistic insight into the observable consequences of devoted soldiery I list above.

2.4.1. ***Case Selection and Chapter Summaries***

The bulk of my analysis concerns the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and is based primarily on more than two dozen original interviews I conducted with former members of the PIRA between February and August of 2022. The PIRA presents an excellent opportunity to isolate my independent variable - the extent to which an organization's deployed ideology is well-balanced in the manner I articulate - because they had to compete in their early years with the "Official" Irish Republican Army (OIRA). The PIRA split from the OIRA in 1969 and were therefore operating in the same conflict environment, attempting to appeal to the same population, fighting the same enemy, and were embedded in the same culture of revolution that defined Northern Ireland. Many features that might vary between disparate rebel groups is therefore controlled in this study.

In chapter 2, I detail the emergence of the PIRA and how they very quickly came to dominate and define the Republican insurgent space despite having begun as an under-resourced off-shoot of the primary body of the movement. They were able to achieve this, I argue, because they deployed an ideology that was simultaneously better fitted to the conflict environment and more simple; it was, in other words, a better navigational tool and therefore more readily initiated the degenerative process by which individuals become emotionally fused with a political movement. The PIRA was therefore far better at attracting and maintaining those in the population who were willing to make enormous sacrifices for the cause. I also contend with the competing theory of "outbidding" and use the proposed ideological utility function to explain why violent outbidding was an effective strategy for the PIRA during the early 1970s when it had failed as a strategy in the preceding decades and would fail again in the following decades.

In chapter 3, I examine three additional case studies of insurgent groups to demonstrate the exportability across time and space of my theory. First, I discuss the PIRA ten years after the period discussed in chapter 2. While this is technically the same organization as I discuss previously, it is a case study examination of a different time period with critically different dynamics within the same conflict. I therefore demonstrate the durability of the theory over key inflection points throughout a protracted dispute. Specifically, I discuss a pivot that the PIRA executed in the early 1980s towards a hybrid rebellion that incorporated both electoral politics and violence simultaneously.

This pivot was critical because it came at a time when the PIRA was attempting to

broaden its constituency and as it was realizing that a "long war" was necessary to achieve their goals. The organization preserved the *balance* of their ideology during this transition by sacrificing some measure of simplicity in order to substantially expand the scope of their political project and increase its resonance with a broader swathe of the population. The result was an ideology that was markedly changed from the one that defined the early years of the conflict but that nevertheless continued to serve as a potent navigational tool. This transition towards a more sustainably balanced ideological approach permitted the PIRA to preserve a hard core of dedicated volunteers far longer than might otherwise have been possible.

My second and third case studies are a comparative analysis of Renamo and the Viet Minh. The Viet Minh aggressively pursued strategies to increase the psychological power of their ideology and accordingly enjoyed a high degree of devotion. Renamo did not engage in these processes (or did so selectively in areas where they already had greater control of the population) and therefore struggled with the consequences of low devotion throughout their campaign. Using the typology specified by Gerring (2009), these cases are Diverse, Extreme, and Crucial.[51] That is: they manifest important variation along both the independent and dependent variable; they represent extreme variants of their respective types (highly effective ideological deployment vs. highly ineffective ideological deployment); and they are crucial in the sense that, if the theory cannot explain their respective successes and failures, it is not valid.

[51] Gerring, 2009.

Regarding the Viet Minh, their revolutionary movement (including their successor organization, the Viet Cong) is perhaps the most cohesive and effective insurgency of the 20th century.[52] As we will see, their soldiers exhibited remarkable devotion to their cause and were capable of enduring prolonged warfare with the Japanese imperial army, the French Colonial government, and the United States military in successive decades. I must demonstrate that their success at cultivating a devoted hard core is due in some substantial part to effective ideological balancing or the theory will not hold water.

Regarding Renamo, they present a nearly unique opportunity to examine an insurgency that failed to develop a political project or deploy a psychologically potent ideology in many areas where they operated. As Lewis (2020) argues, the great majority of insurgencies never make it past the aspirational stage of development.[53] If this theory is correct, then many organizations that completely fail to balance between explanatory power and complexity will have been lost to history. They will never have made enough of a mark to warrant serious scholarly attention.

The particular circumstances of Renamo's inception permitted it to mount a meaningful insurgent campaign without substantial recourse to ideology. Scholars have therefore devoted energy to documenting Renamo's activities during the conflict despite its ideological paucity. It is essential that I analyze the Renamo insurgency to demonstrate the consequences of a poorly deployed ideology even within the context of a movement that otherwise had the resources to persist. The historical record of Renamo allows me to examine precisely how

[52]Henderson, 1979.
[53]Lewis, 2020.

a poorly balanced ideology manifests empirically and the attendant implications for the emergence of a hard core.

Below, I present a table that lays out the basic features of the ideology for each case I examine and the predictions for the effect of those features on devotion.

Case	Simplicity	Fit	Resonance	Balance	Predicted Devotion
PIRA (1969-1975)	High	Medium	High	Good	High
PIRA (1976-1985)	Low	High	High	Good	High
OIRA	Low	Medium	Low	Bad	Low
Renamo	Medium	Low	Low	Bad	Low
Viet Minh	High	High	High	Good	High

2.4.2. ***Theoretical Clarifications***

Before moving on to the case studies, there are two key points that require clarification. I discuss each below.

Preferences and Agency

First, I assume that soldiers are transitively ordering preferences when making choices about whether to participate in rebellion - and on behalf of whom - and choosing whichever alternative they believe maximizes their utility. When insurgencies are able to effectively compress their ideology such that it maximizes explanatory power without recourse to excessive complexity, they increase the likelihood that the movement's ideological goals are a prominent feature of the soldier's utility function. They are not, however, dislodging that soldier from the rational choice paradigm; they are instead altering the preferences which

inform the rational choice calculation.

As discussed, soldiers face a wide variety of incentives when making decisions on and off a battlefield. Soldiers that derive emotional utility from the influence of a well-balanced ideology are merely including one additional incentive; the continued integrity of the movement with which they associate the ideology. The more the soldier derives in utility from the ideology, the more heavily that incentive will weigh in the rational choice calculation. Some soldiers will become so dependent upon the utility afforded by the ideology that other factors become trivial by comparison. For others, it will be but one of many factors in their calculation. But any utility their soldiers derive from pursuing the goals of the movement is to the benefit of the organization.

When in thrall to a very potent ideology, soldiers remain active agents. Intense emotional dependence on a simplifying framework does not rob soldiers of choice any more than greed enslaves capitalists to money or faith enslaves priests to Christ. These individuals are always making choices, but their choices are not free of influence. Rebel groups want to influence the decision calculus of their followers in as low-cost a manner as possible. Successful deployment of a well-balanced ideology provides a particularly low cost mechanism of preference transformation.

The reader may also note an apparent contradiction between the rational choice language I use here and the arguments I make concerning psychological dependence on a well-balanced ideology or the importance of certainty in emotional stability. However, I see no contradiction between these two ostensibly disparate analytical frames because the generation of a utility

function and the calculation of expected utility after a utility function has emerged are distinct processes. Utility functions in the real world are subject to the full range of human foible, flaw, and idiosyncrasy. Soldiers can derive utility from a thing for a theoretically infinite number of reasons, whether it is because that thing gives them money or because it would make their deceased mother proud or because it provides them the comfort of knowing how the world works. It is the calculation of expected utility and the subsequent ordering of preferences that is "rational", not the *generation* of the underlying utility function.

The Hard Core

Third, this theory focuses specifically on the hard core of ideologically committed soldier for whom the doctrinal content of the ideology explicitly matters. I do not claim that every soldier in an insurgency need be devoted to or even aware of the ideological tenets of the organization. The literature is clear that many soldiers endure the costs of combat because of social pressures from their comrades and superior officers. But it is also clear that a core contingent of ideologically committed soldiers can initiate, accelerate, and sustain that socialization process. More work is required to determine how large the hard core must be, and at what phase of the conflict they must exist, to initiate this process; but more is certain to be better.

In a perfect world, organizations would target their outreach specifically at individuals who are most likely to become a member of the hard core. But civil conflicts are low information environments.[54] Rebel groups do not necessarily know a priori who is likely

[54]Gates, 2002; McLauchlin, 2020; Hegghammer, 2013; Forney, 2015.

to become ideologically committed. As we will see, they can make educated guesses as to which populations they are most likely to emerge from, but they often do not have enough information to target their recruitment at specific individuals. As a consequence, they must adopt a wide-aperture approach to ideological deployment. As the case studies below demonstrate, effective insurgent organizations target wide swathes of the civilian population and expose their entire soldiery to indoctrination without regard to whether any individual is likely to be a member of the hard core.

Their hope is that those with proclivities towards ideological commitment will self select into the hard core. The organization's task is to expose as many people as possible to as potent an ideology as possible to maximize the likelihood that the hard core emerges and endures. The wider the reach of the organization's ideological message and the more people they are able to continually expose to a well-balanced map of a political environment, the more likely it is that some sufficient portion of their followers will exhibit devotion. Accordingly, the case evidence I analyze will focus on the wide-aperture strategies that organizations pursue to achieve their goals, even though the mechanism of the theory hinges on a minority of soldiers.

Exogenous Aversion to Complexity

A critical feature of the success or failure of ideological deployment is the likely aversion to complexity in a given environment. In the proposed utility function, complexity is conditioned by how averse the individual in question is to complexity. It is self-evidently true that some soldiers will be more tolerant of a sophisticated and complex view of the world than

others. It is also clear that some environments are likely to produce a systematically more or less complexity-tolerant population from which soldiers emerge. The extent of complexity tolerance will determine how much of a premium individuals will pay in reduced explanatory power to attain simplicity in their outlook. Rebel groups make implicit assumptions about the likely levels of average aversion in their target population when they strike a particular balance between explanation and complexity. Groups in high-aversion environments will be able to deploy poorly fitted models of the world so long as they offer simple explanations

For the most part, this theory treats aversion to complexity as an exogenous, unchanging, and unspecified feature of the utility function. I axiomatically assume that everyone has some baseline level of aversion that punishes increasing complexity, but recognize that this value is not constant across individuals, contexts, or time. Individual-level biological and psychological idiosyncrasies certainly play a prominent role in determining how averse we are to the discomfort of complexity. Environmental features - such as warfare, political tumult, natural disasters, and demographic change - are also likely to have a system-wide effect on levels of aversion. Aversion to complexity is therefore itself a complex phenomenon that requires substantial theorizing in its own right. As a result, I leave the α parameter unspecified except in relative terms.

In the case of Renamo and the Viet Minh, I cannot make any informative claims about systemic levels of aversion to complexity except to say that both environments were fraught by violence and were therefore likely to feature high levels of aversion. Renamo existed in a particularly savage environment and so one could make the claim that perhaps their

average soldier had a higher level of aversion to complexity than that which perhaps existed in Vietnam during the first Indochina War. But this is highly speculative. Too many factors influence aversion levels that are not common between these two cases to make meaningful claims. However, in the case of the PIRA I believe that a relative claim about complexity aversion is possible. In comparing the PIRA during the early years of the conflict (Chapter 2) and the PIRA during the inflection point of the 1980s (Chapter 3), I do make the claim that the average level of aversion to complexity is likely to have *decreased* over time. As a consequence, I argue that a more sophisticated ideology became tolerable where before people wanted only maximal simplicity.

2.4.3. ***Methodological Limitations***

The methodology I employ in this dissertation has several important limitations that it is necessary to discuss. First, it is subject to all the usual limitations that are attendant to qualitative research. My findings are dependent upon the subjective determinations, analysis, recollections, and impressions of historians, political scientists, and participants in the conflict. I mitigate the inherent bias of these sources by trying to use analysis and data from as many different qualitative sources as possible and by employing comparative historical analysis to validate my findings in multiple contexts.

However, it is impossible to entirely eliminate the bias of qualitative work, just as it is impossible to entirely eliminate the bias of quantitative work. My findings would be stronger if I were able to leverage quantitative findings in addition to the qualitative ones. I have not yet been able to identify a compelling way to leverage quantitative data to validate my

theory because the kinds of mechanisms I posit are not readily observable at the structural level. In the absence of such data, it is necessary to consider the kinds of biases that are likely to emerge within the qualitative context.

With that in mind, the second limitation of this methodology is imperfect sampling of Republican sentiment amongst my interview subjects. This manifests in three ways: first, I had greater access to a subset of former PIRA volunteers who were largely sympathetic to the direction the organization took under the leadership of Gerry Adams. Many volunteers were disillusioned by the shift towards electoral politics that Adams orchestrated and were furious at the terms of the Good Friday agreement.

I spoke to some of these men, but the majority of my sample were in the "Sinn Fein" camp and were therefore supports of Adams and the decision making of PIRA leadership in the 1980s and 1990s. It is possible that these men might have had systematically different opinions about the ideology of the organization and its effect on their psychological state. I do not expect this to be true for their recollections of the early years of the organization, when there was profound convergence among all my respondents regardless of their opinion of later decision-making.

Second, I had much greater access to leadership and those men who had already made their involvement in the PIRA known publicly. This is for obvious reasons, as the British government can still indict members of the PIRA. I spoke with several rank-and-file volunteers who preferred to remain pseudonymous, so my sample is not entirely devoid of this perspective, but it is certainly weighted towards leadership and those who chose to make

their involvement public knowledge. Similarly, I was unable to interview any women who participated in the PIRA. Women played a critical role in the movement, particularly in an auxiliary and support capacity, but they are extremely reticent to speak to people about their experiences - again for obvious reasons.

Third, I did not speak to anyone who participated actively in the PIRA's primary competitor during the early years of the conflict, the OIRA. This is because most men who were active participants in the OIRA are no longer alive, as the enormous majority of young men during the 1970's joined the PIRA. I therefore have to rely on histories and second-hand accounts of the decisionmaking and structure of the OIRA in my comparison between the organizations.

The final major limitation of this methodology is that it does not directly validate the causal mechanisms I propose because those mechanisms operate at the level of psychology and emotion. It is not possible to directly observe emotion or psychological predilection influencing decisions in conflict. Instead, I rely on making implicit analytical connections between the accounts provided to me by participants and the mechanisms I advance. I also rely on structural features of the organization's ideological apparatus and the commensurate devotion they enjoyed as gleaned from the historical record. These methodologies are, I believe, the strongest way to proceed with a theory of this kind, but they are nevertheless proxy observations of the true operative mechanism I am exploring.

This limitation will manifest critically when I examine a competing explanation for the PIRA's success in chapter 2: namely, that the PIRA "outbid" other potential organizations

through the use of violence. This explanation locates their ability to attract followers not with ideology but with the mere use of violence at a time when many wanted to act violently. I argue that this explanation is perhaps sufficient to explain initial recruitment success but insufficient to explain the willingness to make personal sacrifices over time on behalf of the movement.

I also argue that the violence was effective not merely because it was violent, but because it underpinned and demonstrated a real commitment to a well-balanced ideology. In the absence of that ideology, the violence would not have had the same effect. However, because I cannot directly observe the effect of the ideology or the violence on the psychology of the people at the time, I must rely on the implicit connections between my qualitative observations and the clear devotion of PIRA volunteers.

In summary, much work remains to be done. I believe this work contributes substantially to the study of ideology in civil conflict and specifically to how rebel groups leverage ideology to cultivate devotion. But many voices remain unheard, and many perspectives remain unexplored. I look forward to expanding the scope of my inquiry in future work.

Chapter 3

"Brits Out" - Simplicity and the Emergence of the PIRA

West Belfast is drenched in memory. I have never been to a place where more of the levers of culture are turned towards the past. Remembrance is everywhere, be it through murals or memorials or graffiti. Falls Road, the main thoroughfare of the Irish Catholic area of the city, is a living museum of the conflict. It has its fair share of literal museums, of course, but the streets themselves are testament to the struggle. Paintings of revered republican heroes adorn essentially every street corner.

There are dozens of shrines dedicated to the dead scattered throughout the area, some grand and some humble, but all maintained and attended upon. The parades through Falls Road on Easter Sunday proudly recall the glory days of armed defense. During the political rallies in the cemeteries, families bring their children to stand next to young men wearing

combat boots while a speaker somberly recites the names of fallen comrades. A helicopter circles overhead throughout, sent by the state to monitor possible insurgent activity.

The immediacy of the past was never more apparent to me than when "Rory" took me on a walking tour of Ballymurphy. Rory was too young to join the PIRA when the conflict began in the late 1960s, but he recalls consciously committing to do "whatever it took" to rid Ireland of the British at the age of 13. He joined the PIRA as soon as he was able to plausibly lie about his age and was later imprisoned for his participation in the conflict. He now runs a youth center in west Belfast where helps young men and women make different decisions than he made when he was their age. But he has no regrets at all about his role in the war.

Rory asked that I meet him on a street corner near where the interview would take place so that he could "show me around town." We walked for more than an hour with seemingly no destination in mind except the sites of remembrance along the way. We stopped at each mural, each memorial, each shop front or home where someone had been shot or stabbed or beaten to death. He recounted stories along the way of men and women who had fought and died against the British or the protestant militias. He was fiercely proud of the work his community had done to commemorate the struggle and to keep it alive and visceral in the minds of the next generation.

As we concluded what turned out to be a loop back towards the youth center, he stopped and turned and said: "Did you notice that, in all this, I never once mentioned a dead British soldier? We don't have any memorials to them. And d'ya know why? Because we don't give

a shit about their dead. They were occupiers, and we were doing what we needed to do to defend our homes."[1] I asked him, some time later, whether or not he believed it healthy for the community to keep these old hatreds alive. His response was unwavering. "If we forget what they did to us, or we let our children forget, they can do it to us again."

This sentiment was the engine of conflict in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Rory's sense of embittered rage - and of threat - was omnipresent in West Belfast and other Irish Catholic communities across the country during the late 1960s. Many organizations, violent and nonviolent, competed with one another to mobilize that emotional energy in pursuit of their particular visions of Irish freedom. But it was the PIRA that emerged as the clear vanguard of republican militant revolution. It maintained this position of dominance over the course of a nearly three-decade conflict within a rapidly changing political environment.

