Abstract
What explains the causes and outcomes of rebel factional struggles? Existing explanations focus on exogenous and material factors that disrupt rebel organizations’ internal processes. Yet rebel groups succumb to infighting and organizational splinters even in the absence of external shocks. In this paper I present an endogenous and social theory of rebel factional struggles, in which leadership disputes result from a shifting balance of loyalties within a rebel organization. In my model, rival rebel leaders cultivate the loyalty of two types of networks, recruitment networks and operational networks, which serve as power bases to initiate leadership struggles, launch coups, or split organizations. I build my theory through a case study of Nicaragua’s Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), which splintered into three factions in 1975–1976. Drawing on an original network dataset of FSLN commanders, I trace how the organization’s network structure changed over time, spurring disputes over rank-and-file fighters’ loyalties that tore the FSLN apart.
1 Introduction

The last century of world history would look unrecognizable absent the factional struggles within its epochal rebel and revolutionary organizations. The Bolsheviks splintered from the Menshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, and later limited membership in the Comintern to parties “preferably formed by a split.”1 Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro only overcame rivals for rebel leadership after years of internal struggle.2 More recently, successive splinters from al-Qaeda produced the Islamic State and Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham.3 Scholars have shown that rebel infighting leads to more violent, intractable conflicts and undermines rebel movement success.4 However, we know relatively little about the causes, dynamics, and outcomes of disputes within rebel organizations. Proposed explanations hold that disputes occur when exogenous factors, such as lootable resources,5 external support,6 and state violence,7 disrupt rebel organizations’ internal processes. Yet externally-focused accounts only partially delineate internal rebel processes, and cannot explain why rebel organizations unravel even in the absence of outside shocks.

Drawing on evidence from Nicaragua, this paper offers an endogenous theory of factional struggle within rebel organizations that draw primarily on social endowments for recruitment.8 In this model, leadership disputes result from a shifting balance of loyalties within a rebel organization.9

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8This encompasses a large and important category of rebel groups that tend to be ideologically motivated (i.e., Marxist and many Islamist rebel groups), or based in dense ethnic networks.
9I define a leadership dispute as a credible attempt to revise the formal distribution of power (e.g. the organizational hierarchy) within a rebel group. This paper does not address disputes between lieutenants that do not challenge the overall leadership of the rebel group.
While balance of power arguments are common in the literature on rebel groups, scholars generally equate power with access to material resources. Other scholars show how rebels can draw on social endowments, networks, and organizational structures to build cohesive organizations, but rarely conceptualize these factors as potential sources of power and division. By identifying power inside rebel organizations with the loyalties of subordinate fighters, I bridge insights from both literatures and develop a model in which networks, like material resources, may fuel factional struggles.

In my model, rival rebel leaders cultivate the loyalty of two types of networks: recruitment networks and operational networks. These networks serve as power bases for individual rebel leaders by structuring the loyalties of subordinate fighters. The composition of both types of networks changes over time, as rebel organizations simultaneously face attrition and pursue expansion. New influxes of recruits or new operational networks alter the distribution of power between rebel leaders, sometimes elevating new leaders and weakening incumbents. This in turn enables would-be challengers to struggle with the existing rebel leadership for control of the group. Leadership disputes, once begun, may end in internal coups, organizational splits, or incumbent victories.

I test my theory through a case study of four interrelated leadership disputes that tore apart Nicaragua’s Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) from 1971 to 1976, and conduct preliminary tests using network analysis and process-tracing. Drawing on evidence from an original network dataset, I show how three new leaders cultivated recruitment and operational networks to mount challenges against the FSLN’s incumbent leadership. When a challenger’s power base was larger, he overthrew the incumbent leader in an internal coup. When the rivals’ power bases were more evenly matched, they split the FSLN into three independent organizations: first the FSLN-Proletaria, later the FSLN-Guerra Popular Prolongada and the FSLN-Insurreccional. My theory accurately predicts the timing and outcome of disputes, and the identities of disputants.

This study contributes to the growing literature on rebel organizational processes in three ways.
First, because my theory is microfoundational (i.e. grounded in individual fighters’ loyalties and behavior), it can integrate existing hypotheses about material resources, state violence, and ideology to form more complete explanations of rebel factional struggles. Second, accurately theorizing the dynamics of internal factional struggles may help unlock rationales behind seemingly irrational rebel behaviors, including infighting, spoiling, and terrorism. Finally, this paper makes a major methodological contribution: the construction and analysis of a network dataset encompassing the membership of a clandestine rebel organization over sixteen years is nearly unique in the literature and may serve as a model for future researchers interested in the inner workings of armed groups.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, I examine existing explanations for rebel factional struggles and then describe the balance of loyalties mechanism step by step, alongside the types of data I sought and the qualitative and quantitative tests I employed to establish evidence of a causal link.14 Second, I introduce the case and summarize the results of my investigation into the FSLN’s four leadership disputes, showing how each arose between an incumbent leader and a challenger supported by a recruitment or operational network. I then process trace each of the leadership disputes. Finally, I discuss the generalizability and implications of the balance of loyalties mechanism.

2 Existing explanations

Rebel factional struggles are common. Lutmar and Terris record 77 rebel group leadership changes since 1945 resulting from internal contestation,15 and splinter groups have emerged in 23% of all conflicts since 1975.16 These outcomes are puzzling as factional infighting weakens rebels, who already face daunting odds against a militarily stronger state. Explanations in the literature emphasize exogenous variables that disturb existing organizational equilibriums. These can be roughly categorized as focusing on rebels’ access to material resources, their vulnerability to state violence, and the rise—often due to outside influences—of ideological and strategic differences within their ranks. I briefly discuss each hypothesis below, and report operationalizations and data used for

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process tracing them in the methodological appendix. I do not regard these explanations as necessarily competing with my own; rather, I sought evidence that they are “coincident” (independent of one another) or “congruent” (that they jointly produced the outcome).  

Material resources

The most straightforward explanation of rebel factional struggles highlights the role of material resources such as lootable goods, external financing, and arms. Material resources may shock rebel organizations through two mechanisms. First, rebel factions in resource-rich environments may opportunistically splinter to capture new sources of revenue and profit. Alternately, when material resources are distributed unevenly within a rebel organization, they may alter the balance of power between internal factions, provoking disputes, coups, and organizational splits.

Hypothesis 1: Rebel factional struggles, internal coups, and organizational splits are more likely when rebels gain access to lootable resources or external patronage.

Battlefield shocks

Battlefield shocks may cause rebel factional struggles through several mechanisms. Christia argues that asymmetric battlefield losses across a rebel group’s constituent subgroups promote internal coups and splinter groups. Extending this logic, Woldemariam argues that gains in rebel territorial control and operational reach also lead to factional struggles by diminishing the incentive for rebel

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18 Weinstein, Inside Rebellion.
21 Weinstein, Inside Rebellion; Seymour, “Why Factions Switch Sides in Civil Wars.”
22 Tamm, “Rebel Leaders, Internal Rivals, and External Resources.”
24 Christia, Alliance Formation in Civil Wars, 44.
sub-groups to cooperate.\textsuperscript{25} Other authors argue that decapitation strategies, in which state forces shatter the rebel leadership, unleash power struggles and fragment rebel groups.\textsuperscript{26} McLaughlin and Pearlman hold that the state’s “repressive measures, such as jailing, exiling, or killing leaders,” serves as an external shock allowing constituent subgroups to renegotiate “the distribution of power and resources” within a nationalist or ethnic movement, provided that subgroups considered the previous equilibrium unsatisfactory.\textsuperscript{27}

*Hypothesis 2: Rebel factional struggles, internal coups, and organizational splits are more likely after battlefield shocks, state repression, and leadership decapitations.*

**Ideological and strategic disagreements**

A growing literature focuses on the ideological dimensions of rebel recruitment, behavior, cohesion and fragmentation.\textsuperscript{28} Hafez argues that “an alternative framing of the conflict from a credible rival could encourage internal dissension and produce defections,”\textsuperscript{29} and splinter groups themselves commonly frame their decision to split in ideological terms. Hard-line ideologies may also motivate spoiler groups opposed to rebel concessions during peace processes.\textsuperscript{30} Though ideological divisions may arise internally, they may also reflect international rivalries (i.e. between Soviet- and Sino-aligned communism) or battlefield gains,\textsuperscript{31} while battlefield losses can provoke strategic disagreements.\textsuperscript{32}

This hypotheses is especially critical in the FSLN’s case, as ideological disagreements are held

\textsuperscript{26}Jordan, “When Heads Roll”; Staniland, *Networks of rebellion*, 47.
\textsuperscript{27}McLauchlin and Pearlman, “Out-Group Conflict, In-Group Unity?,” 44.
\textsuperscript{29}Mohammed M. Hafez, “Fratricidal Rebels: Ideological Extremity and Warring Factionalism in Civil Wars,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 0, no. 0 (2017): 8.
\textsuperscript{31}Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa*, 41–43.
\textsuperscript{32}Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*, 44–45.
to fundamentally explain the FSLN’s three-way division in both official and scholarly historiography. I therefore carefully examine sequencing (whether factional struggles begin before or after the emergence of distinct ideological rhetoric) and assess evidence that ideological commitments reduce to “cheap talk.”

Hypothesis 3: Factional struggles, internal coups, and organizational splits are more likely when rebel group elites commit to incompatible ideological and strategic positions, or rebels negotiate with the state.

3 Balance of Loyalties

This section introduces the balance of loyalties theory: the incorporation of new recruitment networks or formation of new operational networks alters the internal balance of power between leaders of a rebel group, sowing leadership disputes that may end in internal coups and organizational splits. Figure 1 breaks the balance of loyalties mechanism into four discrete steps: 1) a rebel group cultivates a new recruitment network or forms a new operational network, 2) a new leader’s power base, built on the new recruitment network or operational network, grows relative to that of older leaders, 3) the shifting balance of power provokes a leadership dispute, which 4) results in an internal coup, an organizational split, or an incumbent victory. Specifically, when a new leader has a significantly larger power base than older leaders, he is likely to overthrow the incumbent leadership in an internal coup. If his power base is relatively equal to that of older leaders, neither side has the strength to win, and the rebel group is likely to split into two splinter groups, each following a different set of leaders. Finally, if the challenger overestimates his strength (or the incumbent preventatively strikes a potential challenger), an incumbent victory will most likely ensue. The following section

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34 Christia, Alliance Formation in Civil Wars, 6.

35 I use masculine pronouns throughout although the FSLN had many important female commanders, because none were protagonists in the leadership disputes.
Rebel group cultivates recruitment network or forms operational network

Intuitively, recruitment is an existential issue for rebel groups. Rebels must replenish their ranks due to attrition, and seek to recruit sufficient manpower to defeat or exact concessions from the government, or, minimally, survive. Rebel groups would ideally prefer to recruit high-quality fighters who demonstrate both discipline and commitment to their cause, yet gathering information about potential recruits can be costly.\(^{37}\) Thus, rebel organizations organize new recruitment networks or cultivate existing ones, such as radical student, labor, and religious associations; youth groups; social-patriotic organizations; and clan or ethnic networks.\(^{38}\) Recruitment networks provide rebels with a concentration of potential recruits and a heuristic to assess their quality, because members of these networks have high-quality information on other members’ commitment to anti-regime political activities. Individual rebel commanders who gain the loyalty of recruitment networks may draw on them as a power base during disputes.

Alternately, some commanders may win the loyalty of fighters in the operational network under their command. I define an operational network as a unit of fighters jointly participating in military operations and the relations between them. In ordinary language, this definition encompasses squads, units, platoons, commands, cells, and focos. Military operations may produce camaraderie among participants because fighters must train together, which improves inter-group commu-

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36 Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods.*
cation and cohesion,\textsuperscript{39} and because operations may last for a significant amount of time, during which fighters may develop “spontaneous loyalties” to their “military primary group.”\textsuperscript{40} As such, commanders may repurpose operational networks into a power base.

To identify recruitment networks, I sought evidence that the FSLN forged durable recruitment relationships with civilian groups, networks and organizations. If four or more FSLN recruits were members of the same civilian group prior to joining, I consider it a recruitment network.\textsuperscript{41} For operational networks, I sought urban cells and guerrilla columns with four or more combatants lasting at least one year. I collected these data through field interviews with rebel commanders, civilian and dissident leaders, and combatant memoirs.\textsuperscript{42} While recruitment and operational networks are conceptually distinct, they often overlap in practice. Recruits from the same recruitment network train together and fight together: for example, the FSLN’s Segovian guerrilla column was predominantly composed of recruits from the Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario (FER) and its Managua cell by recruits from the Movimiento Cristiano Revolucionario (MCR).

**New leader’s power base grows relative to incumbent’s**

New recruitment and operational networks cause leadership disputes through two interrelated dynamics. First, they elevate new rebel leaders. New cadres with leadership potential may win loyalty as a result of their previous leadership roles, military preparedness or accomplishments, role in recruitment, access to arms or wealth, or personal charisma.\textsuperscript{43} Leaders organizing or emerging from new networks are especially likely to possess strong ties to and social traits in common with their recruits. In the event of a leadership dispute, network leaders may expect personal loyalty from their recruits. Fighters recruited through their recruitment network thus constitute the key military resources in each leader’s power base.\textsuperscript{44} Fighter loyalties represent a leader’s \textit{de facto} power,


\textsuperscript{41}I set four as the minimum threshold because the largest family unit to join the FSLN (the Ortegas) had three members.

\textsuperscript{42}I coded six FSLN operational networks, three of which were nearly coextensive with recruitment networks and thus excluded from analysis. Only one (the Juan José Quezada (JJQ) command) was long-lived and large enough to serve as a leader’s power base.

\textsuperscript{43}Recruitment network leaders need not be join the group through their recruitment network. Rather, they may be older cadres who have been promoted to a key recruitment or command position.

\textsuperscript{44}Tamm, “Rebel Leaders, Internal Rivals, and External Resources,” 3.
as distinct from his formal power indicated by rank within the rebel hierarchy. Second, because dissidents continue to join recruitment networks and through them, the rebel group, a new rebel leader’s power base may grow over time. As with two states locked in an arms race, any upsurge in recruits from new recruitment networks weakens the relative power of older rebel leaders. Meanwhile, the number of loyal partisans of older leaders may diminish due to attrition and desertion, or from the promotion of loyalists to leadership positions, where they may become rivals.

To identify network leaders, I sought commanders who had a central role in a) the network’s recruitment and training, and/or b) operational command of a network. Not every commander who meets one or both of these criteria was a network leader. Thus, I sought data (usually interview evidence) evincing recruits’ respect and loyalty for a specific commander. In practice, there was little ambiguity in the historical record regarding the identities of network leaders at any given time.

Having identified network leaders, how can we operationalize and measure their power base? The operationalization must be sensitive to the way in which leaders actually draw on networks in leadership disputes. A simple count of recruits from each recruitment network, for example, is not an adequate operationalization because leadership disputes are not solely determined by which leader has a larger network. While “strong ties” with loyal fighters are a rebel leader’s core military resource, leadership disputes do not simply pit the disputants’ network against each other: a leadership dispute necessarily involves the entire rebel organization. Disputants therefore seek to construct the largest coalition possible.

For this reason, I operationalize each leader’s power base as the Eigenvector centrality of their network within the rebel organization as a whole. Eigenvector centrality is a commonly used metric in mathematical social network analysis developed to approximate an individual’s power within a social network.\(^45\) It is therefore an ideal operationalization for a rebel leader’s power base. In technical terms, it measures the relative influence of a specific node in a network, returning higher scores (on a scale of 0 to 1) for nodes that are themselves connected to influential nodes.\(^46\) This captures two important dynamics a simple count of network members would not. First, it will


\(^{46}\) Defined mathematically, “the [Eigenvector] centrality \(x_i\) of vertex \(i\) is proportional to the sum of the centralities of \(i\)’s neighbors: \(x_i = \kappa_i^{-1} \sum_j A_{ij} x_j\).” Mark E. J Newman, *Networks: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 170.
return a higher score for a rebel leader whose network includes many influential lieutenants. Second, it captures “weak ties” between network members and other fighters across distinct portions of a rebel organization, which may be drawn on to help build larger coalitions.47

**Shifting balance of power provokes leadership dispute**

Why does the relative change in older and newer leaders’ power bases cause a leadership dispute? In such a case, an older leader occupies a position of formal power at the top of the rebel hierarchy, while the newer leader possesses a larger power base—that is, he possesses more strong ties and affinity with rank-and-file rebel members on whose loyalty he can count. In these circumstances, the newer leader may be frustrated by “blocked promotions”48 and seek to revise the distribution of formal power through a leadership dispute.49 An incumbent leader also possesses incentives to cut down overly powerful subordinates. Rebel leadership disputes are therefore structured like the bargaining model of conflict, in which a rising power cannot credibly commit to continued obedience in the future.50 The bargaining problem is especially acute in a rebel leadership dispute as loyalty, the currency of power in the dispute, is private information known only to individual rebel fighters. Network ties and affinity may serve as a useful heuristic, but both old and new leaders are ultimately uncertain of their own—and their rival’s—power base in case of conflict. Uncertainty may complicate arriving at mutually satisfactory bargaining outcome (for example, agreeing to share power), or cause grave miscalculations (for example, waiting too long to swat down a rising rival leader).