It changed itself radically across several key inflection points, always maintaining the kind of ideological balance that I argue is essential to the cultivation of devotion. And because it was able to deploy a well-balanced ideology in several different conflict environments across time, it was able to absorb the rage and grief of its community and channel it into coordinated revolutionary activity - violent and non-violent - more effectively than almost any insurgent group of the 20th century.

In this chapter, I examine how the nascent PIRA rapidly out-competed its most direct competitor, the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA). In brief, the PIRA identified that the politically-oriented and increasingly socialist ideology of the OIRA was ill-fitted to the rage

[1] "Rory". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on 5/2/2022.

and desperation of the time. They split from the OIRA and instead deployed a maximally simple ideology that had as its only dictum "Brits Out." They made it clear that the only thing that could solve the problems their people were facing was to forcibly expel the British from their homeland through violent conflict. They then demonstrated their commitment to that ideology by perpetrating violence in its name when no other Republican organization had the will or the means to do so.

In essence, the PIRA deployed an ideology in the early years of the conflict that purported to explain the entire conflict - diagnosis, prescription, and prognosis - with what was functionally one variable: remove the British from the equation and all would be well. The simplicity of this ideology, I will argue, was well-fitted to the early days of the conflict, when the intense violence wrought by Protestant militia and British soldiers against Irish Catholics permitted no more nuance than an assault on the institutions that the people blamed for their suffering.

Because the ideology the PIRA deployed and manifested in action was properly balanced for the environment, it was a psychologically potent tool for managing complexity and ameliorating anxiety. It therefore initiated the degenerative process by which IRA volunteers ultimately fused their emotional well-being with the success of the organization. PIRA volunteers consequently exhibited extraordinary devotion. Critically, they were able to out-compete the OIRA in the space of a few short years. Vying for the same audience at the same time and in the same conflict, the PIRA became the de-facto sole representative of violent Republican resistance despite having begun as an under-resourced offshoot of the

main body of the movement.

In the following pages, I will demonstrate that the PIRA was able to achieve this momentous feat because the ideology they deployed was better-balanced - and therefore more effective as a tool for cultivating devotion - than the one deployed by the OIRA. Using primary evidence from more than two dozen interviews with former members of the PIRA, I detail how the organization maximized the salience and minimized the simplicity of their ideology. In keeping with the predictions of my theory, this successful ideological balancing identified them as "the only game in town" for the truly devoted and provided a framework from which the PIRA could sustain devotion throughout the conflict.

The rest of the chapter proceeds as follows: first, I briefly discuss the relevant history of the PIRA to establish the context of Northern Ireland at the time of its emergence. Second, I discuss current explanations for the PIRA's dominance over the OIRA in its early years and articulate how my theory and original research contributes to this extant understanding. I then briefly discuss the important limitations of my methodological approach. Finally, I demonstrate, using a combination of secondary source analysis and my primary research findings, how the PIRA maximized the salience and minimized the complexity of its ideology.

I specifically present evidence from my interviews that this effective balancing of its ideology was essential in the motivations of volunteers at the beginning of the conflict. I discuss this ideological apparatus in contrast to that of the OIRA, which failed to account for their environment and therefore deployed an ill-fitting and excessively complex ideology. Critically, I also argue that the PIRA's violence - often pointed to as a source of their success

- was effective because of the extent to which it *manifested* this well-balanced ideology and demonstrated commitment to it.

The direct comparison between the PIRA and the OIRA provides an invaluable opportunity to isolate the effect of these forces on key outcomes because so much of the two organizations was common between them. They emerged from the same group, fought the same enemy, existed in the same historical context, attempted to recruit from and operate in the same populations, were active during the same time period, had similar (although OIRA-favored) levels of resource at the outset of the conflict, and had roughly the same set of tools at their disposal to wage war. They even operated from a common ideological tradition - although as we will see, they branched from this common Republican tradition in crucially different ways. These commonalities essentially produce a very small-scale fixed effects design, whereby many of the possible confounders between my posited mechanism and the observed capacity to cultivate devotion are controlled.

3.1. A Brief History of the IRA

The Irish Republican Army has been fighting to expel the British from the island of Ireland since 1919, when it first emerged to fight in the Irish War of Independence. The revolutionary tradition that built and sustained the organization goes back much further. But while the mission has been clear from its founding, the means by which to achieve it has been the subject of intense dispute. IRA leadership has often violently disagreed over the extent to which it needed to compromise on its grand ambition - to utterly remove the British from Ireland - in order to achieve incremental political and civil gains.

This fundamental dispute has defined the organization for almost its entire existence. The first split occured in 1922, when the Dail Eireann (Revolutionary Congress) signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty. This agreement created the partition between the six counties of the what became known as "Northern Ireland" - though the IRA would continue to insist it was merely the "north of Ireland" - and the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland. Michael Collins, the erstwhile leader of the revolution, felt that the treaty was necessary to end the bloodshed and consolidate important gains for Irish freedom in the form of a newly autonomous Irish state.

Hardline members of the IRA, however, felt that the treaty was a betrayal of the basic precepts of the revolution and would only cement British authority on the island. The "anti-treaty" IRA formed in opposition to the "pro-treaty" faction and thus commenced the Irish Civil War, which lasted from 1922 to 1923. While the pro-treaty IRA was ultimately victorious and assumed control of the new Republic of Ireland, the anti-treaty IRA persisted

and became the guerilla organization that would represent the armed Republican struggle for the next half century.

The IRA was therefore born out of a radicalism that exceeded even the revolutionary fervor of the "ordinary" Irish freedom fighter and an insistence on the purity of armed struggle over any compromise with the British state. The IRA would spend the mid-20th century struggling to remain relevant in Irish politics and to preserve its sense of mission. Excluded as it was from legitimate politics in both the Republic and Northern Ireland, it continued to rely on violence to justify itself and attract new volunteers.

This violence was sporadic, small-scale, and politically ineffectual. A bombing campaign perpetrated by the radically militant Chief of Staff Sean Russell in the late 1930's "attracted only the young, violent, and foolish"[2] and the "border campaign" of the late 1950's "never really got off the ground or much beyond the border."[3]

While these efforts were not effective tactically or strategically, they did allow the IRA to limp along from one generation to another. These spasms of violence were able to attract enough volunteers to the cause for the IRA to continue to exist, but gone were the "glory days with a unit in every parish and twenty thousand Volunteers waiting for the call."[4] The IRA had "no popular base and no issue on which to arouse support" and its political counterpart, Sinn Fein, "had no deep-rooted political organization on which to build."[5]

The organization's leadership at the time was not entirely blind to this dysfunction. In

[2]Bell, 1997, p. 137.
[3]Taylor, 1998, p. 35.
[4]Bell, 1997, p. 137.
[5]Taylor, 1998, p. 35.

particular, Cathal Goulding (Chief of Staff of the IRA from 1962 to 1969) was determined to learn from the mistakes of the past and transform the IRA into a politically relevant entity once again. Goulding spent most of the 1950's in prison following the border campaign and came to the conclusion that the IRA's strategy to that point - if it existed at all - was deficient. "The notion that the IRA was going to rise up some day and free Ireland" he reflected "was a ridiculous pipe dream, for the simple reason that we never had the support of the people north and south."[6] For Goulding, the military approach had failed and therefore the solution was "to become involved in politics and adopt a socialist agenda which would enable the movement to reach out to ordinary people."[7]

Under Goulding, "politics not the gun became IRA policy."[8] But Goulding was not the only man who spent most of the 1950s in prison learning from the past, and he had miscalculated the movement's tolerance for change. For many men in the IRA, the lesson of the failed campaigns was that the military approach had simply not worked *yet* and that more determination was necessary. For these men, Goulding's attempted reforms were horrifying. In the words of Billy McKee, a founding member of the PIRA, "we realized that if Goulding and this new leadership were allowed to carry on, republicanism would die a natural death."[9]

Critically, there was marked backlash against Goulding's emphasis on Marxism, communism, and socialism. For Joe Cahill, another prominent PIRA leader, "the Republican Movement was being led off the true path of republicanism" by an overly political ideology

[6]Taylor, 1998, p. 37.
[7]Taylor, 1998, p. 37.
[8]Taylor, 1998, p. 37.
[9]Taylor, 1998, p. 39.

that no longer centralized "[getting] rid of the 'Brits' from Ireland."[10] Goulding saw these men as right-wing radicals who could not see past their own hatred to the political realities of their environment.

Goulding and his cohort no longer believed the time-honored adage that, if the British were expelled from Northern Ireland, "everything else would fall into place."[11] They were determined to transform the IRA from a "militaristic organization, solely concerned with 'national unity', into a revolutionary political organization with an embryonic socialist agenda."[12] In keeping with his Marxist outlook, Goulding sought to bridge the divide between the Protestant and Catholic working class by emphasizing their shared economic plight.

While this approach may have been forward-thinking, it was also naive to the increasingly toxic ethnic tensions that would come to dominate and define politics in Northern Ireland. Since partition, Irish Catholics had been subject to a host of discriminatory practices that made them "in every sense of the word, second class citizens."[13] Taking inspiration from the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s, Irish Catholics took to the streets to demand equal access to economic, social, and political opportunities. Many Protestants, however, perceived Catholic demands for civil rights as a direct threat to Protestant well-being.

Because Protestants were a majority in Northern Ireland, but a minority on the island of Ireland, they believed that any reunification with the Republic would result in the marginal-

[10]Taylor, 1998, p. 39.
[11]Rekawek, 2011, p. 8.
[12]Rekawek, 2011, p. 8.
[13]Taylor, 1998, p. 48.

ization of Protestant interests. The most militant elements of the Protestant community - led by Ian Paisley's "Paisleyites" - did not see any class unity in the civil rights marches of the Catholic minority. Rather, they believed that Catholics were advocating for the rights of the Irish at the inevitable expense of the Protestant community. They responded with widespread sectarian violence, which left Goulding's "plan to reshape the politics of Northern Ireland along class lines in ruins."[14]

But Goulding's determination to bridge the Protestant/Catholic divide with a class-based politics blinded him to the severity of the building ethnic hatred. He rejected, for instance, "arming Derry Catholics in order to prepare them for the expected rioting in the summer of 1969" because to do so would have an admission of defeat in his quest for "working class solidarity."[15] This perceived failure to protect the Irish Catholic community against Protestant violence was unforgivable to many in the Republican movement and was a primary contributor to the PIRA/OIRA split.[16]

The issue of Abstensionism was the final straw. The IRA had, for almost a century, engaged in a policy whereby they would stand for election (via Sinn Fein) but refuse to take up any seats they won or otherwise engage at all in government. They viewed the Northern Irish state, assembled at "Stormont" in Belfast, as an illegitimate representation of British colonial rule and had long argued that participation in that government was tantamount to an endorsement of partition. Abstensionism was the "Republican Movements cardinal article of faith" but to Goulding and those sympathetic to his reforms, "abstentionism was

[14]Rekawek, 2011, p. 11.
[15]Rekawek, 2011, p. 12.
[16]Taylor, 1998; Rekawek, 2011; Bell, 1997; Keefe, 2018.

part of a baggage of history which had become an impediment to the socialist revolution the IRA was now committed to undertake."[17]

The issue "came to a head at an extraordinary IRA army convention" in December of 1969, wherein IRA leadership formally determined to end the policy of abstentionism. A group of men, led by Director of Intelligence Sean MacStiofáin, departed the army convention and established a "provisional army council" consisting of 9 of the 13 IRA units in Belfast. They quickly called a "special" convention, at which they elected a new provisional Army Executive and new IRA leadership, with MacStiofáin serving as the first Chief of Staff of the new organization.[18] The Provisional Irish Republican Army was born.

Within a few short years, the PIRA had replaced the OIRA a the primary chief representative of the Irish rebel movement. They would perpetrate the vast majority of the violence over the next several decades, dominate radical republican politics via Sinn Fein, and define the popular imagining of what it meant to be an Irish Republican.[19] Without exception, every man I spoke with recalled that, by 1972, the PIRA had entirely eclipsed the OIRA. According to "Cormac,"[20], the officials "hadn't any real credibility" by the time he had determined to join the rebellion as a teenager in the early 1970s[21]

Most importantly, the PIRA boasted a cadre of the some of the most devoted rebel soldiers of the 20th century. Their volunteers were willing to kill and die for the organization

[17]Taylor, 1998, p. 96.
[18]Taylor, 1998, p. 98.
[19]Taylor, 1998; Rekawek, 2011; Keefe, 2018; Bell, 1997.
[20]Where subject names are presented in quotes without a last name, the subject has requested anonymity. I have assigned these subjects a randomly generated Pseudonym
[21]"Cormac". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan. January 25, 2022

and the movement it represented over the course of a 25 year conflict against one of the most powerful governments in the world. Each man I interviewed spoke of an essentially unquestioning willingness to follow orders and sacrifice everything for the PIRA.

Many of them spent years in jail, often refusing clothes and food for months at a time, despite the fact that they could have had their sentences commuted by cooperating with the British government in a variety of ways. They each risked their lives and the ruination of their families - to say nothing of the violence they were willing to perpetrate - to achieve the goals of the PIRA and the republican movement with which they so closely associated it. Critically, it is not necessarily the case that the PIRA always produced this devotion - although sometimes it certainly did: rather, it positioned itself as the organization where the devoted went.

The PIRA did not have to recruit - it had to vet and filter. It did not have to tell fairy tales about the glories of combat - it gave unvarnished and brutal warnings about the inevitability of jail or death if one joined the organization. When young men decided that they were willing to do anything to expel the British from Ireland, they went to the PIRA much more often than not. The PIRA achieved this position in the republican movement despite a wide range of militant competitors, first in the form of the OIRA and later in the form of several splinter organizations that aspired to wage war against the British.

How did the PIRA attract and sustain this level of devotion? While there are existing theories of competition within rebel movements and a large body of literature on the insurgent tactics of the PIRA, relatively little attention is paid to how the PIRA managed to so

rapidly outcompete the OIRA and other groups for its position as the de-facto representative of militant republicanism. Based on the original research I conducted in Ireland and an extensive review of the relevant secondary sources, I argue that the PIRA was successful in this regard because it deployed an ideology that balanced between the competing needs to simplify and explain the environment of its prospective followers.

3.2. Existing Theories of PIRA Dominance

The PIRA is one of the most extensively researched rebel groups in history, but despite this scholarly attention there exists no work of which I am aware that explicitly attempts to explain the mechanisms by which the PIRA out-competed its predecessor organization. Sub-national comparison of any kind in the conflict is rare. As Rekawek put it in his 2013 comparative analysis of the IRA, the PIRA "has never been systematically compared with its most immediate rival, neighbor, and competitor," the OIRA.[22] There have since been some direct comparisons - not least Rekawek's - but even these do not explain the specific competitive mechanisms at play in the early years of the conflict.

The PIRA is frequently used as a component of cross-national comparison (something I myself will do in Chapter 3), but these studies do not explain how the PIRA came to dominate the republican space after it splintered from the OIRA. For instance, Kenny (2010) conducts a comparative study of the PIRA and the Karen National Union in Burma to explain the causes of insurgent cohesion and structural integrity. He finds that the behavior of the state (its degree of repression and military activity) can explain structural integrity of the organization as a whole while a shared sense of sacrifice explains cohesion.[23]

But these explanations do not suffice to make sense of how the PIRA competed with its closest rivals. Moreover, they suggest a need for the kind of analysis I conduct here. Kenny explicitly calls for a more in-depth exploration of the conditions under which "members come

[22] **rekawek_their_2013**.
[23] Kenny, 2010, p. 552.

to identify the organization's goals as their own over time."[24] Nor does Rekawek attempt to explain PIRA dominance relative to its domestic competitors. Rather, he examines similarities and differences in the way the two organizations handled different periods of ceasefire and conflict.

Similarly, Malesevic and Dochartaigh (2018) explore why combatants fight and use the IRA as a case study. They find that individual motivations, small group solidarity, and local networks played a larger role than nationalism in motivating soldiers for much of the conflict.[25] While these findings reflect what I learned during my research, they do not explain why the PIRA as a specific organization was so uniquely capable of leveraging these motivations to their benefit.

Although no studies directly explore how the PIRA dominated sub-national competitors, the theoretical framework of "outbidding" is arguably the strongest competitor explanation for the dynamics I examine in this chapter. Outbidding is a competitive process by which rebel groups or terrorist organizations use successively more severe violence to "build support and advertise against domestic rivals."[26] Outbidding can create incentives for even ostensibly non-violent organizations to engage in terrorism or other forms of violence to maintain competitive viability.

Mahoney (2020) provides an overview of the literature on the performance of rebel groups following a splinter in the movement. He finds that researchers investigating the question of post-splinter durability "generally focus on the groups' strategies and have arrived at oppos-

[24]Kenny, 2010, p. 2023.
[25]**malesevic_why_2018**.
[26]Findley and Young, 2012, p. 706.

ing conclusions."[27] The first contends that "insurgent organization's opting for a primarily non-violent strategy will outperform groups using violence" because violence will alienate potential sympathizers. This first camp predicts that violent groups will outperform less violent groups because they outbid them.[28] The second "suggests that more extreme groups may 'outbid' moderate competitors by using violence to signal their superior resolve."

Mahoney concludes that the evidence in support of either hypothesis is mixed[29] but that there are clearly cases where "violence carried out by a more extreme faction can help that group outbid" their competition.[30] Perkoski (2022) also explores the performance of splinter groups after an organizational schism and argues that the cause of the split has important implications for the behavior and performance of the emergent group. Schisms caused by an "single, shared" ideological disputes will produce cohesive and controlled splinters, whereas schisms tactical disagreements will produce splinters that attract the most radical and violent elements of a movement[31]

By these arguments, the PIRA's success at outcompeting the OIRA is merely an outbidding story. They used more violence and so out-competed their more moderate counterpart for recruits. While I do not deny the importance of the PIRA's violent activity in their success, the outbidding explanation is, in my estimation, incomplete as a explanation for the PIRA's capacity to cultivate devotion. This is true for three reasons.

First, the predicted scope conditions under which outbidding is likely to benefit organi-

[27] **w_mahoney_splinters_2020**.
[28] **w_mahoney_splinters_2020**.
[29] **w_mahoney_splinters_2020**.
[30] **w_mahoney_splinters_2020**.
[31] Perkoski, 2022.

zations is not consistent with the PIRA's circumstance. Nemeth (2014) finds that violent outbidding is most effective when the state adopts a permissive posture towards violence, when society is accepting of violence, and within religious movements.[32] By contrast, the British government was severe in its response to violence and the PIRA was a left-wing organization - Nemeth finds that left-wing organizations respond to intra-movement competition by reducing violence.[33]

Second, outbidding can provide partial explanation for the PIRA's capacity to recruit radical volunteers, but it does not explain the extent to which PIRA volunteers were willing to sacrifice for the group. Perhaps if PIRA volunteers had merely been willing to perpetrate violence for the organization, outbidding would be a more compelling explanation. But they were also willing to spend decades in jail, abandon their families, starve themselves, go without clothes for years, and otherwise utterly upend their lives on behalf of the organization. Outbidding alone cannot explain this kind of devotion.

Finally and most importantly, there is important unexplained variation in the efficacy of violence as an outbidding mechanism that current theorizing does not address and that my theory can explain. The IRA espoused and engaged in violence throughout its existence, but it was only in the early 1970s that their tactics at last seemed to resonate with the Northern Irish population. The OIRA decided to de-prioritize violence in the 1960s because they determined that it was a poor means of attracting volunteers. Their timing was unfortunate, as I will discuss below, but their leadership had clearly determined that outbidding other

[32] **nemeth_effect_2014**.
[33] **nemeth_effect_2014**.

republican groups with violence had failed as a strategy to that point in the rebellion.

Again, I do not deny that violence was a critical feature of the PIRA's success. I also do not dismiss the value of outbidding as a theory of violence in rebel movements. I do contend, however, that my analysis provides critical insight into the conditions under which the outbidding school of thought has predictive power. It specifically explains how violence interacts with structural features of an organization's ideology and the conflict environment to determine whether that violence has a positive outbidding effect or whether it is alienating. The PIRA executed a violent campaign at a time when the simplicity and absolutism of violence underscored and increased the potency of their ideology.

Violence at a different time or in a different place would have interacted with their ideology and the environment differently and would therefore have had a different effect on their competitive performance. Below, I detail the features of the organization and the conflict that interacted with the PIRA's violent behavior to produce a highly potent ideology.

3.3. Ideological Balance and the PIRA

Based on the fieldwork I conducted in Northern Ireland and an extensive review of secondary source materials, I argue that the PIRA was able to dominate the militant republican space because of the *balance* of the ideology they deployed in the early years of the conflict. Below, I examine how the PIRA maximized the simplicity of their ideology relative to its salience and how the OIRA failed to do so and consequently failed to attract and sustain the most devoted volunteers in the conflict.

3.3.1. ***Simplicity - "United Ireland and Get the British Out"***

Perhaps in part because he spent 16 years in prison, Michael Culbert has very little time for bullshit. He is something like ball lightning in the room, constantly moving and brimming with energy. He speaks quickly and sharply in the platonic ideal of a Belfast accent. When, after our interview, I meekly asked if he might consider introducing me to Gerry Adams - a close acquaintance of his - he laughed in my face. He told me in no uncertain terms that Mr. Adams was retired and wished me a sardonic best of luck in getting an interview. I never did get that interview. He is as passionate today about the cause of Irish republicanism as he was when he joined the PIRA following Bloody Sunday, although his energies are now directed towards running an organization representing former prisoners of war, Coiste Na nIarchimi.

I asked every man I interviewed how they would have described the mission of the PIRA when they joined as young men. Culbert gave a characteristically blunt answer: "We had

to try to throw these boys out."[34] The phrase I heard more than any other during my time in Northern Ireland was "Brits Out." It was the rallying cry of the generation of men and women who came of age during a time when Catholic communities were under siege and British soldiers occupied their streets. Culbert would later describe the PIRA's message in 1972 as "primitive." He did not mean it as an insult. The simplicity of that message - its primal, totalizing nature - was the PIRA's greatest asset during the early years of the conflict.

The people of Northern Ireland have been beset by a daunting array of challenges for many decades. The causes of those problems are myriad and multifaceted. They are sociological, economic, political, religious, cultural, and (not least) imperialistic. Untangling such a complex web to produce lasting improvement is a multi-generational effort that would require many different interlocking policy solutions with no guarantee of success. But this is a frustrating and bewildering view of the world. Nobody wants to hear that their suffering emerges from complex dynamics and that the solution is commensurately unclear. They want to know who to blame and they want to know how to fix things.

The PIRA provided a comprehensive and minimally complex map of the Northern Irish environment in the early 1970s. The British were the source of every problem and the solution to every problem was to expel them from Ireland. Who exactly are the British? Don't worry about it. Do Irish Protestants want the British gone? If they don't, it's because they're confused and they'll certainly come around. What do we do about governance once

[34]Culbert, Michael. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 19, 2022

we get rid of the Brits? That's a problem for another day; besides the main impediment to good governance is the British anyway, so we're killing two birds with one stone.

A central axiom of this ideology was that reform of Stormont was impossible and nonviolent political mechanisms were broken beyond repair. The seat of the Northern Irish government was seen as a "Protestant parliament for a Protestant people"[35] that was "unable to exist without its alleged founding pillar - discrimination against nationalists."[36] The founders of the PIRA argued that Irish Catholics could not participate meaningfully in politics and, even if they could, the institutions were so fundamentally rotten and biased against the Irish that there was no hope for incremental change.

The British would not move themselves and nonviolent routes were no longer viable. War was the only recourse. Take the fight to the Brits, because they needed to go and there was no other way to show them the door. "Cathal", who joined the PIRA early in the conflict and quickly rose to a position of local leadership, recalls that the PIRA's initial ideological breakthrough was the realization that "you couldn't just change things from within. You had to, I suppose, take control of the state all in one."[37] Culbert put it more bluntly: "you just realized, after Bloody Sunday and all the rest, you couldn't talk to these fuckers."[38]

This logic excluded everything but violence as a legitimate response to British oppression. Such blanket exclusion is, of course, the essence of simplification. Ideologies make sense of otherwise incomprehensible environments by selecting the right variables to care about at

[35]Taylor, 1998, p. 33.
[36]Rekawek, 2011, p. 5.
[37]"Cathal". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on January 25, 2022
[38]Culbert, Michael. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 19, 2022

the expense of every other possible variable - of which there are infinitely many. The PIRA deployed an ideology that was able to exclude every possible dimension that was not reducible to "get the Brits out and do it with violence."

Almost everyone I interviewed emphasized the power of the PIRA's clarity and simplicity in messaging and the role of that simplicity in the organization's early success. Danny Morrison characterized it as a straightforward chain of events. "The nationalist community set out to get their civil rights, and they were suppressed. The IRA came along . . . and said 'look, you're not gonna get your civil rights unless you get your national rights, and you're not gonna get your national rights until you get the Brits out.'"[39] This simple "British out and wage war to get there" had "worked well for the first several years of the conflict" at attracting young men to the cause, according to Morrison.

Anthony McIntyre ("Mackers" to those who know him well) believes that simplicity was not merely a useful ideological feature, but rather a core component of the organization from its outset. McIntyre joined the IRA very early in the conflict and was imprisoned for murder in 1974. He spent 18 years in "Long Kesh" prison, including 4 on the "blanket"[40] in protest against British criminalization of republican volunteers. He remains deeply committed to Irish nationalism - although he believes the current incarnation of the IRA manifest in Sinn Fein has abandoned the axiomatic principles of the republican movement. Despite his ideological commitment, he is unambiguous in his perspective on the organization's early articulation of the conflict.

[39]Morrison, Danny Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 20, 2022

[40]the "blanket" protests occurred in the H-blocks of the "Long Kesh" prison. During this protest, prisoners refused to wear any clothes or accept other amenities from the British.

"They made things black and white, and that always appeals to people who think in black and white terms" he recalls.[41] "They said 'the problem is the British and the problem will be solved when the problem goes" which would have "clarified an awful lot for people" who needed clarity at a time of great uncertainty. But it was a "soundbite type clear"[42] that never went much beyond Brits Out.

"The IRA hit their sweet spot with that one term" according to McIntyre. "And that one term was broad enough and narrow enough to everyone a stake and an answer. It became a universal panacea. At the same time though, it grossly oversimplified the answer."[43] Most men I interviewed spoke more positively about this simplifying effect, but to Anthony it was "a child's understanding of the conflict, a lot like the westerns: John Wayne is the good guy and everyone else was the bad guy, and it was just that simple."

Michael Culbert and Anthony McIntyre agree about very little these days, but Culbert too recognizes the power of the PIRA's simplistic messaging. "We had to get the British out of here, although we didn't overly analyze who was[sic] 'the British.'"[44] He sees this simplicity as an analytical error in retrospect, but believes it was a critical and necessary perspective at the time. Because there was "no mechanism, no political party, that represented 'Brits Out'" it was necessary to wage war. "Had to be 'Brits Out'" he says with sobering conviction for a man so many years removed from the conflict. After a pause, he says simply, "primitive."[45]

"Cormac", who came from a rural community and assumed a role in recruitment before

[41]McIntyre, Anthony. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 25, 2022
[42]McIntyre, Anthony. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 25, 2022
[43]McIntyre, Anthony. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 25, 2022
[44]Culbert, Michael. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 20, 2022
[45]Culbert, Michael. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 20, 2022

the British imprisoned him, uses similar language to characterize the PIRA's mission. "Very black and white, I suppose very primitive language, but that's what people wanted to hear."[46] For Cormac, there "were no alternatives, no going back to a six-county Unionist state." He believed then, although he does not necessarily believe now, that you had to "fight the Brits hard enough and that was that." When I asked "Fergus", the youngest man I interviewed, how he would have characterized the goal of the PIRA when he joined the organization in the late 1970s, he answered immediately and almost without thinking: "One sentence. We want to end British rule in Ireland."[47] He landed on each word as though he wanted to drive them into my head.

Ricky O'Rawe does not believe that the PIRA leadership was necessarily conscious of the effect of the simplistic messaging, nor does he think it was a manipulation on their part. But he nevertheless acknowledges its potency. "Most of the IRA was very happy with 'Brits out' because it was very simple, it was *understandable*."[48] O'Rawe recalls that "there was no middle ground: it was the Republic or nothing." This appealed to a group of young men who saw the world in a "non-intellectual way", according to Ricky, and whose personal circumstances did not permit the cognitive burden of nuance.

According to "Murtagh", who grew up in the Catholic slum of Derry called "Bogside", his involvement in the conflict was "quite an instinctual reaction."[49] He spent more than a decade in prison but came back to the Bogside upon his release and committed himself

[46]"Cormac". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan. January 25, 2022
[47]"Fergus." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 27, 2022
[48]O'Rawe, Ricky. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on January 19, 2022
[49]"Murtagh". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 28, 2022

to community activism. But as a young man he was principally motivated by a powerful desire to react to the Bloody Sunday massacre of 1972, in which British soldiers murdered 14 unarmed Bogsiders during a civil rights march. The provisionals "had clear aims and objectives" which matched the "clear cut conditions on the ground" in Murtagh's community.

Seanna Walsh is a Sinn Fein politician today, but by the time he was 42 years old he had spent most of his life in prison. He was arrested and jailed three times over the course of the conflict. He participated and was a leader of the Blanket Protest and the hunger strikes. He was not released from his third and final conviction until the 1998 Belfast Accords led to the release of a large cadre of IRA volunteers. He says that, had it not been for the Accords, he would be proudly in prison to this day. In 2005, he became the first person since 1972 to formally represent the IRA in public without a mask.

Not a man to do things by half measures, the PIRA's clarity was a powerful draw. In Walsh's mind, "the political project was simply defined in terms of driving the British into the sea."[50] His job, and the job of his compatriots, was to "attack the enemy, it was basically a no-brainer. There are the British, we want to get rid of them. How do you get rid of them? You shoot them. It was as simple as that. There was no nuance to it." I asked him whether that lack of nuance bothered him then or now. It did not and it does not. "Didn't bother me," he said. "It's what I signed up for."

"Cathal" joined the IRA as a very young man (younger than the PIRA would have allowed him to join had he told the truth about his age) and was also attracted to the

[50]Walsh, Seanna. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 26, 2022

organization because of its clear sense of purpose. "It was a very simplistic mission" he recalls. "32 county socialist republic, end partition, defend against all enemies."[51] This simplicity was a "direct appeal" to Cathal's sense of righteousness and fury at the "pogrom" he was witnessing against his Catholic neighbors. He felt "implicitly, morally superior" in his pursuit of the PIRA's absolutist agenda.

Cathal is not the only man I interviewed who quoted Bobby Sands from memory, but Cathal did it best. When we discussed the PIRA's mission, he interrupted his own train of thought to recite - as though by muscle memory - several stanzas of the poem Sands wrote from the prison cell in which he would eventually starve to death. "It lights the dark of this prison cell / It thunders forth its might / It is the 'undauntable thought' my friend / The thought that says 'I'm Right!'" Cathal said these lines with the same kind of grim conviction that Culbert demonstrated when he talked about the cause. It was this unerring sense of rightness, expressed in different ways by nearly everyone I interviewed, that the PIRA managed to leverage so effectively with its simplistic messaging.

None of my interviewees recall being particularly motivated by conventional politics or any kind of nuanced understanding of republican ideology. These things came later, in prison or during the political revival of the 1980s. Some came from republican families and so had a rudimentary understanding of the mythology of the anti-colonial struggle, but most had no familial connection to the movement. What they lacked in a common political understanding, however, they made up for in spades with a shared sense of the outrage,

[51] "Cathal." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 22, 2022

conviction, and righteousness. Their deep moral conviction became a kind of crude politics - one which rejected any hint of compromise, was incompatible with subtlety, and which demanded absolute commitment.

The Officials failed to understand or capitalize upon that prevailing emotional and ideological sentiment in the core constituency of Irish Catholics. Under the leadership of Cathal Goulding, they deployed an ideology that had all the complexity, subtlety, and nuance that the men I spoke with rejected out of hand. Goulding aspired to bridge the divide between working class Catholics and Protestants. He believed that, once you saw the world through dialectical materialism, it was clear that the grievances of these two under-served communities against capital were more powerful than any artificial enmity across religious or cultural lines. He saw the mission of republicanism as a piece of the larger global struggle towards socialism and saw violence as almost a distraction from that cosmopolitan venture.

As I will argue in chapter 3 when I discuss the Viet Minh, communism is a potent ideological framework within which to achieve effective balance between simplifcation and explanation. Communism, like the "Brits out" dictum, provides a theoretically parsimonious diagnosis and prescription of an environment. Capital is the source of every problem and the solution to every problem is to empower the working class to sieze the means of production. Of course Marx is much more complex than that pared down version of his thinking, but Communism can and often is communicated in these simplified terms. But there are several reasons why Goulding's application of Marxist thought was insufficiently simple.

First and foremost, it was the wrong kind of simplicity for the time and place. I will cover

this point extensively in the section below on salience. Second, the mechanism by which they espoused change introduced additional complexity. The OIRA wanted to solve the problem with electoral politics. Goulding wanted to build a grassroots working class coalition, end the policy of abstentionism, and drive the British out through the ballot box. The action required to build a long-term political movement and operate through existing institutions to effect change is much more complex than the PIRA's prescribed course of action: wage war to drive the Brits from the island.

Related to this additional mechanical complexity, the OIRA's platform introduced a longer time horizon. Nonviolent politics and coalition building takes time. It requires patience and thoughtfulness and a willingness to make common cause with strange bedfellows. The PIRA, however implausibly, promised results *now* if the will to war was strong enough. They eventually recognized that they had to expand their timeline, as we will see in chapter 3; but at the outset of the conflict, victory was just around the corner if people were willing to fight hard.

Finally, although the theoretical components of Marxism are quite simple in their essential form, the PIRA's message was just simpler. "Brits out" does not require any understanding of class politics, dialectical materialism, or any history beyond the most immediate and pressing grievances of the day. It was about as close to a uni-dimensional understanding of the world as it is possible to achieve without straying into absurdity. The PIRA advocated maximally simple mechanics on an abbreviated timeline to achieve that uni-dimensional policy set, and consequently deployed an ideology that was far simpler than any of its relevant competitors.

However, simplicity alone is not enough. It is hardly difficult to espouse a maximally simplistic view of the world. On the contrary, it is almost definitionally easy if you are willing to abandon reason. The PIRA was effective at generating and sustaining devotion because it deployed an ultra-simplistic ideology in an environment where that simplicity was tolerable and did not critically interfere with perceived explanatory power. Recall that, prior to Cathal Goulding's tenure as Chief of Staff, the IRA had long argued that the British were the source of all woe and that it was necessary to wage single-minded war to drive them from Ireland. But prior to the Troubles, their argument fell on mostly deaf ears.

The Irish people were sympathetic to the political project of independence, but largely rejected the IRA's radical absolutism in the period between the Irish Civil War of the 1920s and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. As a consequence, the IRA was an essentially ineffectual organization for most of its existence in the 20th century. It was not until a combination of ethnic violence and state repression inflicted so much kinetic trauma on Northern Irish Catholics that the PIRA's simplistic messaging at last took root.