I sought two types of evidence to demonstrate that the changing balance of loyalties caused a given leadership dispute. First, sequencing: because a rising leader is unlikely to accept a lower rank for long, a leadership dispute should occur shortly after a significant change in the balance of power.51 Second, and crucially, the identity of the disputant must match the prediction of

47Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1360–1380. I do not report Eigenvector centrality of individual leaders, because (as I note above) their ability to command the allegiance of individual networks derives from their individual leadership qualities rather than their network centrality alone. What matters for calculating the relative power of individual leaders in this analysis, then, is the centrality of the recruitment and operational networks that are loyal to them.

48Staniland, *Networks of rebellion*, 42.

49Similarly, Seymour shows how rivalries stemming from “struggles for leadership and promotions in armed groups” motivate rebel side-switching in fragmented civil wars. Seymour, “Why Factions Switch Sides in Civil Wars,” 103.


51I expect the direct trigger of or pretense for a leadership dispute to be unsystematic: a difference over strategy, a personal insult, a dirty look at a meeting.
the mechanism outlined above: at least one disputant challenging the established rebel leadership should be the leader of a “rising” recruitment or operational network.

**Leadership dispute produces coup or splinter**

Once a leadership dispute begins, what determines its resolution? Tamm sketches the logic of rebel leadership disputes:

A leader’s command authority is generally based on an *imbalanced* distribution of power in his favor. If this imbalance gets radically inverted in favor of a rival, the latter is likely to be able to stage a successful coup, thus replacing the existing leader without necessarily undermining the group’s structural integrity. By contrast, the shift from an imbalance to a *more balanced* distribution of power increases the likelihood of a split.

The rival becomes strong enough to actively challenge the leader but remains too weak to replace him.\(^{52}\)

I expect Tamm’s logic to hold for leadership disputes in this study. Once the gloves come off, the outcome of the dispute is likely to be determined by *de facto* power, measured in the Eigenvector centrality of a loyal recruitment or operational network, rather than formal power within the rebel hierarchy. Loyalty and influence, not funds or arms (as per Tamm), are the key determinants: by drawing on a more influential stock of loyal cadres, a new leader with a dominant power base will likely cobble together an overwhelming coup coalition. Where the power bases of an old leader and a new leader are evenly matched, the new leader can count on loyal cadres to follow him into a splinter group. Finally, when challengers overestimate the extent of their power base, or older leaders preventively strike in a foresighted effort to preserve their dominance, incumbents can overcome their challengers. Challengers are likely to be purged, executed, or to break away with a small coterie of followers to form a marginal splinter group.

This step has a key observable implication: each disputant should employ his power, formal or *de facto*, against the other. First, incumbent leaders should attempt to draw on their *formal*\(^{52}\)

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\(^{52}\)Tamm, “Rebel Leaders, Internal Rivals, and External Resources.” 3. Tamm argues that external support, such as the provision of funds or weapons, can alter the balance of power within a rebel group. However, funds and weapons cannot in themselves constitute a power base—rather, would-be leaders can distribute these resources to *win the loyalty of rebel fighters, thus altering the balance of loyalties in his favor*. My theory emphasizing loyalties is therefore “congruent” with those emphasizing material resources, such as Tamm’s (see Zaks, “Relationships Among Rivals (RAR)”).

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power to ward off challenges. Specifically, they should attempt to apply mechanisms of *internal discipline*, including sanctions, reassignment, reduction in rank, expulsion, and execution. Second, challengers with greater *de facto* power should attempt to mobilize their power base in response to the incumbent’s use of internal discipline. The extent of a challenger’s power base should determine whether they are successful at overcoming internal discipline. I expect that a challenger without a significant power base will suffer punishment, that a challenger with a comparable power base will be able to fight back against punishment (by negotiating or by splintering with loyal fighters), and that a challenger with a significantly greater power base can ignore attempts at punishment. In the latter case, the challenger may expel the incumbent or simply remove his formal powers as a *fait accompli*: an internal coup.

*Hypothesis 4: Rebel factional struggles and organizational splits are more likely following significant shifts in an organization’s balance of loyalties.*

The above account raises the question of the precise timing of disputes. Why do some disputes begin early, when the incumbent retains an advantage or at least parity, and others late, when the challenger has gained the advantage? Unfortunately, it is difficult to predict *ex ante* the precise timing of a leadership dispute, as it is contingent upon the decision-making of individual incumbents and challengers. This, in turn, is subject to uncertainty (over one’s rival’s intentions and power, over the extent of one’s own power, and of potential future changes in the distribution of power), of miscalculation, of mismatches between a leader’s personal incentives and those of the rebel group as a whole, and of learning, which accumulates over successive leadership disputes. That is, predictable disputes are unpredictably triggered by the vagaries of individual leaders’ decision-making processes. I discuss this issue further in the Supplemental Appendix.

4 Research design

I test my theoretical claims through interview and network data gathered on Nicaragua’s FSLN. Though the FSLN case study forms the empirical core of the paper, the balance of loyalties theory is meant to explain the causes and outcomes of factional struggles more broadly. To this end I follow
Slater and Ziblatt’s framework for establishing external validity in single-case study research.\textsuperscript{53} I express the theory in general, rather than context-specific, terms and selected the Nicaraguan case for its within-case “representative variation” of outcomes across disputes: all possible outcomes predicted by the balance of loyalties theory occurred in the case. I return to the question of generalizability at the end of the paper, and offer comparisons to the FSLN’s disputes drawn from diverse case material.

**Data collection and dataset construction**

To gather the “diverse and relevant evidence” necessary for process tracing,\textsuperscript{54} I conducted elite interviews and built an original, longitudinal network dataset of commanders (comandantes) and political leaders (dirigentes) in the FSLN and its splinter groups (henceforth the FSLN Commander Dataset). I conducted 31 interviews, primarily with former FSLN commanders. I sought out commanders from each of the FSLN’s three splinter groups. My interviews were free-ranging but followed a common pattern: I asked each informant about their pathway to mobilization, their experiences upon joining, and their attitudes to FSLN goals and ideological positions. Then I asked informants to narrate their experiences of the 1975-1976 split, along with their understanding of its causes. I report in the Methodological Appendix detailed information about my informants, my interview techniques, sampling frame, saturation levels, and how I negotiated retrospective and presentation biases while interpreting interview evidence.\textsuperscript{55}

I use the FSLN Commander Dataset to calculate the centrality of the FSLN’s constituent recruitment and operational networks, which determines when rebel organizations succumb to leadership disputes and organizational splits. I generated the data to construct the dataset during three months of archival research at the Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica (IHNCA) in Nicaragua. Typically, rebel group internal structures are opaque to researchers: to prevent infiltration by regime agents and damage when collaborators defect, guerrilla warfare requires compartmentalization of information about chains of command. Nor can clandestine rebel networks be easily reconstructed after conflict. As the modal rebel group fails to take power and

\textsuperscript{53}Dan Slater and Daniel Ziblatt, “The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison,” *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 10 (2013): 11–12.

\textsuperscript{54}Bennett and Checkel, *Process Training*, 27.

surviving combatants may face state retaliation during the post-war period, former rebels often lack the resources or motivation to divulge wartime command structures in detail. In Nicaragua, however, the Sandinista government compiled meticulous historical records after the FSLN’s victorious revolutionary campaign. Drawing on those information sources, my dataset can depict the internal structure of each insurgent group at greater levels of detail than most conflict studies.

I employed dozens of primary and secondary sources to construct the Commander Dataset, including a large collection of biographies of FSLN commanders compiled to provide reading material for a 1980 literacy campaign, 27 memoirs of former combatants, almost all of whom were commanders or political leaders across all three factions, and 12 collections of combatant interviews. The network dataset contains 119 FSLN commanders who joined from 1961–1976, an extraordinary level of granularity for a rebel movement that, at any given moment, comprised fewer than 100 members.\textsuperscript{56} In 1977, a year after the organization splintered, Humberto Ortega reports that all FSLN factions combined had “a little more than a hundred” combatants;\textsuperscript{57} my network dataset contains 90 individuals in 1977, indicating substantial coverage.