3.3.2. ***Salience - "Events on the Ground"***

Rory was born in Ballymurphy but would frequently visit his Grandma at her house on a hill overlooking his home town. He remembers being in her attic as a boy of 12, watching "what seemed to me to be all of Belfast burning." His father, who fought the Nazis in the Second World War, took him aside one day when British soldiers were marching down the street past his house and said to him: "that's Fascism there, in our streets, in our homes." Rory made a conscious decision at the age of 13 to fight the British. In his own words, "if

what I was witnessing on the streets where I lived was fascism, then we were fucked."[52]

It was with this profound sense of existential threat that the PIRA's ultra-simplistic messaging resonated so effectively in the early years of the conflict. And it was the attendant fury and need to act that Goulding and the other reformers in the Official IRA failed to recognize. The left-leaning, cosmopolitan message of the OIRA was not *wrong* in some objective sense. Nor was it necessarily *complex* when compared to many possible theories of Northern Ireland at the time. The PIRA would, in fact, adopt many of OIRA's attempted reforms later in the conflict - as we will see in Chapter 3.

But the OIRA's message was not fitted to the environment that emerged in the wake of the sectarian violence perpetrated against Irish Catholics. The PIRA's message, which had failed the IRA for so many decades before the Troubles, was suddenly a perfect match for the new world in which the country found itself. Where before the balance of the ideology was flawed because the simplicity of "Brits out" excluded too much of the relevant environment for most Irish Catholics, sectarian violence functionally narrowed the aperture of relevance.

It is easy to care about a long-term socialist political project or to reject violence as an end-unto-itself when one lives in relative peace. But when Protestant militia are burning families out of their homes or beating people to death in the streets, these considerations tend to fall by the wayside. The PIRA's message did not objectively explain more of the environment in 1972 than it did in 1952; but the *subjective* world of the population it was appealing to in 1972 was so narrowed by conflict that the fit - and, therefore, the salience -

[52]"Rory." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on 5/2/2022

of the ideology was hugely strengthened.

The ideology therefore achieved a balance between simplification and explanation during the Troubles which had previously eluded it. The OIRA's ideology - despite incorporating what most now agree were the objectively "right" lessons of history - suddenly became far less salient because it was attempting to explain elements of the world that were no longer a part of people's political consciousness. It's balance between simplification and explanation was therefore critically damaged.

In my interviews, the phrase I heard most frequently other than "Brits out" was "events on the ground." Again and again, the men I spoke to emphasized that their sense of politics and their decision to join the PIRA rather than some other organization was a function of the every day reality of living under threat. Events on the ground made it perfectly clear to them what needed to be done and the message of the OIRA was simply not relevant to the new world.

"Brendan," who is a member of Culbert's PoW organization, recalls how things fundamentally changed after Bloody Sunday. "People were lined up around the corner of the IRA recruting centers after that," he told me. "They just wanted to do something so badly and the PIRA was doing something."[53] When I asked him why he had chosen the Provos instead of the Officials after Bloody Sunday, he gave a similar answer to many of the men with whom I spoke: "The only thing people were interested in was 'who had the guns and who was gonna fight the British . . . the Provos were going to keep the fight going and the

[53]"Brendan." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 24, 2022

Stickies[OIRA] weren't."

Michael Culbert agrees. Bloody Sunday also "knocked [him] out of inattention." Before then, he was "more interested in football and his girlfriend than politics."[54] After that, his politics were still unsophisticated - "visceral," he describes them - but he had an acute belief that reform was no longer possible. "Timely reform works, untimely reform doesn't, and the ball was already rolling down the hill."

He recalls that the OIRA and others like them who wanted to "talk to the Brits" were a "laughing stock."[55] "What do you wanna talk to them fer?" he asked mockingly. "They internin' people, breakin' into people's homes, killin' people, bastards, and you wanna talk." Eventually, he says, people determine, "oh, you're just scared of em', ain't you?" The OIRA was "for dialogue" but the Northern Irish Community was "past that", according to Culbert.

Anthony McIntyre was also motivated to join by "facts on the ground." He recalls that "point of contact you had with the British government was British soldiers" and that - often as not - meant you caught a beating.[56] The PIRA was more effective at recruitment and retention of devotees in the early years of the conflict, according to McIntyre, because they "were relevant to the facts on the ground and they had an answer to the questions raised by the facts on the ground."

To McIntyre and many men like him, the Officials sounded "highfalutin with all this stuff about political theory. It seemed absolutely stupid to young people to be told, when there was a loyalist gang approaching, and to hear that the thing to do was approach someone

[54]Culbert, Michael. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 19, 2022
[55]Culbert, Michael. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 19, 2022
[56]McIntyre, Anthony. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 25, 2022

from the working class with the same class interests: that meant nothing."[57] He continued: "ya know, there is no point in saying 'the fellow worker is good and all' if that fellow worker is burning you out of your house." He concluded with a rhetorical question that perfectly encapsulates the frustration I heard again and again regarding the approach of the Officials at the time. "What answer would the Officials have had to Bloody Sunday? They had no answer."

For "Colum", who joined the PIRA after Bloody Sunday and now runs a community organization in West Belfast, his motivation to join was crystal clear. "I saw my friend die in front me of, killed by British Soldiers. As basic as that. That was that for me and no sayin' otherwise."[58] He was as deaf and disinterested to the message of intra-class solidarity as McIntyre was at the time. Cormac felt much the same. For him, "the Officials had no credibility." They thought the "state was still reformable, but people knew there was no reforming the state."[59]

Ricky O'Rawe still has "vivid images" of his grandfather choking on CS gas during a civil rights protest; this image compelled him to join the PIRA and made it unthinkable to view the British in anything but antipathetic terms. He recalled that, "we viewed the British the same way that French people saw German soldiers on their streets."[60] The "sense of righteousness" he felt in taking up arms was "absolute" and "unquestioning" at the time. Fergus remembers feeling the same. "If people come into your house and wreck it, what

[57]McIntyre, Anthony. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 25, 2022
[58]"Colum." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 29, 2022
[59]"Cormac". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan. January 25, 2022
[60]O'Rawe, Ricky. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on January 19, 2022

would any normal human do?" he asked. In his mind, there was only one way a "normal human" would react: with militant opposition.

Murtagh also points to "events on the ground" as cementing his conviction to join the PIRA rather than the OIRA. He says that he regarded the Officials as "unprofessional, unmotivated, essentially gangsters."[61] The PIRA was about "taking the fights to the Brits" while the Officials were about "self gain" in his mind. He could not fathom why a group would do anything other than fight the British given the circumstances on the ground except out of base selfishness, laziness, or stupidity.

Laurence McKeown "never would have considered" any organization other than the Provos when he decided to participate in the struggle. In his mind, "events on the ground made a ceasefire ridiculous"[62] and he believed the OIRA was intent on a ceasefire. He joined the Provos, and believes others did the same, because "they were doing something" and the Officials were not. Here again it is critical to note that the OIRA was, in fact, active at this time. Rekawek (2011) has comprehensively documented the activity of the Officials in the early stages of the conflict, and they were far from dormant.[63]

But the kind of activity they were engaged in had become either irrelevant or actively anathema to the most dedicated cadre of prospective volunteers. Rory, who spoke so passionately about the need to remember the past, recalls thinking of the OIRA as "elderly men caught in a time warp."[64] He had ample opportunity to join either the youth wing of the

[61]"Murtagh". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 28, 2022
[62]McKeown, Laurence. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 28, 2022
[63]Rekawek, 2011, p. 521.
[64]"Rory." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on 5/2/2022

Provisionals or the Officials - both of which had a presence in Ballymurphy - but there was never really a choice for him.

When I asked him how he would have characterized the respective missions of the PIRA and the OIRA as a young man, he gave an honest (if unfair) appraisal of the differences between the two organizations in the minds of his contemperaries. "The Provisional mission was to free Ireland. The Official mission was to convince the Unionists to free Ireland." Rory appreciated the social work and the community outreach that the Officials were achieving at the time, but at the end of the day he believed that you "had to defend Catholics. Good for them, but you have to defend your home, don't you?"

Rory believes that the Provisionals out-competed the Officials because they recognized that the "northern nationalist psyche had changed. They were no longer willing to tolerate what they'd been willing to tolerate." He described the "pogroms" he witnessed as a "crossing of the Rubicon" that forever altered the landscape of the country. The Officials failed to recognize (or refused to adapt to) that changed world, while the Provisionals eagerly embraced it.

Seanna Walsh saw more than his fair share of sectarian brutality growing up, but it was violence against peaceful protestors in the late 1960s that marked him indelibly as a revolutionary. These events "exposed the psychology of what the state was for. It was a Protestant state for Protestant people."[65] He determined that "there's only one thing these guys understand, and the only way to fix things is to get the British army out of the streets."

[65]Walsh, Seanna. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 26, 2022

The Officials existed in Walsh's community to an extent, but they did not exist "as a threat the British." The Provisionals were the only group that were "willing to do something about the violence and the killings and the burnings." This is again a critical distinction: it is not that the Officials were absent from the political environment. Rather, the message they deployed and the tactics they chose to employ were irrelevant to that environment. Walsh did not regard them because they were engaged in a struggle that was a universe removed from the beatings and bloodshed directly in front of his eyes.

The essential point here is not that the PIRA was "correct" in their analysis of the conflict of their prescription for behavior. Rather, the PIRA deployed an ideology that was *subjectively* better fit for the environment. The OIRA's ideology did not resonate with the population - and therefore lacked salience - because it attempted to incorporate lessons of history that ceased to be relevant once sectarian violence began in earnest. Cathal Goulding saw the IRA as a vanguard in a broader global struggle against capitalism. He saw little difference between the Irish Catholic and the Irish Protestant; indeed, there is little apparent difference.

But their similarities operated at the level of class, nationality, and a shared global struggle against oppressive economic forces. The salient level of analysis for the men I interviewed, however, was local. Death and suffering had stripped them of the luxury of any perspective except the most immediate need for communal defense. They could not even tolerate the complexity of real Republican politics, let alone a global call to transcend parochial divides in the name of class solidarity.

This recitation of accounts from the men I interviewed is an attempt to impress upon the reader what was so powerfully impressed upon me during my research; that they were furious and scared and determined beyond measure to defend their neighbors and the PIRA created a space in which they could do something about how they felt. The PIRA did not attempt to answer a question they weren't asking or answer their questions in ways that ignored the reality driving the question in the first place. They provided an answer to the right questions in the right ways at the right time. Their ideology was, in other words, maximally fit.

3.3.3. ***Outbidding and the Role of Violence***

As discussed, the current explanation for the role of violence in the success of the PIRA is incomplete. There is certainly something visceral about violence that is intrinsically appealing to a subset of prospective insurgents. Violence also demonstrates commitment relative to competitor organizations. But violence is not always an effective outbidding mechanism. This is evident both in the history of the IRA and in the outbidding literature, which identifies a large number of factors that influence the extent to which violent outbidding is likely to occur and/or work as a competitive tool.

It is possible to explain this variation, I contend, by re-conceptualizing violence as a mechanism of ideological simplification. There is a brutal simplicity to violence. It is immediate, it is reactive, and you can see the effects of it with your own eyes. It is so extreme that it often precludes all other courses of action, which has the effect of simplifying the decision-set of possible behavior. Perhaps more importantly, the PIRA's violence manifested the

simplicity of their message in action. It was the most direct signal they could send that, when they said "Brits out", they really meant it - and meant nothing else.

None of the men I spoke with denied the importance of the PIRA's use of force in their motivation to join and persevere in the movement; but they always discussed the violence in connection with what it communicated about the PIRA's beliefs and intent. The simplicity of taking the fight to the British solved a cognitive challenge that seemed otherwise insurmountable. How is a person supposed to act in the face of persistent physical trauma? How can a person feel as though they are in control of their environment - as though they understand it - when forces utterly beyond their control are disintegrating their communities?

Violence may not be an effective answer to these questions in the final analysis (I personally believe it is not), but it is *comprehensible*. In the absence of violence, the proper course of action is uncertain. The possibilities for recourse that remain are unsatisfactory by comparison because the relationship between cause and effect is so much less direct. The simplicity imposed by violence is therefore powerfully satisfying.

I believe this explains why violence is an effective outbidding tool, but it also explains why it sometimes is not. The ultra-simplicity of violence is sometimes a competitive feature of an ideology but it can be a detriment under the right conditions. Recall that simplicity increases total ideological utility only when it is not offset by a critical reduction in explanatory power or when the individual's aversion to complexity is so high that they will pay almost any premium in explanation in order to attain simplicity.

During the early years of the Troubles, the PIRA found a way to compress a great deal of information into a very simplistic message ("Brits out"), which permitted the ultra-simplicity of violence without critically sacrificing explanatory power. Just as importantly, the sectarian violence that preceded the conflict had created an environment where the average level of aversion to complexity was likely high. I must speculate here somewhat, since I cannot observe average levels of aversion to complexity, but the testimonial evidence of my interviewees suggests that nobody had much time for nuance in 1971. Under these conditions, the simplicity of violence was a boon to the PIRA's ideology - and, consequently, their outbidding capacity - where before and after it was less effective as a competitive tool.

3.4. Conclusion

To return to the language of my formalized theory, the PIRA out-competed the OIRA in the early years of the conflict as a repository for the devoted because they deployed a more potent ideology. Recall the posited utility function for ideological potency:

$$u(I) = \frac{PR}{k^{\alpha}} \tag{3.1}$$

In the denominator, the PIRA minimized the complexity of their ideology by reducing the entire conflict to "Brits out." This produced an essentially uni-dimensional interpretation of the environment. One could therefore conceptualize the denominator of the PIRA's ideological utility as a "1" (i.e. the α has little or no influence on the total value of the utility function because there are no additional dimensions to impose a complexity premium).

In the numerator, "events on the ground" produced a narrow subjective political environment that the uni-dimensional ideology was well-fitted to explain. The same historical forces likely produced an environment with a high average level of aversion to complexity, heavily punishing any increase in the number of dimensions a given ideology brought to bear.[66] And because the content of the uni-dimensional frame spoke directly to the most pressing psychosocial questions of the day, it also resonated powerfully with the community. By maximizing its fit and resonance, the PIRA therefore maximized the salience (numerator) of their ideology.

By contrast, the OIRA deployed an ideology that, while simple relative to many pos-

[66]Here again, I can only speculate about average levels of aversion to complexity, since this feature of my theory remains under-explored. More work remains to be done to unpack this phenomenon and specify its dynamics

sible interpretations of the environment, was substantially more complex than the PIRA's competitor variant. They argued for an understanding of the conflict that transcended local grievance, proposed a policy-set that had a more complex line of causality to outcome, and operated on a longer (and therefore more complex) timeline. While it would be arbitrary to propose a specific value for the denominator of the OIRA's ideological utility, I posit that it was certainly greater then 1. The α parameter therefore imposed some cost on the utility of their model that it did not impose on the PIRA's model.

In the numerator, the OIRA deployed an ideology that was designed for a different political environment. Its scope was too large for the newly narrowed subjective political environment of Northern Ireland and the questions it sought to answer were no longer pre-eminent in the minds of its prospective volunteers. The fit and the resonance of their model was therefore reduced. Here again, it would be arbitrary to assign specific values to these parameters for either the OIRA or the PIRA; the essential point is that there is strong evidence that the OIRA values in the numerator were smaller than that of the PIRA. Given that the PIRA's denominator was also smaller than the OIRAs, this implies an unquestionably larger total utility for the PIRA's model of the world.

The α for the environment is unknown, except insofar as we can postulate that conflict will probably tend to increase aversion to complexity. However, because the PIRA and the OIRA were operating in essentially the same environments and attempting to appeal to essentially the same populations, we can assume that the α for the two functions is close to identical. And because the two organizations were competing with one another in

such similar circumstances, I have accounted for the great majority of possible environmental confounders. It is therefore possible to conclude conclude that the differences I have identified played an important role in the clear superiority the PIRA exhibited in the capacity to cultivate devotion in the early years of the Troubles.

Chapter 4

"Armalite and the Ballot Box" - Ideological Balance in Other Contexts

Danny Morrison has a gift for compression. During his time in Long Kesh prison from 1972 to 1975, PIRA leadership took note of his way with words and appointed him to a series of successively more influential communications positions in the movement. This culminated with his appointment as Director of Publicity for Sinn Fein, the political party most closely associated with the PIRA. In this capacity, he gave a speech at Sinn Fein's 1981 *Ard Fheis* (Annual Conference) in which he famously summarized what was to become the PIRA's governing logic in the years to follow.

"Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box?" he asked the assemblage of volunteers, "but will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in this hand

and an Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?"[1] An Armalite in one hand, a ballot paper in the other. With these words, Morrison managed to summarize and reconcile two of the most powerful - and ostensibly contradictory - traditions in the history of Republican resistance: violent struggle and electoral struggle.

This rhetorical turn simultaneously demonstrates the enduring capacity of the PIRA to deploy a well-balanced ideology over the course of protracted conflict and the external validity of the posited theory of ideological potency in civil conflict. In chapter 2, I closely examined a single historical incidence of a rebel group exhibiting profound ability to attract and maintain devoted fighters. I presented evidence that they were able to do so in large part because of an effective balancing between ideological simplicity and salience. In this chapter, I examine three additional case studies that each demonstrate the importance of ideological balance in rebel movements across time and space.

First, I examine the PIRA in the early 1980s. This case is separated from the analysis in chapter 2 not by geography or historical context, but by time. The PIRA of the hunger strikes and of electoral politics was technically the same organization as that which emerged following the 1969 split, but it was operating in a radically different political environment. It was fighting the same enemy and had ostensibly the same goals, but the conflict was very different in ways I discuss below. This case presents an opportunity to conduct comparative analysis between two cases that share almost every feature but differ markedly by temporal dynamics. I therefore demonstrate the durability of the theory over key inflection points

[1]Keefe, 2018, p. 181.

throughout a protracted dispute.

Finally, I compare and contrast two geographically and temporally distinct rebel movements - the Viet Minh and Renamo. The Viet Minh fought a successful insurgent campaign against the French government in the aftermath of the Second World War. Renamo, by contrast, fought the incumbent Frelimo government in Mozambique in an extraordinarily brutal conflict that ultimately did not achieve its goals. To reiterate from the introduction, these cases fit Gerring's typological categories of Diverse, Extreme, and Crucial.[2] That is: they manifest important variation along both the independent and dependent variable; they represent extreme variants of their respective types (highly effective ideological deployment vs. highly ineffective ideological deployment); and they are crucial in the sense that, if the theory cannot explain their respective successes and failures, it is not valid.

In the case of the Viet Minh, their revolutionary movement (including their successor organization, the Viet Cong) is perhaps the most cohesive and effective insurgency of the 20th century.[3] As we will see, their soldiers exhibited remarkable devotion to their cause and were capable of enduring prolonged warfare with the Japanese imperial army, the French Colonial government, and the United States military in successive decades. I must demonstrate that their success at cultivating a devoted hard core is due in some substantial part to effective ideological balancing or the theory will not hold water.

Regarding Renamo, they present a nearly unique opportunity to examine an insurgency that failed to develop a political project or deploy a psychologically potent ideology in many

[2]Gerring, 2009.
[3]Henderson, 1979.

areas where they operated. As Lewis (2020) argues, the great majority of insurgencies never make it past the aspirational stage of development.[4] If this theory is correct, then many organizations that completely fail to balance between explanatory power and complexity will have been lost to history. They will never have made enough of a mark to warrant serious scholarly attention.

The particular circumstances of Renamo's inception permitted it to mount a meaningful insurgent campaign without substantial recourse to ideology. Scholars have therefore devoted energy to documenting Renamo's activities during the conflict despite its ideological paucity. It is essential that I analyze the Renamo insurgency to demonstrate the consequences of a poorly deployed ideology even within the context of a movement that otherwise had the resources to persist. The historical record of Renamo allows me to examine precisely how a poorly balanced ideology manifests empirically and the attendant implications for the emergence (or lack thereof) of a hard core of devoted fighters.

4.0.1. ***Scope Conditions***

As I expand the argument to other contexts, it is important to articulate the scope conditions under which I expect ideological balance to be a particularly salient element of conflict outcomes. I do not suggest either that ideological balance is always preeminently important in conflict or that it is the only force at play in the cultivation of devotion. Rather, there are several scope conditions of the theory that influence how I expect it to manifest in the historical record.

[4]Lewis, 2020.

First, I do not claim that every successful insurgency necessarily deployed a psychologically powerful ideology or that every unsuccessful organization failed to do so. Rather, I claim that deploying a powerful ideology lowers other barriers to preference transformation and therefore makes success more likely. The litany of positive outcomes associated with the cultivation of devotion can be achieved through other means, but at greater cost. If we examine the most successful insurgencies, we are very likely to see that they engaged in this process of ideological manipulation. If we examine failed insurgencies or insurgencies that display low levels of devotion, we are likely to see that they did not engage in this process.

Second, it is likely that the specific articulation of an ideology will become less critical to devotion as an insurgency develops and becomes more sophisticated. Once a rebel group attains sufficient capacity to extract resources, hold territory, and distinguish themselves as a principle adversary of the state, they will acquire a certain inertia that assists in the generation of devotion. Social pressures and material interest will begin to align incentives with the goals of the rebel group whether or not they deploy a powerful ideology. However, effective ideological manipulation will always reduce the costs associated with preference transformation even when other incentives are also working in the organization's favor.

Fourth, I do not claim that every soldier in an insurgency need be devoted to or even aware of the explicit ideological tenets of the organization. The literature is clear that many soldiers endure the costs of combat because of social pressures from their comrades and superior officers. But it is also clear that a core contingent of ideologically committed soldiers can initiate, accelerate, and sustain that socialization process. This theory focuses

on the soldiers who are directly influenced by an organization's political ideology. More work is required to determine how many genuine devotees are required to initiate this process (or what proportion of a soldiery must be ideologically committed to attain broader devotion), but more is certain to be better. The wider the reach of the organizations ideological message and the more people they are able to continually expose to a powerful ideology, the more likely it is that some sufficient portion of their followers will exhibit devotion.

Finally, the extent to which an ideology is necessary to cultivate devotion will depend upon the dynamics of the specific conflict. More powerful incumbent states, more brutal conflict, more protracted warfare, and a large number of competitor rebel groups will all make ideologies more important. The higher the cost a soldier has to pay for participation in the conflict, the higher the barrier to preference transformation; effective ideologies lower the material costs of preference transformation and are therefore more critical in environments where incentives against participation are high.

In the case of the PIRa, they faced a powerful incumbent state and had to fight a protracted conflict in a crowded field of competitors. They had few resources at the outset of the conflict and had to contend against decades of demonstrated innefectiveness by previous iterations of the IRA. In the case of the Viet Minh, they faced a relatively powerful colonial state, experienced severe losses and setbacks at intermittent periods throughout the war, and had to compete with a wide array of competitor rebel groups at the outset of the conflict.

Renamo, by contrast, faced a corrupt, ineffectual, and institutionally weak incumbent state and had no meaningful competitor organizations vying for recruits. The former two

conflict environments demanded a psychologically valuable ideology to facilitate preference transformation, while the latter was more permissive of a "brute force" approach. In none of these cases was ideology irrelevant, but the context within which the conflict took place determined the extent of ideological influence.

4.1. The PIRA Evolved: Politics and Violence

Anthony McIntyre and Laurence Mckeown shared a cell in Long Kesh. They were on the blanket together. They were brothers in arms who would have died for one another. Today, they agree about very little where modern republicanism is concerned. They stand on opposite sides of a divide in the former members of the PIRA that has its roots in a remarkable transformation the organization executed in the 1980s. McIntyre believes that shift - and the Good Friday Agreement it eventually produced - was a profound betrayal of core republican ideals and the death of the Irish Republican Army as he understood it. McKeown believes it was a necessary transition that enabled the movement to extract critical concessions from the British and ultimately led to an advantageous peace. Accordingly, McIntyre is viciously critical of Sinn Fein - then and today - while McKeown supports the party.

Half by coincidence and half by geographical serendipity, I interviewed McKeown and McIntyre on the same day. They both live in the Republic of Ireland, about an hour away from one another. McIntyre refuses to live in Northern Ireland because it is "still occupied by the British." McKeown offered no such explanation for his choice of location - I suspect his reasons are somewhat more prosaic, given his temperament. Without prompting on my end, each man referenced the other during our interviews and did so with great respect. They held one another up as an example of the kind of person in the movement with whom they disagree strongly today but whose integrity and commitment to the cause are beyond contestation.

McIntyre is particularly contemptuous of those in his ideological camp who would ques-

tion McKeown's commitment. "People who say, 'oh Laurence left the cause or abandoned republican ideals', fuck that n'all," he says with a sneer. "This guy starved himself, nearly to death. They don't know what the fuck they're talkin about."[5] But as certain as he is of McKeown's commitment, he is equally certain that his faith in Sinn Fein is egregiously misplaced. McKeown, in turn, believes that McIntyre is too absolutist to pursue necessary compromise in pursuit of real gains.

The PIRA had to navigate this divide, magnified across hundreds of volunteers and many thousands of constituents across Northern Ireland, when they decided to pursue electoral politics in the wake of the hunger strikes in the early 1980s. Tension between these ideals of revolution have plagued Irish Republicanism since the inception of the Original IRA following the 1916 Easter Rising. It was at the heart of the split between the "Pro-Treaty" and "Anti-Treaty" factions that tore the movement in two after the 1922 peace treaty and precipitated the Irish Civil War. And it was at the heart of the disagreement that created the PIRA when it split from the OIRA in 1969.

Indeed, the PIRA was born from a commitment to the use of violence and a rejection of the left-leaning politics that had come to define an organization that many viewed as defunct. The PIRA was again struggling to make sense of these competing impulses when Morrison gave his speech to the 1981 conference. New leadership, in particular Gerry Adams (who would go on to become President of Sinn Fein for nearly four decades), had determined that the organization's staunch commitment to violent resistance could not alone earn the

[5]McIntyre, Anthony. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 25, 2022

Irish their freedom from British rule.[6] Adams and others knew, however, that they could not simply eschew violence lest they lose the support of the most intensely devoted volunteers in the movement. Morrison's rhetorical turn provided an elegant solution to this dilemma: assert that the contradiction did not exist.

Morrison was able to succinctly encapsulate the complexity and paradox of a decades-old revolutionary effort with the simple claim that the Irish had every right to simultaneously pursue violent and non-violent resistance. When I asked Morrison about this transition in organizational ethos, he said that he and others in the leadership had been contemplating a move into electoral politics since the late 1970's, but the perception in the movement would have been that any such effort would "suck on our resources and undermine the physical armed struggle."[7] It would have been impossible, said Morrison, to seriously contemplate electoral efforts without "risking a schism."[8]

This changed after the election of Bobby Sands to Parliament in 1981. Sands was a prisoner at the time and was leading a hunger strike to protest the criminalization of Republicanism in British penitentiaries. His election, very shortly before his death due to starvation in May of 1981, galvanized the republican movement in unprecedented ways.[9] It also demonstrated the value and feasibility of electoral politics. "The world suddenly said 'what's goin on there? the Brits said these people were criminals, and then 30,000 people votes for the guy, in jail?'"[10]

[6]Keefe, 2018, p. 167.
[7]Morrison, Danny. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan. April 18, 2022
[8]*ibid*
[9]Taylor, 1998, p. 7.
[10]Morrison, Danny. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan. April 18, 2022

Morrison and his contemporaries capitalized on this sea change in public perception to execute a stunning shift towards non-violent politics in an organization that had vociferously rejected non-violence repeatedly over the course of its half-century existence. Insodoing, they exemplified what I consider to be the single greatest strength of the PIRA: a capacity to meet the moment with an ideology that was *fitted* to the ever-changing environment of Northern Ireland without recourse to excessive complexity.

While the decision to engage in electoral politics ultimately alienated men like McIntyre, it emerged from an ideology that was designed to go the distance. It eschewed the ultra-simplistic narrative of the PIRA's early years in favor of a more nuanced and complex understanding of the republican political project. It expanded the temporal and conceptual scope of the movement, and insodoing widened the aperture and durability of its appeal. This pivot, in other words, enabled the PIRA to fight the "long war" that their previous ideological frame did not envision.

The results are clear in the historical record. Sinn Fein went from a political irrelevance - lacking all legitimate political power and utterly subsumed to the military goals of the PIRA - to the largest Irish Catholic political party in Northern Ireland.[11] More critically where the subject of this dissertation is concerned, it provided a sustainable engine of devotion that Gerry Adams knew the organization needed to generate if "the 'struggle' were to progress."[12] As in 1969, the PIRA were able to a potent ideology that balanced effectively between the need to simplify and explain and environment.

[11]Taylor, 1998, p. 354.
[12]Taylor, 1998, p. 354.

In the terms of my theory, the PIRA identified that they needed to adapt their ideology to sustain a longer conflict and to appeal to the preferences of a broader constituency - expanding from a core group of volunteers willing to engage in a violent campaign to the wider population of Irish Republicans who could propel Sinn Fein to electoral victory. As such, they sacrificed a substantial portion of the simplicity of their ideology to expand its scope and improve its resonance with more prospective followers. The *balance* of the ideology was preserved during this transition, and perhaps strengthened, but the composition of its elements shifted away from simplicity and towards explanation and resonance.

4.1.1. ***Simplicity***

There are conflicting accounts of how early in the conflict the leadership of the PIRA – and, in particular, Gerry Adams – realized that a course correction was necessary. By some accounts, Adams may have recognized from near the outset of the PIRA split that a purely militaristic approach was not feasible.[13] By his own account, he began as a devotee of the military approach and only later came around to the hybrid strategy that the PIRA would pursue in the latter stages of the conflict. Whatever the timing, there is no doubt that insurgent leadership consciously sought to move away from the short-term, purely militaristic message of the early PIRA towards what became known as "the Long War."

Danny Morrison, whose rhetorical fusing of "Armalite's and ballot boxes" was so critical to the PIRA's success in the latter stages of the conflict, described the Long War to me as an essential shift in perspective. "We knew by then that we weren't going to simply 'drive

[13]Keefe, 2018, p. 22.

the British into the sea' as some had initially hoped. We had to settle in, and prepare for a prolonged conflict, and we didn't know how long it might take."[14] The attitude of the movement had to change; it had to shift away from the immediacy of the early conflict – the desperate hope that enough energy and violence might bring about a swift end to occupation. If the movement was to survive for decades, as the leadership now believed it must in order to succeed, then a radical shift in perspective was required.

But therein lay a serious dilemma for the PIRA. As discussed in Chapter 2, the immediacy and simplicity of the PIRA's message was a core component of their success during the early conflict. Promises of driving the British into the sea and claims of the need for immediate communal defense galvanized the PIRA's initial popularity and transformed them into the de facto representative of republican insurgent energy. To now claim that there was no immediate end to the conflict in sight and that the British were a more determined foe than advertised was to risk elements of the platform that were most appealing to the aggrieved Irish Catholic population.

In effect, the PIRA was determined to intentionally increase the complexity of their ideology in order to widen the aperture of its political vision. They did this by expanding both the timeline of expected victory and the scope of necessary reform. The leadership did not, of course, think of their decision in terms of "increasing complexity," but the effect was the same nonetheless. Even as he was making the case for radical change, Gerry Adams was arguing "that it would be naive to expect immediate results."[15] He tried to convince

[14]Morrison, Danny Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 20, 2022
[15]168 Keefe, 2018.

his compatriots to "stop telling people victory is just a year away" and to "marshal your resources and plan for a fight that could take much longer."[16]

In addition to elongating the timeline, Adams began to "subtly modulate the language in which he talked about what victory itself might mean"[17] and the proper role of the revolutionary in Northern Ireland. "'Youse are politicians'", he would tell other republicans during his time in Long Kesh prison in an attempt to convince them that "the end of the conflict would likely result not merely from a military triumph, but from some variety of political settlement."[18] When he left prison in 1977, he proceeded to reorganize the Provos around his view that "the long war could not be won unless the struggle had a political dimension."[19]

The inclusion of a "political dimension" in addition to the military dimension is an increase in complexity as such. The inclusion of politics ran counter to almost every element of simplicity that defined the early ideology. Rather than immediate victory, the movement had to accept an indefinite timeline. Rather than single-minded fixation on the acquisition and deployment of weapons, volunteers now had to consider public service, constituencies, and electoral reality. They had to reconcile the contradictory calls to violent and non-violent action. And they had to accept the end of abstentionism, arguably the core pillar of republican resistance ideology in the 20th century.

By the early 1980's, the Adams wing of the Movement was "in ascendancy,"[20] as were

[16]Keefe, 2018, p. 168.
[17]Keefe, 2018, p. 168.
[18]Keefe, 2018, p. 168.
[19]Keefe, 2018, p. 171.
[20]Taylor, 1998, p. 322.

his attempted reforms. The effect of the shift was obvious in the testimony provided by my interviewees. They all spoke at length about the inclusion of the political and electoral dimensions in the ideology of the PIRA. While most believe that it was a necessary and effective shift, there is obvious disagreement. The inclusion of new and potentially contradictory dimensions into the modus operandi of the organization came into conflict with the clear simplicity of its previous iteration.

For some, like McIntyre and Ricky O'Rawe, the contradiction could not be ignored. For O'Rawe, "they most definitely lost the simplicity after the move to elections."[21] He is not explicitly opposed to electoral politics, but he does believe that the "elections impinged on the armed struggle." A series of what O'Rawe describes as "bad ops" in the late 1970s and early 1980s was "interfering with Sinn Fein's electoral prospects." He believes that, as a result, Sinn Fein/PIRA leadership began to deprioritize or shift resources away from armed action. This, according to O'Rawe, is where things started to get "watered down."

McIntyre agrees. He is also not opposed to electoral politics in general, but he does believe they are "basically incompatible with the core claim of republicanism; that the system of protestant domination in Northern Ireland could not be reformed."[22] Participation in politics was a tacit admission that the organization thought the Protestant-dominated institutions were not irredeemably broken. If the institutions were not irredeemably broken, according to McIntyre, then the justification for violence - that it was the only way for the marginalized Catholic community to express its will - was no longer valid.

[21]O'Rawe, Ricky. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on January 19, 2022
[22]McIntyre, Anthony. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 25, 2022

The dissonance is so severe that McIntyre now argues that all the PIRA's violence, including the violence he himself participated in, was illegitimate. Not because violent resistance to a colonial oppressor is unjustifiable, he emphasizes, but because it was violence "on behalf of an organization that never really believed their own justification for killing."[23] If the major political institutions of the Protestant system were functioning sufficient for electoral politics to work, then the situation was not so dire as to justify violence. He does not regret that he participated in a violent rebellion; he regrets that he participated on behalf of an organization that he believes betrayed its core principles.

Brendan Hughes was a close friend of Gerry Adams during his time in Long Kesh and became perhaps the most prominent military strategist in the PIRA's history. He was present during the 1969 split and was among the first men to join Mac Stiofain when they walked out of the *Ard Fheis* that year. He was primarily responsible for the Bloody Friday bombing, the PIRA's largest single attack in Belfast. He was as staunchly devoted to abstentionism and absolute militarism as anyone in the movement. He died in 2008, but the effect of the shift towards electoral politics is evident in the interviews and testimonials he provided before his death.

He felt deeply betrayed by the concession to politics and the subordination of the military effort to the electoral effort. Most of all, he felt betrayed by the Good Friday Agreement, which both McIntyre and O'Rawe characterize as the final manifestation of the organizational shift away from absolute rebellion. He joked that "GFA, tha acronym by which the accord

[23]McIntyre, Anthony. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 25, 2022

had come to be known, stood for Got Fuck All."[24] Like McIntyre, he wondered what it had all been for. "The lives he had taken, the young volunteers he had sent to die: his understanding of those sacrifices would ultimately be justified by a United Ireland. Instead, Adams had become a well-healed statesman."[25]

Like McIntyre, Hughes felt that the PIRA's participation in electoral politics and the willingness to accept less than maximally absolutist concessions from the British government invalidated the rationale they had used to justify violence. "'As everything turned out,'" he told the author of *Say Nothing*, "'not one death was worth it.'"[26] McIntyre used almost identical language during our conversation. For McIntyre, O'Rawe, Hughes, and many other members of the movement, the contradiction created by the inclusion of a new dimension in the ideological frame of the organization was fatal to the integrity of that frame.