I coded the date each commander joined the FSLN, the date they ceased activity (usually through being killed in action), their factional membership in 1976, and at least one network connection immediately prior to joining the FSLN (a recruitment network for most, otherwise a personal connection to an FSLN member, a university, or a high school). Commanders were excluded from the dataset when this information was unavailable, which occurred primarily for obscure or short-time members whose impact on the outcomes of interest were minimal. Exclusion of relatively marginal commanders should not bias the findings for or against any hypothesis. Because the data are longitudinal, they paint a picture of the FSLN’s social composition for every year between 1961 and 1977. I discuss dataset construction in more detail in the Methodological Appendix.

\textsuperscript{56}The FSLN suffered an attrition rate of 1.53 commanders per year during this span. FSLN ranks surged into the thousands only during the 1978–1979 mass uprising that swept them to victory.

\textsuperscript{57}Humberto Ortega Saavedra, \textit{La epopeya de la insurrección} (Managua: Lea Grupo Editorial, 2004), 315.
5 Case overview

The FSLN fragmented not during adversity, but shortly after its greatest operational success to date. On December 27th, 1974, after thirteen years of armed struggle, the FSLN struck a spectacular blow against the Somoza dynasty that had governed Nicaragua for nearly four decades. A command of thirteen urban guerrillas stormed a Christmas party hosted at the home of José María “Chema” Castillo, the minister of agriculture in Anastasio Somoza Debayle’s government. The FSLN captured a large number of high-ranking members of the regime, including relatives of the president. In exchange for freeing the hostages, the guerrillas demanded one million dollars, the publication of a revolutionary manifesto, freedom for eight captured FSLN members, and an escort to the “Las Mercedes” airport, where they would fly to Cuba.58 All these demands were met. On the way to the airport, masses of ordinary Nicaraguans followed the caravan, demonstrating their support for the revolutionaries. Young Managua-based rebel leaders observed the popular reaction and envisioned new possibilities for toppling the Somoza dictatorship by bringing the masses into the fight.59

Yet despite the spectacular success of the operation, the FSLN’s rapid growth, and the increasing unsteadiness of the regime, the FSLN tore itself apart. By mid-1976, less than two years after the operation, the FSLN had fragmented into three bickering factions, called tendencias or tendencies. One faction, the Guerra Popular Prolongada (FSLN-GPP), or Prolonged People’s War, favored a Maoist strategy of building guerrilla columns in Nicaragua’s northern mountains. The second, Proletaria or Proletarian tendency (FSLN-TP) favored mobilizing urban workers and rural campesinos. The third, Tercerista or Insurreccional tendency (FSLN-TI), sought to spark a mass popular uprising. For three years until their formal reunification in 1979, the factions’ leadership closed their structures to one other and competed with propaganda and military outbidding. The FSLN’s splintering, coming at a moment of political opportunity, instead proved costly. Security conditions deteriorated as each faction hastily rebuilt internal structures to replace those lost to rival factions. In November 1976, Carlos Fonseca, the FSLN’s long-time leader and now a top commander of the FSLN-GPP, was killed by the National Guard.60 At almost the same time,

58 Jaime Wheelock, Frente Sandinista: diciembre victorioso (Managua: SNPEP, 1979), 53.
FSLN-TI leader Eduardo Contreras and FSLN-TP leader Roberto Huembes were captured and killed in separate incidents.\textsuperscript{61} In October 1977, the FSLN-GPP leader Pedro Aráuz was caught unaware and killed by a National Guard patrol responding to a nearby FSLN-TI operation.\textsuperscript{62}

This sequence of events raises a puzzle: why would a rebel organization splinter in such a costly manner despite enjoying military success and popular support? The balance of loyalties mechanism allows us to solve this puzzle. It was precisely rising popular support, and the resulting waves of new recruits, that made rebellious collective action more challenging. Rising levels of civilian discontent in Nicaragua, caused by the 1967 Roosevelt Avenue massacre and the 1972 Managua earthquake, mobilized new recruitment networks: radical student groups and revolutionary Christians. These networks dramatically transformed the FSLN’s internal composition, displacing the networks upon which the organization was originally built and bringing to the fore new leaders with independent power bases. These new leaders struggled with declining incumbents to move up the rebel hierarchy. Where new leaders built a dominant power base, they overthrew older leaders in internal coups. Where the FSLN’s constituent recruitment and operational networks divided their loyalties between old and new leaders, the conflicts sundered the rebel group, engendering organizational splits.

**Leadership disputes: a struggle for power**

While almost all extant historiography on the FSLN reports that the factional dispute was caused by disagreements over ideology and strategy, my interviewees were equally unanimous that the factional dispute was, at heart, a struggle for power. The factional dispute resulted from “disputes between leaders that had the fundamental nature of power, of desire for power;”\textsuperscript{63} it was caused by “human pettiness... and I don’t know, I don’t discard either the ambition for power, right?... So then, I think those two things are the seed of the conflict. That afterwards came to acquire a clear ideological differentiation, or rather strategic.”\textsuperscript{64} It had “a very strong doctrinal foundation, there’s no doubt, but it didn’t present itself like that, right? One. Two, it seems to me that it presented itself at the same time as a struggle for power... They wanted to take the leadership from Carlos

\textsuperscript{61}Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 203.

\textsuperscript{62}Interview 9, Managua, October 2015. See also interview with Glauco Robelo in Mónica Baltodano, *Memorias de la lucha sandinista. Tomo II, El Crisol de las insurrecciones: Las Segovias, Managua y León* (Managua, Nicaragua: IHNCA-UCA, 2010).

\textsuperscript{63}Interview 16, Laguna de Apoyo, June 2016.

\textsuperscript{64}Interview 17, Managua, June 2017.
Another commander, close to the main protagonists, told me that “everybody wanted to be in command. Even in the most thuggish bands there’s always a fight for command [...] that’s the human condition: ambition, the theory of ambition.” Carlos Fonseca, the FSLN’s visionary co-founder, also recognized this. “It happens,” he wrote in a 1976 polemic dripping with biting understatement, “that certain compañeros give the appearance of being ambitious.”

The struggle for power took place between the leaders of the FSLN’s constituent recruitment or operational networks, because these networks structured their members’ loyalties into a power base. FSLN combatants referred to their most prolific sources of recruits as “canteras,” which they considered constitutive building blocks of the rebel organization. Individual rank-and-file rebels who joined the FSLN from a specific cantera, or recruitment network, tended to remain loyal to other rebel fighters and rebel leaders from the same cantera. In theory, individual rebels may find their loyalties divided in several directions. They may be loyal to a leader who can provide selective incentives, the quotidian ties of friends, family, and romantic interests, the individual(s) that recruited them, operational ties, generational ties such as shared training or experiences, ideological commitments, and individuals from the same cantera. In practice, these different possible sources of loyalty tend to overlap and reinforce each other. Friends and family follow each other into the same recruitment networks and recruit each other into armed groups, while dissidents who join together are likely to train together, fight together, and share a pre-existing ideological formation. One commander, who gave up his high ranking in the FSLN to defect to the FSLN-TP, Jaime Wheelock’s splinter faction, explained why: “We’re comrades [compañeros] and friends for many years. Jaime and I entered the Frente together, together in the same year, doing the same thing... and in the same place in León. With the same people. We came from the same university, we lived in the same house, we lived in the same neighborhood in

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65 Interview 26, Managua, December 2016.
66 Interview 21, Managua, October 2016.
67 Carlos Fonseca Amador, El Último Documento de Carlos Fonseca: Nota Sobre Algunos Problemas de Hoy (1976), 13. Fonseca was referring to Eduardo Contreras and Humberto Ortega with this statement.
68 FSLN members also referred to recruitment networks as “semilleros,” or seedbeds, or as organizaciones intermedias. Guerrilla practitioners inventing a specialized terminology equivalent to our theoretical constructs should reassure us of their validity. I will refer to the FSLN’s recruitment networks as canteras within this case study.
70 Parkinson, “Organizing Rebellion.”
Managua, so we knew each other from forever, right?”