These perspectives highlight the damage done to the potency of an ideology when rebel leaders increase its complexity. But for most of the men I interviewed, the inclusion of the political dimension was not fatal to the PIRA's ideological appeal. For "Murtagh," it had become clear by the early 1980s that "we couldn't just say to people what we usually said to people, which was 'Brits out.' People wanted someone who could deal with their problems in the streets and in their homes."[27] Eventually, he came to believe that "you have to have a political struggle, and Sinn Fein had to lead in that political struggle. Eventually you came to the conclusion that the political struggle had to have primacy. Violence wasn't enough,

[24]Keefe, 2018, p. 237.
[25]Keefe, 2018, p. 237.
[26]Keefe, 2018, p. 238.
[27]"Murtagh". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 28, 2022

you had to have something else."[28]

While in prison, McKeown played a prominent role in convincing other republican prisoners that the shift towards politics was essential. "You'd take all these military minded people," he told me, "and you'd say 'yeah ok, all that matters, but you gotta be involved in all this other as well. You need to be thinking about what comes after the war, after prison. How can you be making a change?'"[29] The goal was to get the volunteers thinking "more and more" about what it meant to be a republican, to govern justly, and to actually unite Ireland. In other words, the goal was to gradually inject complexity into the ideology to achieve longer term political goals.

McKeown did not think about it in terms of complexity vs. simplicity. But when I presented my theory to him at the end of our interview, he conceded that there was no doubt the net effect of the political shift was a substantial increase in the complexity of the PIRA's ideology. "Rory" made siilar arguments to his compatriots in prison. Rory emphasized the need to "temper the idea that 'freedom was at hand.'"[30] In the 1970s, he recalls, it was "just a matter of time until the British say 'right, we're out of here, we're gone.'" Before anyone could be convinced that politics was a necessary dimension of the struggle, they had to believe "that just fighting a little harder, a little longer" wouldn't work any time soon.

Seanna Walsh, like McKeown, was a leader during his time in prison and took seriously his responsibility to re-educate his peers. He saw it as his "job in jail to send people out into

[28]"Murtagh". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 28, 2022
[29]McKeown, Laurence. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 28, 2022
[30]"Rory." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on 5/2/2022

the community who were going to serve their community, or be community champions."[31] Walsh was committed to expanding the idea of what it meant to be a revolutionary. Although he believed (and still believes) fiercely in the justness and necessity of the war, he felt that republicans had to be just as devoted to addressing the needs of Irish Catholic population beyond simply ending partition.

"Cormac" was also deeply involved in the process of transmitting the revised ideology to other volunteers in and out of prison. In the early 1970s, "it was fight the Brits hard enough and that was that, but it was no longer really black and white in that sense by the 1980s."[32] "The simplicity of the past," he told me, "could no longer sustain you." For Cormac, the most critical part of the transition was convincing people that "you had to see armed struggle as a tactic rather than the sacred cow it was for many years."

"Fergus," who was a young man during the electoral transition and very much the intended audience for the messaging of Walsh and McKeown, acknowledged the potential contradiction introduced by electoral politics. However, he said that it simply didn't bother him - then or now. For him, the concept of "armalite in one hand and ballot box in the other didn't stop the war; it *became* the war."[33] Like essentially everyone with whom I spoke, he began the conflict committed absolutely to the war effort to the exclusion of everything else. But by the late 1970s, he had come to view electoral politics and the associated issue of governance as a core component of "the struggle" right alongside armed rebellion.

Like Fergus, "Colum" so "no contradiction at all between the Armalite and the ballot

[31]Walsh, Seanna. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 26, 2022
[32]"Cormac". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan. January 25, 2022
[33]"Fergus." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 27, 2022

box."[34] To him also, the electoral and military efforts were twin aspects of the broader struggle. He was convinced by circumstance and by the rhetorical efforts of PIRA leadership that, far from being a betrayal of republican principles, political activity was a fundamental requirement of effective rebellion. He credits his current career - as the leader of a community center in Belfast - to the shift in perspective produced during this period.[35]

Like everyone I interviewed from Coiste - Michael Culbert's prisoner of war organization - "Cathal" is fiercely proud of the work of Sinn Fein and his role in the transition to politics. He too, though, acknowledges the potential contradiction and complexity of the new dimension. "Initially, we thought we were going to have our 'Saigon' moment, and we were going to militarily force the British to withdraw. But by 75', get into 76', you realized that that wasn't going to happen. You then had to re-educate and re-orientate the entire army."[36] But talking about these things "forced you to analyze and think about the things you thought in the early days."

"Brendan," another Coiste member, is uncomfortable with thinking of his attitude as "righteous" - it "has a kind of religious connotation" that he wants to steer away from - but he was convinced beyond doubt by the arguments of the PIRA's leadership during the transition. He defines the revised vision of the republican movement as "realizing the potential of the people who live in this country. Partition doesn't allow that to happen."[37] The conceptual emphasis here is critical: Brendan began the conflict defining victory as a

[34]"Colum." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 29, 2022
[35]"Colum." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 29, 2022
[36]"Cathal". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on January 25, 2022
[37]"Brendan." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 24, 2022

military defeat of the British, plain and simple. He evolved over the course of the conflict in lock-step with PIRA leadership to instead define victory as the betterment of the Irish people. Partition is an impediment to that goal, in Brendan's articulation, but ending partition is no longer the end goal. It is instead an intermediary step towards a much more expansive political and humanitarian project.

Culbert too remembers the added complexity of the new political emphasis in the movement. He used to think of "politics as just politics, never getting into any major slicing down of liberalism, socialism, middle-of-the-roadism, communism, social democrats, I hadn't ever given it any major thought."[38] He still believed absolutely in the necessity of armed struggle, but paired it with a new political awareness that called for broader action. He recognizes, however, the dissonance it produced. "Some people just could not accept this business of 'the fuck we talking about that for? Fucking fight these boys' without analyzing, 'and then what?'"

Culbert recalls imploring his fellow prisoners to "get educated." He argued that "if we're gonna rule ourselves, we gotta know stuff. What do you know about economics? What do you know about, sort of, setting up industry and banking . . . and what do you know about fairness in society?"[39] These ideas "sort of seeped into your awareness" over time and gradually took root in the movement. Obviously, the incorporation of these disparate conceptions of "victory" and of the necessity for a post-conflict political project constituted a substantial increase in the complexity of the PIRA's ideology. Again, the

[38]Culbert, Michael. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 19, 2022
[39]Culbert, Michael. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 19, 2022

increased complexity was both temporal and conceptual. The fight would take much longer than first promised and victory was a much more expansive destination than first imagined.

4.1.2. ***Salience***

This new analytical tradition produced too much dissonance in the minds of some, such as McIntyre and O'Rawe, but for most of the men I interviewed it was the key to understanding how to take the struggle forward into a future of indeterminate duration. The historical record suggests that, although some in the movement became disaffected (e.g. the case of Brendan Hughes), the shift was largely successful and became widely accepted doctrine.[40] Several men I interviewed described it as the "engine" of the long war. It gave the movement the language, the rhetorical strategy, and the energy required for a sustained struggle.

But given the evident complexity this introduced, and the empirically observed dissonance it produced within the organization, how did the PIRA manage to execute this shift without critically jeopardizing the potency of their ideology? Recall that Cathal Goulding had tried to reshape the organization in much the same ideological vein in the late 1960s, only to create the 1969 schism between the Officials and the Provisionals. Somehow, the PIRA managed to do a decade later what Goulding had failed to do at the beginning of the conflict. In brief, the Adams contingent succeeded where previous reformed had failed because they executed a strategy to increase the fit and salience of the ideology to offset the increase in complexity.

The effect of these strategies, as we will see, was to undo the some of the psychological narrowing imposed by the sectarian violence of the 1960s and 1970s. In Chapter 2, I argued

[40]Taylor, 1998; Keefe, 2018; Rekawek, 2011.

that trauma and fear severely narrowed the relevant psychosocial environment of Northern Ireland such that an ultra-simplistic ideology was tolerable (and even preferable). The simplistic "Brits out" approach worked because it was trying to explain an environment that had become, in the minds of Irish Catholics, commensurately simple.

In the late 1970s into the 1980s, the PIRA re-expanded their psychosocial environment such that the added layers of complexity were necessary in order to provide minimum acceptable explanatory power. Time did some of their work for them. By about 1977, it had become apparent to many that the British were not simply going to leave. The simplistic prognostications of the early PIRA were not going to hold water much longer. Leadership chose to adapt to the changing world and actively accelerate that change through a combination of carefully crafted education programs, rhetorical campaigns, and sustained electoral action. Below, I detail how these strategies contributed to the overall salience of the model, thereby offsetting the increased complexity and preserving the balance and potency of the ideology.

Fit

The newly complex ideology of the PIRA proved an appropriate fit for the changing environment of Northern Ireland for several reasons. First and foremost, the conflict was not ending. By 1977, the PIRA had carried out thousands of attacks against targets across the island. In 1972 alone, there were over 12,000 shootings and bombing attacks in Northern Ireland[41] and had killed 100 British solders and wounded 500 more.[42] Despite this enormous

[41]Bishop and Mallie, 1992, p. 310.
[42]O'Brien, 1999, p. 119.

increase in violence and an unprecedented wave of support following Bloody Sunday, the British were not leaving. The election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979 further eroded hope for a swift victory.[43]

PIRA leadership realised that they "had to stop telling people victory is just a year away. Better to marshal your resources and plan for a fight that could take much longer."[44] To maintain the old promise of a swift victory was to risk an inevitable collision with reality. Simplicity and immediacy are all well and good insofar as psychological satisfaction is concerned, but it will eventually become absurd if it is proven wrong too obviously and too frequently. The Long War narrative emerged to counteract this possibility by creating new expectations that were more in line with the emerging reality of guerilla war.

Moreover, in shifting to the electoral realm, the PIRA had to expand their audience. The ultra-simplistic messaging of the early conflict was fitted to a constituency of the most hard core and devoted volunteers, but it was not as well-fitted to a broader electorate of Irish Catholics. The IRA had struggled for decades to convince the broader public that their militant approach was appropriate and had, for the most part, failed. Adams was determined not repeat these mistakes. As Anthony McIntyre put it to me, it was like "casting more hooks to catch more fish outside their own pool. In order to broaden and become a hegemonic force outside their own community the language had to change, it couldn't stay the same. You had to broaden your message and balance it between the people already in your community and the people outside it."[45] The Long War narrative and the new emphasis on politics was

[43]Keefe, 2018, p. 172.
[44]Keefe, 2018, p. 167.
[45]McIntyre, Anthony. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 25, 2022

a way to speak to this new constituency; a message perhaps less well-fitted to the Brendan Hughes' of the world, but a far better fit for the wider environment of potential supporters the organization now sought to court.

In the end, though, nothing altered the political environment in favor of the PIRA's new platform more than the hunger strikes in the early 1980s and the election of Bobby Sands to parliament. Sands was made Officer Commanding of the Maze Prison, succeeding Brendan Hughes, and died of starvation on hunger strike in 1981. He was elected shortly before his death in May of that year. He technically only spent one month as an MP elect, but his tenure indelibly changed the movement. Sands is a mythical figure in republican history. He was spoken of, and quoted, reverently a dozen times in the interviews I conducted and was described by turns as brilliant, charismatic, determined, dynamic, and heroic. Sand became in the minds of many volunteers, particularly any who had served time with him in prison, the ideal of a republican.

When he was elected to parliament, he permanently altered what it meant to be a rebel against the British government; it now included running for office. McKeown remembers hearing from his prison cell that Sands had won as "'without doubt the highest point of [his] existence.'"[46] His victory "laid the foundation for the political base that Gerry Adams knew had to be built if the 'struggle' were to progress." Peter Taylor, in his seminal work on the PIRA titled *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Fein*, argues that "Sinn Fein's electoral successes through the next two decades are the political legacy of the hunger strikes."[47] It was only

[46]Taylor, 1998, p. 338.
[47]Taylor, 1998, p. 354.

a few months after Sands' death that Danny Morrison gave his speech to the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis wherein he first articulated the dyadic "Armalite and ballot box" philosophy that would come to define the movement for the rest of the conflict.

Such was Sands' popularity and legend that he functionally remade the psychological landscape of republicanism. In this new post-hunger strike world, a platform of electoral politics was a far better fit than it had been before Sands' death. As discussed, Cathal Goulding also tried to engage the organization in electoral politics and was soundly rebuffed by the hard core. But he was attempting a political transition in the world before Sands was elected to parliament. He was trying to force electoralism into the republican movement from the top down; Sands - through his extraordinary resilience and eventual death - managed it from the bottom up. His protest and campaign "engendered popular support for republicanism on a scale that the IRA had never achieved through violence"[48] and ultimately made Sinn Fein's successful excursion into electoral politics possible."[49]

Each of the men I interviewed reflected on Sands' influence on them in different ways, but Tommy McKearney summarized it nicely: "We weren't going to drive the British into the sea, we didn't have the military capacity for that. But the political initiative that Bobby Sands created allowed us to develop a new mindset."[50] There was "always discussion about what republicanism actually entailed, what it meant"[51] in the prisons. Now, that conversation would forever include a meaningful debate about the role of elections. The transition did

[48]Keefe, 2018, p. 240.
[49]Keefe, 2018, p. 241.
[50]McKearney, Tommy. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 30, 2022
[51]■Murtagh.■ Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 28, 2022

not happen overnight after Sands' death. When Gerry Adams was elected to parliament in 1982, he abstained from taking his seat - in keeping with long-standing Sinn Fein policy. But the change had been wrought and there was no going back.

Saturation

The clear evidence of the insufficiency of a purely militant approach, coupled with the hunger strikes and associated electoral activity, altered the landscape of Northern Ireland such that the revised ideology of the PIRA was a proper fit. But the organization's leadership was far from idle during this transition. They took active steps to accelerate the ideological shift by saturating the environment of their membership with arguments in favor of a more nuanced approach to rebellion. The most important mechanism by which the PIRA saturated the environment of their volunteers with strategic messaging was education. This campaign was executed principally through the prison system, particularly in the early years of the move towards politics. Men and women were stuck behind bars, sometimes for more than a decade, with little else to do except talk, read, and occasionally write. Education flourished in this environment, partly due to decentralized initiative taken by individual prisoners and partly due to a coordinated effort by PIRA leadership in and out of prison. The coordinated portion of the education effort was designed, as discussed above, to promote an expanded understanding of republicanism that included non-violent politics.

A first and critical step was the teaching of Irish language. Men and women imprisoned for years with little else to do with their time began to teach themselves and each other how to speak Irish and about Gaelic culture more generally. "Generations of imprisoned

republicans held one thing in common - and interest in, or commitment to, learning the Irish language.“[52] By the later years of the Blanket protest, many prisoners ”became fluent speakers, even if with a limited vocabulary based around politics and imprisonment.“[53] Without exception, each man I interviewed emphasized the importance of the Irish language in tying the movement together and in connecting it with the past. According to Ricky O'Rawe, 'the Gaelic culture that we nurtured and our emphasis on all things Irish rekindled the flame of resistance in us and inspired us to keep the faith."[54]

Immersion in Gaelic culture served to expand the psychological scope of the movement by connecting it with the past and with the broader goals of the republican tradition. “The fact was that we existed in an idealistic time warp,” O'Rawe recalls of his time on the blanket. “There was an almost biblical reverance for the 1916 Proclamation” and “we justified all our actions and the entire struggle on basis of the Proclamation."[55] Some men even “learned it in Irish.” No longer was the movement solely about community defense or winning any specific kinetic battle. It was, instead, part of an enormous tapestry of Irish rebel tradition dating back many decades. Within the historical context, far more complexity was tolerable and even required in order to make sense of the newly expanded mission to which the PIRA volunteers had dedicated themselves.

Without exception, every man I spoke with emphasized the importance of Irish language and Gaelic culture in their commitment to the cause and their understanding of

[52]McKeown and Williams, 2021, p. 60.
[53]McKeown and Williams, 2021, p. 61.
[54]O'Rawe, 2016, p. 85.
[55]O'Rawe, 2016, p. 84.

republicanism. It was, literally and figuratively, a common language with which they could communicate and transmit values across time and space when they were deprived of many other means of communication. Learning Irish, in the words of "Cathal," was about more than just a language: it was about "connecting the suffering of the men in the blocks with a lineage of volunteers and soldiers" who had, in some other cell and at some other time, spoken the same language in defiance of the British state. One of my interviewees describe it as "the subterranean lineage of the Irish Republican Army, unearthed."[56]

Cultural and linguistic education was followed by and eventually paired closely with political education. In the early 1970s, the PIRA did very little in the way of formal indoctrination.[57] At the beginning of the conflict, the organization had no time for any education except "operational" training.[58] Seanna Walsh cannot remember any exposure to intentional political indoctrination or outreach on the part of the PIRA, except "perhaps in song here and there." According to Seanna Walsh, there was no political education except a basic lesson on Irish history right when he joined. McKeown says that they "did absolutely nothing" to promote specific ideological messages. It was just "get operations done."[59] This changed dramatically as the conflict progressed and the concept of the Long War took root.

Here again, every person I spoke to emphasized the importance of education in the prisons and elsewhere during the transitional period of the late 1970s/early 1980s. By 1977, "lectures on republicanism became a regular occurrence in the H-Blocks."[60] For the first time since

[56]"Brendan." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 24, 2022
[57]Taylor, 1998, p. 105.
[58]Walsh, Seanna. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 26, 2022
[59]McKeown, Laurence. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 28, 2022
[60]O'Rawe, 2016, p. 56.

joining the organization, O'Rawe learned about the "five 'ism's' that constitute republican philosophy: socialism, non-sectarianism, nationalism, secularism, and seperatism."[61] Adams' "underlying political outlook was the inspiration for the lectures" and O'Rawe "greedily adopted" that outlook as his own.[62] Danny Morrison too recalls that Adams and his cohort played a "critical role in encouraging education in the prisons" and in providing direction for the nature of that education.[63]

Brendan credits the education he and others received in prison with "allowing for the shift from primacy of the military to primacy of politics."[64] Michael Culbert argues that electoral pivot took place almost entirely in the prisons at first, for the very simple reason that the prisoners had time to think and debate and consider the future.[65] Culbert was "quite heavily involved in the promotion of the development of people" in prison and describes the point of the education system as "having them go back to the war, but knowing better why they're taking part in it." He remembers telling young men in prison with him that "it's no use going to fight for 'Brits out', you have to go out and get the Brits out to get a better Ireland. It's not about 'Brits out' on its own. It's about 'Brits out' and a better future for this island."

"Cathal" remembers sitting down with other prisoners to set down in a "really scientific way the idea of what we called the republican history."[66] The explicit goal of this process was again to explicitly connect the current struggle to the past but also to explain "why it

[61]O'Rawe, 2016, p. 56.
[62]O'Rawe, 2016, p. 56.
[63]Morrison, Danny. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan. April 18, 2022
[64]"Brendan." Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 24, 2022
[65]Culbert, Michael. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 19, 2022
[66]"Cathal". Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on January 25, 2022

was always a glorious failure." And the more you understood about the history, "the more you understood about the social and economic nature of the conflict; you became much more politicized." For Tommy McKearney, education in prison was essential because it enable him "to argue more powerfully for a particular position, to take part in the public debate."[67] The goal "hadn't changed for most of us, but how to achieve it, this is what the more formal education equipped us to pursue in the long run."

In brief, the formal components of the educational system implemented in the prisons and elsewhere in the middle portion of the conflict saturated the environment of PIRA membership with the idea of the Long War and the associated inclusion of non-violent politics in the movement's platform. It was essentially exposure therapy for complexity. Volunteers were allowed to gradually come to terms with the idea that the war was going to take a long time and that victory was a complex amalgam of political and military outcomes. They succeeded in altering the psychological landscape of the movement - both broadening its aperture and defining it in specific ways - such that their revised ideology was accepted by a sufficient proportion of their constituency. This saturation interacted with the changed political environment discussed above to produce an ideology that explained a great deal in the minds of its followers. And because it was a good fit for the burgeoning political consciousness of the organization, the ideology preserved its potency despite increased complexity.

[67]McKearney, Tommy. Interview. Conducted by Michael Cowan on April 30, 2022

4.2. The Viet Minh: Ideological Balance in the Mekong Delta

To further illustrate how insurgencies cultivate devotion through successful ideological balancing, I analyze the behavior of the Viet Minh (1941-1954) during the first Indochina war. They are widely regarded as one of the most successful insurgencies of the 20th century and exhibited greater control of their soldiers than competitor revolutionary organizations with better external funding and more established social ties at the outset of the conflict.[68] The Viet Minh could turn violence on and off, desertions were "very rare", and they had "relatively few" morale problems.[69]

I demonstrate below that they achieved these outcomes because they were able to successfully associate their movement with a highly compressed ideology and distributed it to their soldiers in such a way as to maximize its navigational function. I am hardly the first to argue that ideology was an important component in the Indochina Wars, but I use the framework of the proposed theory to shed new light on *why* the ideological tactics of the Viet Minh worked as effectively as they did. Critically, I demonstrate that the organizational characteristics of the Viet Minh interacted with the doctrinal content of the ideology to determine the overall utility that their ideology provided soldier - and, therefore, stimulated the emergence of an ideologically committed hard core.

[68] Worsnop, 2017, p. 508.
[69] Tanham, 2006, p. 64.

4.2.1. ***Simplicity***

The Viet Minh minimized the complexity of their ideology by associating their movement with two intellectual traditions (Vietnamese Nationalism and Communism) that both purport to explain great swathes of the world with very few dimensions of consideration. Ho Chi Minh and other Viet Minh leaders saw themselves engaged in a "double revolution, both political ('national independence') and social ('land to the tiller')."[70] They, "like any other Communist government, attached enormous importance to the political aspects of war."[71] From the outset of the conflict, a "political organization within the military establishment was designed to ensure proper ideological indoctrination of the soldiers and the integration of military actions with political objectives."[72] Military officers "were themselves Communists and thus required relatively little supervision."

Both of these ideologies - but in particular, Communism - seek to explain monstrously complex social problems with relatively simple diagnoses and clear prescriptions for behavior. They both exclude all but a small set of dimensions of consideration and therefore achieve the most basic psychological purpose of an ideology; they allow for comprehension of otherwise incomprehensible environment. Perhaps just as importantly, these conceptual frameworks allowed the Viet Minh to unify "'the least coherent territory in the world.'"[73] The Mekong Delta, where the Viet Minh had to struggle most to attain control of the revolutionary movement, was characterized by substantial social and cultural heterogeneity. Through

[70]Elliott, 2003, p. 23.
[71]Tanham, 2006, p. 34.
[72]Tanham, 2006, p. 34.
[73]Elliott, 2003.

"indoctrination or . . . persuasive political analysis, those who joined the revolution accepted and even internalized the Party's . . . definition of what nationalism entail[ed]."[74]

The result was a rough cobbling together of a unified national and revolutionary identity from a disparate collection of sub-national elements. This amounted to a dramatic simplification of the social context in the Mekong Delta. Where before individuals had to contend with and consider a host of competing identity categories and attendant behavioral prescriptions, they could now turn to a single, unifying framework for understanding their environment. This characterization is of course a simplification in itself, as substantial sub-national variation persisted during and after the conflict; but insofar as the Viet Minh were able to subsume local identities to their national cause, they provided a more parsimonious tool for their followers to navigate an otherwise incomprehensibly complex environment.

4.2.2. ***Salience***

The Viet Minh coupled a parsimonious and well-articulated ideology with a deployment strategy that was likely to maximize the salience of their political project in the minds of their followers. They consciously fitted their ideological outreach to receptive populations and saturated the daily lives of their followers with the tenets of their ideology. They achieved this latter feat by integrating their ideology into their personnel procedures and by attaching their political goals to existing cultural modalities.

Fit

The Viet Minh maximized the fit of their ideology in two principal ways. First, they ar-

[74] Elliott, 2003.

ticulated political theories that addressed the challenges of a newly modernized Vietnamese society in ways that their incumbent challenger did not. According to John T. McAlister, French colonial initiatives produced "partial modernization" which made the general population of the country more socially mobile, better educated, and more demanding of public services.[75] The French colonial government denied this semi-modern population access to political participation, which produced a "common frustration against France"[76] that had not existed in previous generations.

As a result, the Viet Minh's ideological campaign was successful "in launching revolution because this ideology could galvanize into action the large numbers of people who had acquired social mobility and political cohesiveness from the colonial impact on Vietnamese society."[77] In other words, colonial modernization changed the Vietnamese social environment such that the French government's extant methods of social control were no longer fitted to the concerns of the Vietnamese population. Using the ideologies of nationalism and communism, the Viet Minh deployed an ideology that was fitted to this new social reality because it directly addressed political disenfranchisement and material deprivation.

Insurgent leaders built on this generally well-fitted model by choosing to focus their outreach on a community that was most likely to perceive their ideology as well-fitted. They consciously "cast aside" the "intellectuals, landlords, and rich peasants who had led the Viet Minh in its formative years . . . in favor of leaders whose class interest bound them so

[75]McAlister et al., 1969, p. 306.
[76]McAlister et al., 1969, p. 305.
[77]McAlister et al., 1969, p. 305.

tightly to revolution that they did not vacillate when the going got tough."[78] Elliot (2006) recounts the testimony of a peasant who joined the Viet Minh who "found the communist doctrine very appealing" because he "was poor, and [he] liked the idea of bringing material well-being to all the people - all the poor people liked this idea."

Elliot goes on to note that "the idealism, universalism and appeal to personal and class interest brought an enthusiastic response from many people like this poor peasant."[79] A RAND report on the Viet Minh and Viet Cong notes that the Viet Minh would "study family characteristics as well as personal and local grievances" and employ "persistent face-to-face encounters" to tailor their outreach to the most receptive populations.[80] The Viet Minh's target population was therefore very likely to perceive the ideology of the movement as well-fitted to their environment.

Saturation

The Viet Minh saturated the daily lives of their followers with their ideology by connecting their movement with previously significant cultural figures and by integrating the tenets of their ideology into their personnel procedures. As an example of the former, a senior party leader in the Mekong Delta region used Russian revolutionary history in his outreach campaigns, but linked figures like Lenin with "revered names in Vietnam's precommunist anticolonial movement."[81] In an effort to paint Ho Chi Minh as a "great patriotic inspirational figure" for recruitment purposes, insurgent leadership had to "link Ho to the

[78]Elliott, 2003, p. 42.
[79]Elliott, 2003, p. 66.
[80]John C. Donnell et al., 1965, p. 15.
[81]Elliott, 2003, p. 66.

leading anticolonial figures of the 19th century."[82] These propaganda campaigns allowed the Viet Minh to imbue their ideological platform with the significance of figures and ideas with which the Vietnamese people were already familiar.

The Viet Minh also integrated their ideology into their recruitment, training, discipline, and promotion processes, which elevated the salience of the ideology in the minds of their soldiers. Local military leaders recruited soldiers into units with a "combination of patriotism, internationalism, and socialism."[83] New recruits were only graduated to a "village guerilla cell" for actual military training once they had been "politically indoctrinated."[84] Once in the army, political indoctrination was "the most important aspect of the soldiers' training" and was designed to produce "politically reliable" soldiers and "effective propaganda agents."[85]

When they experienced their most significant morale problems in 1951-1952, they resorted to severe re-education initiatives to discipline wavering soldiers.[86] Admission to the Party was a reward reserved for soldiers who displayed particular loyalty or effectiveness in the army[87] The Viet Minh's soldier's lives were functionally saturated with the doctrine of the organization. As a consequence, that doctrine assumed increasing social and cultural significance merely because it occupied such a critical space in the day-to-day lives of the rank-and-file soldier.

The result of these efforts was a simple and salient ideology that satisfied the psycholog-

[82]Elliott, 2003.
[83]Elliott, 2003, p. 65.
[84]Tanham, 2006, p. 58.
[85]Tanham, 2006, p. 63.
[86]Elliott, 2003, p. 71.
[87]Elliott, 2003, p. 153.

ical needs of their followers. As a consequence, their soldiers exhibited high levels of loyalty, commitment, and discipline in the face of a determined foe with superior military and operational resources. We can see individual level evidence of this devotion in testimonials and interviews provided by Viet Minh and Viet Cong fighters in a RAND report titled "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale in 1964." Although this report is based on interviews with prisoners of war and defectors from the Viet Cong, the "vast majority of [interviewees] over 30" participated in the Viet Minh insurgency and spoke extensively about their attitudes towards their involvement in that campaign.

The effect of the Viet Minh's ideological deployment was such that, even a decade later, their indoctrinated hard core was utterly devoted to the revolutionary effort. "Almost to a man" this older generation that had participated in the Viet Minh campaign spoke of a "solemn duty to obey their leaders"[88] and a "sense of duty to join the [revolutionary] struggle."[89] When they were subjected to brutal conditions during infiltration missions into the south, they responded with "self sacrificing stoicism: 'It wasn't a question of liking or disliking the march; it was our duty.'"[90]

The RAND report characterizes these seasoned soldiers as the "backbone of leadership and experience for the combat effort" of the insurgency. These "well-indoctrinated" veterans of the Viet Minh campaign could give "clear-cut" and "articulate" justification for why they fought and made frequent reference to communist and nationalist ideology in their expla-

[88] John C. Donnell et al., 1965, p. 10.
[89] John C. Donnell et al., 1965, p. 12.
[90] John C. Donnell et al., 1965, p. 13.

nations.[91] The hard core would answer certain questions "so consistently and so carefully" that those answers seemed "rote."[92] This clarity and "predictability" of response is certainly a consequence, at least in large measure, of the Viet Minh's parsimonious deployment of their ideology. While many soldiers in this study followed orders because "a good soldier obeys the commands of his superiors", the researchers found that this broader commitment to organizational discipline was "bound up in the revolutionary Communist ideology" of the most devoted fighters.[93]

These soldiers knew precisely why they fought and were possessed of a fierce devotion to the cause. For them, there was no ambiguity or prevarication; they "[lived] splendidly and [died] gloriously" for the movement despite objectively "miserable" conditions.[94] The Viet Minh's simple and salient ideology imbued them with a shield against uncertainty that served them well in even the most complex political environments. In short, the Viet Minh produced a hard core of ideologically zealous soldiers whose absolute commitment to the cause endured for many years and established the foundation for cohesive and effective fighting units in subsequent conflicts.

[91] John C. Donnell et al., 1965, p. 19.
[92] John C. Donnell et al., 1965, p. 35.
[93] John C. Donnell et al., 1965, p. 16.
[94] John C. Donnell et al., 1965, p. 28.

4.3. Renamo: Brutality as Ideology

To demonstrate how the absence of a powerful ideology can impede insurgent capacity to overcome collective action problems I provide analysis of the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo), which fought a brutal civil war (1976-1992) against the incumbent Liberation Front of Mozambique (Frelimo). Three interrelated features of Renamo are crucial insofar as this theory is concerned. First, they received extensive support from foreign powers from the outset of the conflict. The Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) consciously sought to destabilize the newly independent Mozambique by fomenting insurgency.

They identified Renamo's first leader, André Matsangaissa, and provided the initial money, training, material, and logistical support to transform Renamo into an armed rebel group.[95] The South African Defense Force (SADF) assumed patronage of the organization in 1980. Although impossible to determine conclusively, it is "unlikely that Renamo would have evolved into such an effective military organization or grown so rapidly" without this external intervention.[96]

Second, Renamo devoted relatively little time and resources to strengthening and deploying their political ideology in pursuit of their military aims. The domestic leadership was ideological, as we shall see, but their foreign benefactors placed overwhelming emphasis on the military elements of the organization.[97] The "immediate security needs" of first Rhodesia

[95]Emerson, 2014; Weinstein, 2007; Vines, 1991; Wiegink, 2020.
[96]Emerson, 2014, p. 29.
[97]Vines, 1991; Weinstein, 2007; Emerson, 2014.

and then South Africa drove them to "create a military tool to threaten Frelimo rather than groom an indigenous political opposition."[98]

Finally, Renamo was plagued by poor unit cohesion, low morale, poor discipline, and high desertion for the bulk of the conflict. While they were capable of mounting sophisticated military operations and did endure a protracted and bloody conflict, they struggled to generate zealous fighters outside of leadership. Despite a substantial resource endowment (especially relative to their poorly organized and funded opponents[99]) they had to rely extensively on forced recruitment throughout the war in order to bolster their ranks.[100]

More importantly, "commanders and combatants in Renamo did not trust one another" which produced a broader "lack of cohesion" in the fighting units of the organization.[101] Desertion and defection rates were high, particularly in the later years of the war when South Africa's support waned.[102] These problems were most acute in the south where there were "general problems with discipline and desertions."[103] According to Weinstein (2009), defection eventually became the "dominant norm of rebel conduct" within the movement.[104]

Once again, I am not the first to argue that the dearth of ideology in Mozambique had a deleterious effect on Renamo's rank-and-file. However, rather than treating ideology as a black box, my analysis provides specific insight into why the political ideology of Renamo failed to serve its primary functions of simplification and explanation. Below, I will analyze

[98]Emerson, 2014, p. 29.
[99]Wiegink, 2020.
[100]Vines, 1991; Emerson, 2014; Weinstein, 2007; Morier-Genoud et al., 2018; Wiegink, 2020.
[101]Weinstein, 2007, p. 145.
[102]Weinstein, 2007.
[103]Morier-Genoud et al., 2018, p. 332.
[104]Weinstein, 2007, p. 145.

how Renamo failed to maximize the psychological value of its ideology, and therefore failed to service the core psychological needs of its followers.

4.3.1. ***Simplicity***

Renamo's ideological project, such as it was, revolved around traditionalism. After seizing power from the Portuguese, the communist government of Frelimo instituted a series of sweeping economic and social reforms designed to counter severe inequality and underdevelopment in the countryside. These included the collectivization of farms and "villagisation", or a process whereby scattered settlements were concentrated into centrally controlled villages. Frelimo was able to implement these policies with a modicum of regard for local culture in the south of Mozambique, where there was "historical experience of living in larger village units."[105] Elsewhere, however, the government had to force citizens into villages in sometimes brutal ways, which in turn generated "peasant discontent and resistance."[106]

Renamo's early leadership attempted to capitalize on this frustration by structuring their ideology around neo-traditionalism and anti-communism. With approval from their Rhodesian backers, they implemented a "rudimentary hearts and minds campaign . . . by stoking the fires of opposition to Frelimo's policies of collectivization, communal villages, and the usurping of traditional authorities."[107] While this strategy had some promise as an early recruitment tactic, leadership confined itself almost exclusively to opposition rhetoric rather than proactive attempts to construct a meaningful political platform. Matsangaissa

[105]Vines, 1991, p. 114.
[106]Vines, 1991, p. 115.
[107]Emerson, 2014, p. 39.

summarized this pathology in a 1979 interview, saying that "we are not interested in policy making . . . later we will have to work out politics but first communism must go from our country. It is killing us."[108] Even after Matsangaissa's death later that year, the organization was never able to move past his oppositional ideological frame.[109]

Anti-communism and a call for a return to traditionalism are simplifying to some extent, but they only do half the work. They diagnose problems but they do not prescribe solutions. Both are necessary for a maximally effective ideological framework. Renamo decried the changes brought about by Frelimo and argued that the country would be better if they went backwards, but they did little or nothing to explain how they would actively improve the country. There was some attempt to incorporate democratic liberalism into their platform - in 1981, for instance, its national council adopted a program that called for free and fair democratic elections and other liberal principles - but these nominal commitments had almost no impact on the ideology they deployed to the Mozambican people.[110]

These efforts were hindered further by a schizophrenic approach to ideology. Sometimes Renamo was anti-communist, sometimes it was neo-traditionalist, sometimes it was pro-democracy, and sometimes it was simply anti-Frelimo.[111] Other times, they would claim to represent the local religious tradition of whichever village or settlement they were attempting to occupy.[112] The result was a confusing patchwork of different (and sometimes contradictory) ideologies and political claims, any one of which might have sufficed as the

[108]Vines, 1991, p. 76.
[109]Vines, 1991; Hall, 1990; Emerson, 2014; Wiegink, 2020.
[110]Hall, 1990; Vines, 1991, p. 77.
[111]Hall, 1990; Leão, 2007; Wiegink, 2020.
[112]Vines, 1991, p. 112.

basis simplification; but in combination and absent the attendant deployment strategies that would be necessary to increase its salience, they served primarily to confuse rather than clarify.[113]

4.3.2. ***Salience***

Even if Renamo had been able to perfectly articulate a powerful ideology within their leadership, they failed utterly to deploy the ideology in such a way as to maximize its salience in the minds of their followers. While there is evidence that some soldiers would profess support for Renamo's core ideological aims (as in the case of one or two of Wiegnik's respondents) the general consensus in the historical record is that the majority of soldiers had no particular relationship with the ideology of the organization.