Even in integrated combat units, FSLN recruits often continued to identify, or be identified by others, with their original cantera. One FSLN guerrilla who joined from the Christian movement told me that when she was initially placed in a mixed cell of Christians and Marxists, some Marxists remained distrustful—even disparaging—of the Christians. Clandestine tasks were divided between militants from different canteras—“community organizing” for the Christians and “clandestine propaganda” for the Marxists. Later she was transferred to a fully Christian cell. Reflecting on how rank-and-file militants later sorted into different splinter factions, she told me that “the links or the construction of the tendencies [factions] came about by who your friend was, who had recruited you, who you knew, who you were with at the moment. It wasn’t by your ideology, it was by personal alignments.” Each of these elements, in turn, were largely a function of the cantera from which individuals had joined the FSLN. In this manner, canteras structured rebel subgroup loyalties over the course of a conflict and they determined which rank-and-file militants followed which leaders.

_Canteras_ matter most during leadership struggles, when formal lines of communications break down as links between the loyalists of different leaders come apart. Given that rebel groups are illicit organizations, the resulting environment is likely to be information-poor: rank-and-file cadres may receive only a partial account of the causes of division and the composition of different factions, and may even be uncertain of how to contact their immediate superiors. When formal lines of communication break down, they may be replaced by informal lines built on pre-existing social ties. As these ties are densest among members of the same cantera, canteras are especially likely to structure individual choice during leadership disputes.

6 Tracing the mechanism through four leadership disputes

Though this study is primarily concerned with theory-building, I also exploit within-case variation to conduct preliminary tests of specific predictions drawn from the theory. This section presents an overview of the findings from my analysis of all four major leadership disputes in the FSLN from

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72 Interview 26, Managua, December 2016.
73 Interview 16, Laguna de Apoyo, June 2016.
74 Parkinson, “Organizing Rebellion.”
Table 1: FSLN leaders and power bases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Power base</th>
<th>Abbr.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Fonseca</td>
<td>Partido Socialista Nicaragüense</td>
<td>PSN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar Turcios</td>
<td>Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario</td>
<td>FER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro Aráuz</td>
<td>Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario</td>
<td>FER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis Carrión</td>
<td>Movimiento Cristiano Revolucionario</td>
<td>MCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eduardo Contreras</td>
<td>Comando Juan José Quezada</td>
<td>JJQ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1971 to 1976 (Table 1 briefly summarizes contending leaders and their respective power bases). I present two types of evidence connecting rebel recruitment and operational networks to leadership disputes: a comparison of theoretical predictions with observed outcomes, and process-tracing evidence. The results offer strong support for my theory. Predictions about the timing of disputes, the identities of disputants, and the outcomes of disputes are accurate across all four disputes. In the process tracing sections that follow, I observe the posited observable implications throughout each leadership dispute.

Predictions about rebel leadership disputes

The theory makes three predictions based on relative changes in rebel leaders’ power bases. These predictions pertain to a) the timing of leadership disputes, b) the identities of the disputants, and c) the outcomes of leadership disputes. All three predictions proved accurate in every dispute—twelve correct predictions in all—furnishing strong evidence that relative changes in rebel leader’s power bases caused the FSLN’s leadership disputes.

First, the theory predicts that rebel leadership disputes occur shortly after a new rebel leader’s power base grows strong enough to challenge or threaten the incumbent. Figure 2 compares the Eigenvector centralities of all large canteras within the FSLN over time, along with one operational network (JJQ) that functioned as a power base in the fourth dispute. Comparing Eigencentralities in this way identifies all potential challengers, not just those who actually challenged incumbents. In the FSLN’s case, every potential challenger did in fact participate in an actual leadership challenge.

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75 I also discuss minor leadership disputes—those ending rapidly in incumbent victories—below, though in less detail.

76 Prior to 1969, the Juventud Patriótica Nicaragüense (JPN, not shown in Figure 2) was the FSLN’s most central cantera. The JPN was also recruited by Fonseca and its membership significantly overlapped with the PSN.
providing strong support for my theory. All power shifts in the FSLN led to a leadership dispute, which invariably initiated within two years after a challenging leader’s power base (a cantera or operational network) reached an Eigenvector centrality of at least .5.\textsuperscript{77}

Moreover, the theory predicts the identity of the disputants: challengers naturally should be the leaders of rising canteras or operational networks. There were, at any given moment, a dozen or more elite commanders within the FSLN who might contend in a leadership dispute, but only one or two leaders of rising canteras or operational networks. Thus, we would not expect to observe this pattern unless there were a causal relationship between a leader’s growing power base and his participation in a leadership dispute. Yet the theory accurately predicts the identity of the challenger in all four leadership disputes: at least one challenger in every dispute was the unambiguous leader of a rising cantera or operational network (see Table 2). By contrast, there is far less correlation between participation in a leadership dispute and the challenger’s formal rank within the rebel hierarchy. Oscar Turcios was Fonseca’s second-in-command and Eduardo Contreras a member of the FSLN’s paramount National Directorate, but Pedro Aráuz and Luis Carrión were not even members of the National Directorate when their leadership disputes began.

Finally, my theory predicts the outcome of leadership disputes based on the relative sizes of the incumbent’s and the challenger’s power base. As demonstrated by Table 2 my theory performs well in this task. The first dispute, where an internal coup was predicted, ended in a power-sharing

\textsuperscript{77}Note that Eigencentrality is a heuristic metric and .5 is an arbitrary, if common-sense, cut-off to mark a substantial power base.
accord favoring the challenger, an outcome closely resembling an internal coup.\textsuperscript{78} The other disputes ended in unambiguous coups and splits, as predicted by the theory. Several \textit{incumbent victories} also occurred throughout the FSLN’s history, in each case when challengers lacked a significant power base. I discuss one of these, Pedro Aráuz’s victory over challenger Jaime Wheelock, in detail below. Several other challengers were expelled from the organization, including Catalino Flores, Alejandro Gutiérrez, and Plutarco Hernández. Like Wheelock, Plutarco Hernández’s 1979 expulsion is especially useful in illustrating incumbent victories: though a member of the FSLN’s National Directorate, he was Costa Rican, and thus lacked organic ties to Nicaraguan recruitment and operational networks.\textsuperscript{79}

The theory’s predictive success provides compelling evidence that changing balance of loyalties explains the FSLN’s leadership disputes, internal coups, and organizational splits. Alternative explanations are less successful. Leadership disputes raged through periods of heightened state violence and during lulls. An examination of rebel leaders’ ideological and strategic statements reveals ample evidence of “cheap talk.” Most importantly, throughout the case study period, the FSLN had limited access to lootable resources and controlled little to no territory.\textsuperscript{80} Nor did the FSLN receive external patronage: according to FSLN-GPP commander Henry Ruiz, “[after] 1968, Cuba suspended the policy of training us militarily.”\textsuperscript{81} Edén Pastora reports that Fidel Castro, fearing American counterintervention, said in 1977 that, “The best help I can give you is not to help you at all.”\textsuperscript{82} Cuba withheld external support during the factional dispute in particular because “they didn’t want to be seen as taking sides.”\textsuperscript{83} Only in 1978, after the case study period, did other foreign sponsors emerge.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{78}While I had not theorized power sharing accords prior to data collection, this outcome is consistent with the underlying logic of the balance of loyalties theory. Leaders may share power rather than split organizations when connected by strong “horizontal ties.” Staniland, \textit{Networks of rebellion}.

\textsuperscript{79}Ortega Saavedra, \textit{La epopeya de la insurrección}, 261; Plutarco S Hernández, \textit{El FSLN por dentro: relatos de un combatiente} (San José, Costa Rica: publisher not identified, 1982). Incumbent victories largely appear in historiography and recollections of participants as matters of internal discipline. Due to space limitations I do not treat these comparatively minor events in depth.

\textsuperscript{80}The FSLN funded its operations through hostage-taking and bank robberies, measures available to all factions alike.

\textsuperscript{81}Interview with Henry Ruiz in Mónica Baltodano, \textit{Memorias de la lucha sandinista. Tomo I, De la forja de la vanguardia a la montaña} (Managua, Nicaragua: IHNCA-UCA, 2010).