Fit

Regarding fit, there were some early attempts to target recruitment at populations that were most likely to resonate with their ideology, but these efforts quickly gave way to Renamo's brutality and short-term material ambitions. Early in the conflict, Renamo would often liberate Frelimo re-education and prison camps and recruit the newly freed prisoners.[114] Renamo's oppositional ideology would certainly have resonated with these former Frelimo prisoners - and indeed there is evidence that voluntary recruitment was more common following these liberations[115] - but there were not enough Frelimo prison camps to match Renamo's growing operational capacity.

[113]Wiegink, 2020.
[114]Emerson, 2014, p. 39.
[115]Emerson, 2014, p. 45.

Between 1981 and 1982, Renamo was estimated to have grown from 5,000 guerillas to approximately 10,000 a year later.[116] But this growth was not an organic outpouring of support for Renamo: instead, their South African support permitted them to extract resources and manpower by force.[117] By one estimate (produced through a series of interviews with Renamo commanders and soldiers) more than 90 percent of Renamo soldiers were forcibly recruited.[118]

In Nikkie Wiegink's 2020 study of former Renamo combatants, each respondent reports being forcibly recruited into Renamo, apparently without respect to their background or the likelihood that they would resonate with the ideology of the organization.[119] One of Wiegink's respondents - a man she calls Balthazar - recalls that Renamo's leader once told him that their goal was the "'stop socialism'" and "'that everybody had to be able to work his own land'" but that these ideological goals did not reflect his own experiences.[120] Other respondents in her book express more enthusiasm for Renamo's political goals (particularly if they were educated or high-ranking combatants) but even these sympathetic individuals were not recruited because they were likely to resonate with the cause. They were recruited by force because they were vulnerable and easy to exploit; they sometimes found ideological justifications for the violence they were thereafter forced to perpetrate.[121]

Further, Renamo's brutality prevented them from capitalizing on the most promising

[116]Hall, 1990, p. 40.
[117]Vines, 1991; Emerson, 2014; Wiegink, 2020.
[118]Hall, 1990, p. 45.
[119]Wiegink, 2020.
[120]Wiegink, 2020, p. 42.
[121]Wiegink, 2020.

source of organic devotion: rural disaffection with Frelimo policies. As mentioned, there was a genuine vein of discontent with Frelimo's redistributive and villagisation policies that might have served as fertile ground for Renamo's ideology; but their pervasive targeting of civilians and the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure belied their ostensible commitment to rural autonomy and human rights. Renamo's strategy was to "destabilize the country in such a way as to make development impossible." This required Renamo to target "the country's economic infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, railways, and power lines."[122]

Other operational targets included "health posts, schools, and any other structure associated with the Mozambique government."[123] Renamo would intentionally depopulate settlements and cause sufficient destruction to make them uninhabitable as a mechanism of weakening state control over an area.[124] Under these conditions, any theoretical fit between Renamo's purported ideology and the grievances of the rural population would surely have vanished.

Saturation

Even if Renamo had successfully targeted a population that was likely to resonate with its ideology, it failed to pursue tactics that would make its ideology omnipresent in the lives of its followers. They did attempt to attach their ideology to existing modes of cultural practice - for instance, they sought to associate their movement with traditional hierarchies and religious structure by aggressively mythologizing their leadership and primary ethnic

[122]Leão, 2007, p. 16.
[123]Vines, 1991, p. 87.
[124]Vines, 1991; Emerson, 2014; Leão, 2007; Hultman, 2009.

group as superhuman[125] and by manipulating shamanistic practice to legitimize their military efforts[126] - but they did very little to integrate their ideology into their organizational structure such that it came to define the day-to-day lives of their followers.

This failure began at the highest levels of command. Because Rhodesia and South Africa had no interest in cultivating a long-term political project, neither "invested in the building of political capacity within Renamo."[127] According to one member of the organization who interacted with foreign benefactors, they "never showed any interest in providing textbooks, never offered scholarships, never provided technical training" and "would hinder contacts with countries that could potentially provide this type of training."[128]

Aversion to ideological capacity building extended down the chain of command. Extensive use of conscription meant that ideology obviously played little role in recruitment, but it was also not a component of training. Most soldiers received "three to eleven months" of training[129] and even the more advanced training regiments were devoted to "weapons handling, marksmanship, basic guerilla tactics, and developing leadership skills."[130] There is no evidence that ideological indoctrination was an important component of training for Renamo soldiers at any phase of the conflict. None of Wiegnik's respondents recall any ideological indoctrination or even any notable discussion of ideology during their time in Renamo, although each of them participated in military training of some kind.

[125]Vines, 1991, p. 113.
[126]Vines, 1991, p. 113.
[127]Leão, 2007, p. 17.
[128]Leão, 2007, p. 17.
[129]Wiegink, 2020, p. 56.
[130]Emerson, 2014, p. 86.

Instead of using indoctrination or ideological training to organically increase the salience of the organization's goals, Renamo relied on brutalization, traumatization, and intoxication to overwhelm individual preferences. Military training involved "'initiations into brutality' and a process of 'psychological trauma and deprivation,' which included the use of cultic or ritualized violence."[131] These processes "were essential to 'remold' the recruits' identities." Participation in "vivid atrocity [was] often demanded of new recruits as a type of initiation" which made it less likely for forced recruits to desert for fear of a "blood price on them for their part in atrocities."[132]

Drugs and alcohol were "centrally distributed"[133] to the soldiers to encourage frequent intoxication as a mechanism for coping with the psychological trauma of atrocity or to "'become a machine that does not fear anything.'"[134] Discipline was similarly brutal. Eyewitnesses report that reluctant recruits were sometimes "put in deep holes and buried up to their necks until they cooperated" or "hung upside down from trees until their individualism is broken."[135] The recruitment of child soldiers made this process of de-individuation and traumatization easier, as they were more vulnerable.[136]

By merit of its substantial foreign backing, Renamo was able to supplant the need for a psychologically powerful ideology with brute force. Where other fledgling insurgencies would have lacked the material capacity to engage in such widespread and well-coordinated

[131]Wiegink, 2020, p. 76.
[132]Vines, 1991, p. 90.
[133]Wiegink, 2020, p. 88.
[134]Emerson, 2014, p. 187.
[135]Vines, 1991, p. 95.
[136]Vines, 1991; Emerson, 2014; Morier-Genoud et al., 2018; Wiegink, 2020.

savagery, Renamo had all the money and logistical support it needed. It did not need to cultivate devotion because it could extract compliance by force of arms and because the incumbent state was hardly a better option. Renamo was therefore able to sustain a sophisticated and well-coordinated insurgency over decades, but they achieved this in spite of an entirely deficient ideology and a commensurate absence of ideologically devoted soldiers.

4.4. Conclusion

The cases I have discussed in this chapter and throughout this dissertation demonstrate how, across very different contexts, the ideological balance of rebel groups plays a critical role in their capacity to cultivate devotion. The most important insight these cases provided is that the individual components of any ideology are much less important than the extent to which the ideology as a whole balances between the competing need to simplify and explain an environment. There are an infinite number of ways that organizations can construct or deploy an ideology to produce balance. But to fixate on any individual configuration or component of an ideology is to miss the forest for the trees. It is how the ideological features of the movement interact with an environment and a context that determine its potency.

Take the PIRA: one might be tempted to fixate on the extraordinary simplicity of the 'Brits out' message and conclude that simplicity is the key to devotion. But that ignores the environment in which the simplicity was deployed. The PIRA had failed for generations to leverage their single-mindedely militant approach in pursuit of a sustainable rebel movement. It was only when sectarian violence narrowed the relevant political environment to meet the simplicity of the ideology that it became potent enough to power the insurgency.

One might be similarly tempted to conclude that, because electoral politics launched Sinn Fein to power, that nonviolent ideologies are intrinsically superior at generating a devoted constituency. But this would be to ignore the fact that Cathal Goulding had attempted an essentially identical transition in the late 1960s and failed spectacularly because the amount of complexity that such a shift introduced was intolerable in the trauma-laden environment

of that time. Time had to pass and events had to transpire that shattered and reformed the definition of republicanism in order for the electoral transition to finally succeed in the 1980s.

In the case of the Viet Minh, one might assume that a Marxist ideology is intrinsically effective at cultivating devotion because it worked well in that context. But we have seen that attempts to deploy Marxism early in the conflict in Northern Ireland were roundly rejected because it was a poor fit for the environment at the time. Left politics later came to hold larger prominence in the PIRA after electoralism took root, but even then it was hardly a purists notion of Marxism. The lesson is that we must understand ideology dynamically and contextually. Its' influence on a conflict will change over time as the constituent elements of the ideology shift in relation each other and to an ever-changing environment. The potency of the ideology will, in turn, modulate over the course of a conflict in ways that are only comprehensible if we understand their contingent and unstable nature.

These cases also demonstrate critical variation in the extent to which rebel groups are capable of achieving ideological balance - and, consequently, cultivate devotion. Consider Renamo and the Viet Minh. Although they were both technically effective insurgencies - in that they were able to wage substantial war against an incumbent state for a sustained period of time - they were not equally adept at cultivating devotion. The Viet Minh was able to field an army with principally voluntary recruitment, generally high morale, low rates of defection and desertion, and high levels of unit cohesion despite early resource disadvantages and a powerful incumbent state. Their hard core of fighters also exhibited remarkable individual

devotion to the revolutionary cause. Renamo, by contrast, had to rely extensively on forced recruitment and experienced sustained problems with discipline, cohesion, defection, and morale despite a large resource endowment from the outset of the conflict and a deeply incompetent incumbent state. To the extent that they had a hard core of fighters, their commitment was to the opportunities for violence, intoxication, and looting the rebellion provided, rather than to the rebel cause per se.

As the theory predicts, this variation corresponds to commensurate variation in the extent to which these organizations engaged in ideological balancing. The Viet Minh adopted and developed a simplistic explanation for their environment, targeted it at populations that were most likely to resonate with their model, and engaged in strategies to maximize its salience in the minds of their followers. Renamo had the makings of a powerful ideology but failed utterly to deploy it in a simple or salient manner. Where the Viet Minh transformed preferences at relatively low cost by organically increasing the salience of their ideological platform, Renamo relied on costly brutality and trauma to overwhelm the individual preferences of their soldiers.

Chapter 5

Conclusion - Simplicity in Politics

In brief summary, we have seen that the PIRA was able to deploy the maximally simple ideology of "Brits Out" in the early years of the Troubles because the conflict environment precluded more nuanced ideologies. They were able to out-compete their principal rival, the OIRA, because the OIRA failed to take the temperature of their constituency and attempted to increase the complexity of their ideological platform. Later in the conflict, when circumstances no longer permitted the maximal simplicity of the Brits Out message, the PIRA adeptly pivoted their platform to one that included dimensions of electoral politics and public service - a functional increase in ideological complexity - in order to broaden the aperture of their appeal and expand the temporal scope of their goals. In both cases, the balance of the ideology - and therefore its psychological utility - was preserved.

We have further seen how ideological balance influenced the ability of two other rebel groups - Renamo and the Viet Minh - to cultivate devotion. The Viet Minh was able to selectively highlight different elements of nationalism and communism depending on the

audience to present a model of their environment that was simple enough to satisfy the need for comprehension while still speaking to the real challenges of a complex environment. Renamo, by contrast, failed to deploy what might have been a sufficiently simple ideology because it did not invest the time or energy required to ensure its resonance with the target population. As a consequence, they had to rely on brutality and conscription to wage war where they might otherwise have been able to rely on devotion.

A multi-methods approach is eventually needed to validate a direct connection between the organizational choices we observe and the presence of devotion. My analysis, however, demonstrates that the theoretical mechanisms I propose are plausible and have explanatory power. Many questions remain, including how organizational decisions interact with cultural idiosyncrasies of a given conflict and how individual temperamental variation influences susceptibility to these processes. But this dissertation constitutes an important first step in the process of explaining a specific mechanism by which rebel groups cultivate devotion.

Moreover, I believe the theory I articulate here is generalizable beyond the question of insurgent devotion. I have no reason to believe that the incentives, pathologies, and proclivities which inform this theory are particular to soldiers or that the capacity to exploit them is particular to rebel groups. A research agenda that examines how organizations leverage ideology to simplify and explain a political environment can yield important insights across a wide variety of disciplines and subject matter. Most importantly, it is incumbent on each of us as researchers, thinkers, citizens, and people to contend seriously with the mechanism at the heart of this work: the degenerative allure of simplicity and certainty.

I grappled with the consequences of certainty many times during my research, but one relatively innocuous event is particularly stark in my memory. On my first day in Belfast, I arrived a half hour early to my interview with Danny Morrison at Aras Uí Chonghaile (the James Connolly Visitor Center) on Falls Road. I got a coffee at the cafe on the first floor of what is otherwise a museum to Irish Republicanism. Two men were seated at the table next to me having a heated conversation. I did not know it at the time but one of them was Seanna Walsh, who I had been trying to contact for months without success. Walsh is famously the first acknowledged member of the Provisional IRA to appear on television in public without a mask. He spent 21 years in jail for his involvement with the PIRA and now represents Sinn Fein on the Belfast City Council.

It was April of 2022 and everyone was talking about the war in Ukraine. Walsh and his companion were engaged in a discussion as to Ukraine's chances of resisting the Russian invasion. Both men were obviously sympathetic to Ukraine, but Walsh was particularly adamant that Russia was doomed. Ukraine, he was certain, would prevail because they were fighting to defend their homeland. I learned later when I interviewed Walsh that he and many other former members of the PIRA felt a certain kinship with the Ukrainian resistance - as indeed they felt kinship with almost any oppressed or embattled minority fighting for self-determination.

This conversation has stuck with me, perhaps in part because of their flippant dismissal of Russia's "wee tanks and wee planes", but mostly because of the conviction it demonstrated. Walsh was among the most committed Republicans in the conflict. By his own admission,

he would have stayed in jail for the rest of his life if PIRA leadership had not signed the 1996 Good Friday Agreement. Such was his certainty in the rightness of his cause that he extended his conviction to other places, peoples, and times. I believe that, in his mind, the Ukrainian resistance must prevail because so too must the Irish resistance. The failure of one suggested the possibility of failure in the other and was therefore out of the question. So ironclad was his belief in the justness and the inevitability of the Republican cause that it encompassed and enveloped the justness of every cause built on common principles.

This kind of certainty is the engine of greatness but it is also, in my opinion, the most dangerous force on earth. When we are certain we are right, we are capable of anything. But such certainty is predicated on delusion. It exists only when we have tricked ourselves into believing that our flimsy understanding of reality is sufficient to predict the future. This is a necessary delusion, because we have to decide how to act in an incomprehensibly complex world. We have to willfully pull the wool over our own eyes so that we aren't blinded by the glare of the infinite.

There is, however, a terrible temptation and danger in forgetting that we have tricked ourselves. It is all too easy to sink into the comforting delusion of certainty; to descend so far into the rickety models we make of the world that we mistake them *for the world.* Here there is no room for humility or second-guessing or reasoned consideration because these things threaten to puncture the comforting bubble of certainty afforded us by the simplicity we impose on the world. Here we can convince ourselves that anything we do is right because we have removed the constraints imposed by fallibility.

Narcotic simplicity is everywhere in politics. I have focused in this dissertation on how rebel groups compress ideologies into simplistic frames because civil conflict is a defining feature of 21st century political contestation, but there is nothing unique in their deployment of simplicity to cultivate devotion. I have demonstrated how different rebel groups across contexts and time leverage similar structural characteristics of ideology to attend to the psychological needs of their prospective followers.

But one could apply the same analytical approach to almost any political organization. When the National Rifle Association tells its members to vote solely on the basis of a candidate's gun control stance, they are peddling in precisely the same kind of simplicity as the PIRA or the Viet Minh or countless other rebel groups. When Donald Trump tells his followers that all their problems are a consequence of illegal immigrants and China stealing their jobs, he is hoping to lure them into the delusion of certainty. As with any rebel group, he hopes to bind them to his cause by intertwining his radical certainty with their emotional stability.

It is against this simplicity that we must set ourselves. More than any research agenda or specific finding, I hope to take from this dissertation a lifelong pursuit of complexity. I hope to impart on the reader the need to forever insist on nuance and humility, most especially in our own minds. We are all vulnerable to the need to feel secure. None of us is immune to the drugging delusion of certainty. But like any addiction, the first step is admitting we have a problem. I hope this dissertation helps the reader admit they have a problem, as writing it did for me.

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