Table 2: Predicted and observed leadership dispute outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dispute</th>
<th>Predicted challenger</th>
<th>Incumbent’s power base (Eigen-centrality)</th>
<th>Challenger’s power base (Eigen-centrality)</th>
<th>Predicted outcome</th>
<th>Observed outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dispute 1: Fonseca vs. Turcios (1971-1973)</td>
<td>Turcios</td>
<td>0.464</td>
<td><strong>0.924</strong></td>
<td>Internal coup</td>
<td>Power-sharing accord favoring challenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispute 2: Fonseca vs. Aráuz (1973-1974)</td>
<td>Aráuz</td>
<td>0.408</td>
<td><strong>0.922</strong></td>
<td>Internal coup</td>
<td>Internal coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispute 3: Aráuz vs. Wheelock, Carrión, &amp; Huembes (1975)</td>
<td>Carrión</td>
<td><strong>0.927</strong></td>
<td>0.512</td>
<td>Organizational split</td>
<td>Organizational split</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispute 4: Aráuz vs. Contreras (1976)</td>
<td>Contreras</td>
<td><strong>0.992</strong></td>
<td>0.674</td>
<td>Organizational split</td>
<td>Organizational split</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following sections, I process trace each of the FSLN’s four leadership disputes. Not only are my theory’s predictions accurate; I also observe each of the balance of loyalties mechanism’s posited steps in every dispute.

**Leadership dispute 1**

Historians trace the institutional origins of the FSLN to a *Partido Socialista Nicaragüense* (PSN) “cell” at the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua* in León (UNAN-León) founded in 1956.\(^{85}\) Radicalized by the Cuban revolution in 1959,\(^{86}\) the cell broke with the accommodationist Moscow-line PSN in 1961 and committed itself to armed struggle.\(^{87}\) Former PSN cell member and FSLN co-founder Carlos Fonseca emerged as the organization’s first major leader. PSN cadres continued to join the FSLN until 1967,\(^{88}\) forming Fonseca’s dominant power base until the late 1960s.

The Cuban-inspired revolutionary wave also left behind another small student organization, the *Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario* (FER),\(^{89}\) which discreetly affiliated with the FSLN in 1963.\(^{90}\)

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\(^{85}\) IES, Carlos: el eslabón vital.
\(^{87}\) Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 65.
\(^{89}\) Interview 26, Managua, December 2016.
\(^{90}\) Ortega Saavedra, *La epopeya de la insurrección*, 146.
Table 3: Relative power of FSLN canteras, 1967–1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Eigencentrality</th>
<th>FER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>0.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>0.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a 1967 regime massacre of civilian protestors on Roosevelt Avenue in Managua impelled a second wave of student mobilization from 1967 to 1970, the FSLN seized on anti-regime anger by "open[ing] the doors of the FER and many students entered, without the condition that they be Marxists." The FER became a major cantera—a source of dozens of FSLN commanders and rank-and-file fighters. Few FER recruits met Carlos Fonseca, who spent much of this period imprisoned in Costa Rica.

Instead, Oscar Turcios, an early student leader who assumed control of the FER after the National Guard killed its previous leader in 1969, benefited from the cantera’s growth. After spending 1968 to 1970 in Cuba, Turcios returned to Nicaragua, where as National Coordinator, he "took up all of the organization’s work," above all recruitment and training, a process Turcios called the “accumulation of strength in silence [acumulación de fuerzas en silencio].”

Analysis of the network dataset demonstrates that the FER rapidly rose from a marginal cantera to the FSLN’s most central cantera between 1968 to 1971. Table 3 shows the Eigenvector centrality of the FER from 1967, the year of the Roosevelt Avenue massacre, to 1971, when the first leadership struggle initiated, compared to the PSN cantera that constituted Carlos Fonseca’s power base. In 1967, Fonseca commanded an overwhelmingly central position within the FSLN’s network (see Figure 3). Thus, when frictions first emerged between Fonseca and Turcios after a failed 1967 guerrilla foco, Fonseca simply responded with internal discipline, temporarily demoting Turcios in

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91 Interview 27, Managua, December 2016.
92 Interview 21, Managua, October 2016.
93 IES, Carlos: el eslabón vital.
94 Interview 21, Managua, October 2016 and Ortega Saavedra, La epopeya de la insurrección, 168.
95 Adolfo Díaz Lacayo, Nicaragua, gobiernos, gobernantes y genealogías (Managua: Printex, 2010), 703.
96 Bayardo Arce interviewed in Baltodano, Memorias de la lucha sandinista I.
Figure 3: The FSLN in 1967
PSN: Carlos Fonseca’s power base, FER: Oscar Turcio’s power base

Figure 4: The FSLN in 1971
PSN: Carlos Fonseca’s power base, FER: Oscar Turcio’s power base
favor of a loyalist, Tomás Borge. By 1971, Fonseca’s power base was still formidable, but the FER had become the most central node in the FSLN’s network (see Figure 4). As its leader, Turcios now had a strong position from which to challenge Fonseca’s formal authority over the FSLN—which he soon did. The dispute’s timing, 1971, supports the hypothesis that Turcios’ growing power base gave him the leverage necessary to challenge Fonseca.

The ensuing struggle for “supremacy in the leadership of the FSLN” played out in a series of missives arguing for different strategic emphases. According to Matilde Zimmermann, who reviewed the leaders’ dueling communiques, Turcios proposed that the FSLN focus on building its strength in the Segovia mountains (writing “It will be from the countryside that we will advance on the cities and take them”), a Maoist position called the guerra popular prolongada (GPP, or prolonged people’s war). Meanwhile, Fonseca wrote that this reduced to “just copying an approach from books about experiences in other countries,” and advocated building strength in cities, towns and agricultural sectors for a potential insurrection.

While the content of the dispute may have been strategic differences, the conduct of the dispute reflected each leader’s relative power: the leaders bargained with each other to define the strategic direction of the FSLN. In mid-1973, both sides attended a meeting in Nandaime. The cadres present at this meeting accurately reflected each leader’s power base, providing some evidence that the relative balance of loyalties played a role in determining the outcome of the dispute between leaders: Turcios attended the meeting with two of his top lieutenants, Ricardo Morales and Carlos Agüero, both student movement leaders whose chief responsibilities were organizing the FER and its new recruits, while Humberto Ortega and Tomás Borges, recruited from first-generation canteras, represented Fonseca. The outcome of the negotiations—a power-sharing accord—also reflected the respective power base of each leader. In the accords struck at this meeting, “the thesis that predominates is the guerra popular, without rejecting judgments of the insurrectional type.”

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an incomplete victory for Turcios. It is uncertain whether this dispute would have eventually culminated in a leadership coup, because the National Guard killed Turcios a month later.\footnote{Claribel Alegría and D. J Flakoll, \textit{Nicaragua, la revolución sandinista: una crónica política, 1855-1979} (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1982), 202.}

New recruitment and a changing balance of loyalties offer the best explanation for this leadership dispute and its outcome. The FSLN had little access to material resources during this period.\footnote{Omar Cabezas, \textit{Fire from the Mountain: The Making of a Sandinista} (New York: New American Library, 1986).} The FSLN’s mountain column and student cadres suffered asymmetric battlefield losses in the years prior to the dispute. However Turcios’ dispute with Fonseca revolved not around the strategy of “accumulating forces in silence” (a response to these losses), but rather over the relative importance of guerrilla and urban warfare. Meanwhile, though ideological differences were real, there is evidence of “cheap talk” as well: other commanders point to conflicts over pride, position, and personality before the dispute,\footnote{Borge, \textit{The Patient Impatience}, 230, 232; Hernández, \textit{El FSLN por dentro}, 69; Ortega Saavedra, \textit{La epopeya de la insurrección}, 285 and interview 16, Laguna de Apoyo, June 2016. See also interview of Henry Ruiz in Baltodano, \textit{Memorias de la lucha sandinista I}.} while in 1973 Turcios proposed an alliance with the Conservative Party in which “Sandinista guerrillas could distract and neutralize the National Guard while the opposition carried out a coup”—a strategy, needless to say, completely at odds with the stated GPP platform “that envisioned up to 30 years of rural guerrilla warfare as a precondition for an FSLN victory.”\footnote{Zimmermann, \textit{Sandinista}, 174.}

In sum, ideological differences were superimposed onto earlier personal and personnel disputes, and leaders manipulated and disregarded ideology when inconvenient. Moreover, ideological differences cannot explain why Oscar Turcios possessed the military resources to challenge Carlos Fonseca, nor explain their dispute’s outcome. Battlefield shocks and internal ideological contestation served as short-term triggers, but the shifting \textit{balance of loyalties} was the underlying cause of Turcios’ and Fonseca’s leadership dispute.

**Leadership dispute 2**

Rather than ending, the leadership dispute intensified after Turcios’ September 1973 death. Pedro Aráuz Palacios replaced Turcios as interim National Coordinator and leader of the FER, inheriting Turcios’ \textit{cantera} and thus his relative power superiority over Carlos Fonseca. With the underlying balance of power still shifting away from Fonseca, my theory predicts a continuation of the leader-
ship dispute, this time with Aráuz challenging Fonseca’s overall leadership, and predicts that this dispute should end in an internal coup. All of these predictions were borne out.

The FSLN recruited Aráuz, a university student at UNAN-León and a member of the FER’s secretariat, in 1969. He became Oscar Turcios’ top lieutenant, and on Turcios’ death, was a natural successor because “Oscar and Pedro were like two sides of the same coin. Oscar took him everywhere, so Pedro knew the whole structure, and that’s why they decided on him.” Aráuz held two key roles that allowed him to swiftly consolidate the FER as his power base: first, he conducted FER recruitment, and second, he monopolized communications with Henry Ruiz’s guerrilla column in the Segovia mountains, assuring that they heard only his accounting of events. Having gained the loyalty of the FER cantera, Aráuz was able to challenge Fonseca’s leadership despite lacking his predecessor Turcios’ legendary military skills and long trajectory in the FSLN. Oscar Turcios’ death allowed Fonseca to attempt to reclaim the FSLN’s overall leadership. Yet he would be stymied by Aráuz’s sudden and, to Fonseca, unexpected rise. Observing the shifting balance of loyalties, we are much less surprised by Aráuz’s challenge. When Aráuz assumed leadership of the FER in September 1973, it had become the most central cantera within the FSLN’s network, with an Eigenvector centrality of 0.924. By contrast, Fonseca’s PSN had declined to 0.464, leaving him with a narrower power base than Aráuz’s (see Table 4 and Figure 5).

As predicted by my theory, a) Fonseca, the formal leader, attempted to impose internal discipline on Aráuz, and b) Aráuz, the de facto power, mobilized his power base. After Turcios’ death, Fonseca ordered two personnel moves intended to restore his authority over the FSLN. First, he promoted Jaime Wheelock, a Cuba-based intellectual with few ties to the rank-and-file, to the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>PSN</th>
<th>FER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>0.657</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>0.464</td>
<td>0.924</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Relative power of FSLN caneras, 1972–1973

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109 Interview 21, Managua, October 2016.
110 Mónica Baltodano (2010a), who served directly under Aráuz in the FSLN-GPP.
111 Interview 24, Estelí, November 2016
112 He led the FER “by default,” by “out-surviving” others, and was a “relative unknown.” Interview 30, Managua, January 2017 and interview 29, Managua, January 2017.
National Directorate, and second, he assigned Henry Ruíz, the commander of the Segovian column and presumably more pliant than Turcios or Aráuz, to be the new National Coordinator. Aráuz rejected both changes, telling one of my informants “Look. I’m going to be the boss [jefe].”  

In response to Aráuz’s disobedience, Fonseca attempted to apply internal discipline by chastising him and ordering him to join the column as a rank-and-file guerrilla (a punishment Wheelock later referred to as being sent to a “concentration camp.”)  

Yet Aráuz could defy this new order “because he had dominion over the structures. . . Carlos didn’t even know who was in the Frente, he didn’t know and he didn’t know how to find them.” Aráuz actively mobilized his power base, going “from cell to cell weakening the figure of Carlos Fonseca in front of the cell. . . Saying that Carlos had been outside for a long time, that he hadn’t been here pulling his weight; he weakened Carlos’ authority.”  

The leaders settled into an uneasy impasse, which Aráuz contrived to break. In October 1974, Pedro Aráuz and and his top lieutenant, Eduardo Contreras, proposed that “the members of the National Directorate can only make use of their authority when located inside the country.”  

This resolution nullified Fonseca’s authority as long as he stayed in Cuba. Contreras then led the Chema Castillo raid with the Comando Juan José Quezada (JJQ). This spectacular operational success (described above) “was also a mechanism to strengthen the internal leadership and their positions against the external leadership.” Fonseca abacked down, affirming Aráuz’s position and canceling Wheelock’s appointment to the DN. Critically, Fonseca and Ortega accepted Aráuz and Contreras’ resolution, placing all decision-making authority in Aráuz’s hands. The dispute had culminated in an internal coup by Aráuz, as my theory would predict based on the FER’s dominant network centrality within the FSLN.  

Other hypotheses fail to fully explain this dispute. The FSLN received a million dollar ransom from the Chema Castillo raid, yet hypothesis 1 finds little support. Strikingly, the challengers,
Figure 5: The FSLN in 1973
PSN: Carlos Fonseca’s power base, FER: Pedro Aráuz’s power base

Aráuz and his lieutenant Contreras, delivered this windfall to incumbent Fonseca and the National Directorate in Cuba, while successfully overturning Fonseca’s authority. This dispute would be resolved by command of loyalties, not control of funds. Battlefield shocks—specifically, Turcios’ killing—does help explain the timing of this leadership dispute.\textsuperscript{120} As Staniland argues, leadership decapitation depletes horizontal bonds of trust between leaders.\textsuperscript{121} In line with this theory, Turcios’ personal ties to Fonseca were far closer than Aráuz’s: Fonseca and Aráuz had never met.\textsuperscript{122} According to one FSLN commander, Fonseca wanted to replace Aráuz with Henry Ruiz precisely because the two enjoyed a better personal relationship (even though, as detailed below, they disagreed on strategy).\textsuperscript{123} Nonetheless, while leadership decapitation triggered the conflict between Fonseca and Aráuz, it cannot predict the identities of disputants nor the outcome of the dispute.

There is little evidence that strategic/ideological disagreements played a role in this leadership

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{120}There is no evidence for Christia’s (2012) asymmetric battlefield loss mechanism, as the FSLN avoided battles between 1971 and 1973. \\
\textsuperscript{121}Staniland, \textit{Networks of rebellion}. \\
\textsuperscript{122}IES, \textit{Carlos: el eslabón vital}. \\
\textsuperscript{123}Interview 29, Managua, January 2017.
\end{tabular}
\end{footnotesize}
dispute. The rhetoric used by Fonseca and Aráuz, reported in interviews and documents, does not mention ideological or strategic differences. Rather, the rhetoric centered on a) personnel assignments and b) resentment at Fonseca leading from Cuba rather than Nicaragua. Meanwhile, had Fonseca wanted to push back against Turcios’ prolonged people’s war strategy, his selection for the new National Coordinator, Ruiz, would have been the least logical choice in the entire organization: Ruiz had been the sole commander of the FSLN’s Segovian column for four years, and was utterly devoted to the prolonged people’s war strategy. Fonseca’s primary goal was promoting a competent, trustworthy lieutenant, not promoting an ideological vision.

Leadership dispute 3

Even before Pedro Aráuz’s coup, the FSLN incorporated a new cantera, the Movimiento Cristiano Revolucionario (MCR), which became the FSLN’s second largest cantera by 1974. My theory accurately predicts a leadership dispute between Aráuz and the MCR’s cantera leader, Luis Carrión Cruz, ending in a 1975 split.

In 1972, a group of well-off, liberation theology-inspired students relocated to a Christian Base Community in the “impoverished slums” of the Managua, founding the MCR under Luis Carrión Cruz’s leadership. According to a founder, “the FER wasn’t for us... So then, what we did was connect a number of people in the university through their relations with Christian groups, which we had established when we were high school students or a little later, and it was like a network.” Following a devastating December 1972 earthquake and the Somoza regime’s embezzlement of international aid, “[t]he [MCR’s] leaders joined [the FSLN] directly and, little by little, the rest of us joined up.”

The MCR recruits maintained an identity as revolutionary Christians, distinct from the typically secular FER students. By 1974 “in Managua there were many more people in the Movimiento Cristiano than the FER—the FER [in Managua] was weak” and FER leader Pedro Aráuz had “less dominion, less control, less presence” in Managua. Meanwhile, MCR leader Luis Carrión

124 Interview with Henry Ruiz in Baltodano, Memorias de la lucha sandinista I.
126 Interview 17, Managua, June 2016.
127 Alegria and Flakoll, Nicaragua, la revolución sandinista, 192.
128 Interview 30, Managua, January 2017
Table 5: Relative power of FSLN canteras, 1972–1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Eigencentrality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>0.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>0.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>0.922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

rapidly rose to an elite position in the FSLN’s hierarchy due to his independent power base: when he “joined the Frente Sandinista, he did so as the leader of an organized group of people, not as an individual, and without idealizing the Frente and its leaders.”

Table 5 compares the Eigenvector centrality of the FER cantera and the MCR cantera, while the network graphs in Figures 6 and 7 visualize the relative growth of the MCR cantera, Luis Carrión’s power base. My theory predicts a leadership dispute between the MCR’s leader and the incumbent. This should be a challenging test for my theory, because other than leading a cantera, Carrión possessed few attributes that would lead us to expect his involvement in a leadership dispute. He was a recent recruit, had no military achievements, and was of relatively low rank. Yet this unlikely prediction proved accurate, strongly supporting my theory.

Carrión was initially uninvolved in a dispute that began in early 1975 between Aráuz and Jaime Wheelock. Somewhat “resentful of the people in Cuba” for being denied his promised position in the DN, Wheelock cultivated relationships with key FSLN leaders in Managua, including the city’s new chief of operations Roberto Huembes and MCR leader Carrión. Wheelock relayed strategic deliberations among FSLN members in Cuba, where debates swirled between GPP and insurrectional proposals. The three commanders in Managua began pressing Aráuz for strategic changes, though without “a totally clear idea of what [they] were going to do.” Aráuz responded with a “disciplinary” solution: he ordered Wheelock to the guerrilla column in the mountain with the pretext that he would write a history of the campesino struggle. Instead, Wheelock

129 Interview 30, Managua, January 2017.
130 Interview 30, Managua, January 2017.
131 Interview 17, Managua, June 2017.
133 “That sounded false, right?” Luis Carrión told Mónica Mónica Baltodano, Memorias de la lucha sandinista. Tomo III, El Camino a la unidad y al triunfo: Chinandega, Frente Sur, Masaya y la Toma del Búnker (Managua,
Figure 6: The FSLN in 1972
FER: Pedro Aráuz’s power base, MCR: Luis Carrión’s power base

Figure 7: The FSLN in 1975
FER: Pedro Aráuz’s power base, MCR: Luis Carrión’s power base
negotiated reassignment to Costa Rica, an *incumbent victory* for Aráuz. That Wheelock accepted exile demonstrates that a discontented leader needs a power base—a substantial, loyal group of fighters—to foment a splinter group or internal coup. The militants inside Nicaragua “didn’t know [Wheelock] and didn’t recognize him.”\(^{134}\) His power base within the FSLN was limited to a handful of personal friends.

After Wheelock’s exile, Huembes and Carrión continued to press for strategic changes. Aráuz responded once again with internal disciplinary measures, ordering Huembes to head to the mountains. When Huembes refused and sought, with Carrión, to resign, Aráuz’s lieutenants expelled them from the FSLN.\(^{135}\) Contacting Wheelock, the expelled commanders decided to reorganize as a splinter faction, the FSLN-TP, each drawing on their relations with other members of the FSLN to retain whatever structures they could. Aráuz’a attempts to impose internal discipline on Carrión had gone awry. Carrión fought back, taking most of the recruits from his MCR *cantera* with him to his FSLN-TP splinter group.

My theory helps answer two important questions about this dispute. First, why did Aráuz respond with severe sanctions to relatively minor acts of insubordination? In interviews, my informant referenced Aráuz’s calculations of relative power. Specifically, Aráuz became increasingly suspicious that his former lieutenant Eduardo Contreras had “made a turn” while in Cuba, and was preparing to ally his own growing power base with Fonseca’s.\(^{136}\) Aráuz’s top lieutenant Bayardo Arce, recalling a period in late 1976, also provides strong evidence that Aráuz interpreted the leadership disputes in terms of loyalty and power relations. Deciding to train incoming recruits himself instead of delegating the task to Arce, “he told me that he went [to run the training] because he that leads [jefea] the combatants has the real power. And if he had sent me, I would have had the real power, and that even so he came back afraid that I had made a play, an ambush, something like that to control the GPP.”\(^{137}\)

Second, why did Aráuz’s sanctions fail? The importance of the *cantera* to not only mobilize fighters but to structure their choices throughout conflict is particularly pronounced here. *Canteras* embedded FSLN recruits in a latticework of overlapping relationships. MCR recruits supported

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\(^{134}\) Interview 16, Laguna de Apoyo, June 2016.

\(^{135}\) Interview with Luis Carrión in Baltodano, *Memorias de la lucha sandinista III*.

\(^{136}\) Interview 17, Managua, June 2016. Aráuz would struggle with Contreras in Leadership Dispute 4 (see below).

\(^{137}\) Interview with Bayardo Arce in Baltodano, *Memorias de la lucha sandinista I*. 

34
Carrión, even though he lacked a reputation or a history of successful militancy, because he “organized the Movimiento Cristiano, through which many people entered the Frente, and with whom he had a history of many years of work, of struggle, of friendship.”

Though Carrión was technically the junior partner in the FSLN-TP (behind Huembes and Wheelock), his cantera enabled its three leaders to form a splinter group when faced with Aráuz’s sanctions.

Other hypotheses do not adequately explain the second dispute. Neither side controlled the Chema Castillo ransom in Cuba, and challengers Carrión and Huembes were expelled with nothing more than a 500 córdoba bill. Lacking material resources, they nonetheless organized a splinter group. While the FSLN did suffer through battlefield losses prior to the split, a leadership decapitation did not precipitate the dispute nor did losses disproportionately affect the MCR cantera. Woldemariam’s theory does find support here: in an example of preference divergence, the FSLN’s newfound popular support and organizational reach motivated the challengers’ strategic demands. Yet while strategic disagreements help explain the dispute, there is ample evidence that ideological commitments amounted to “cheap talk.” As one FSLN commander and historian explained to me,

> When this division took place, Luis [Carrión] is as clear as can be that they didn’t have a Marxist-Leninist thesis; that was a construction made later... And this typically occurs in these processes of division. The processes of division, when they get started with personal problems, they need a self-justification in front of the militants, in front of the base, and then you end up creating that self-justification, creating a proposal of identity. To establish for oneself an identity.\(^\text{141}\)

The disputants themselves confirm this insightful account. In a recent interview, Wheelock allowed that, “at heart it was also a struggle for political hegemony that took the form of a strategic discussion.”\(^\text{142}\) Another disputant told me that,

\[^{138}\text{Interview 30, Managua, January 2017.}\]
\[^{139}\text{Or about \$75. Ernesto Cardenal, Las ínsulas extrañas: memorias II (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), 359.}\]
\[^{140}\text{Woldemariam, Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa.}\]
\[^{141}\text{Interview 16, Laguna de Apoyo, June 2016.}\]
\[^{142}\text{Hellmund, “La fractura del movimiento revolucionario,” 162.}\]
to the extent that [Aráuz and his lieutenants] repressed us we joined together to defend ourselves better. I think that was the genesis [of the coalition]. There was also a principle of identification and political sympathy that afterwards strengthened and deepened—but it was more a defensive action so that they couldn’t grab us one by one.143

The strategic demands of the future leaders of the FSLN-TP were simultaneously genuine and instrumental, and hardened endogenously throughout the dispute. Furthermore, ideological differences again triggers a dispute predicted by a rapidly changing balance of power between cantera leaders. The challengers did not have the intention of founding a splinter group, but rather of influencing the FSLN’s strategic direction. Both Aráuz’s strong disciplinary reaction, best explained through reference to his relative power calculations, and Carrión’s MCR cantera were necessary to transform the challengers’ strategic demands into an organizational split.

**Leadership dispute 4**

In 1976, the FSLN endured a second organizational split: incumbent Pedro Aráuz, now allied with his one-time opponent Carlos Fonseca, attempted to exclude challenger Eduardo Contreras from the organization; in response, Contreras and his allies formed “an autonomous group:” the FSLN-Tendencia Insurreccional (FSLN-TI, also called Terceristas).144 Rather than a cantera, Contreras cultivated the loyalty of an operational network: the Juan José Quezada (JJQ) command, the squad that conducted the Chema Castillo raid.

Three factors allowed Contreras to draw on the JJQ as a power base. First, the Command underwent three months of extensive training together,145 offering participants ample time to form strong interpersonal bonds. Second, after the operation itself, all thirteen command members and eight freed prisoners landed together in Cuba, where they remained exiled together for nearly two years.146 This forced cohabitation provided additional opportunities to cohere as a group, which may be why almost all of these 21 later followed Eduardo Contreras into his Tercerista tendency. Third, the fact that they were “selected and extracted from distinct regions of the country” meant

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143 Interview 30, Managua, January 2017
146 Interview 29, Managua, January 2016
that the members of the group possessed strong ties to several different canteras, while the liberated prisoners were mostly elite commanders from the FSLN’s earliest cohorts. The JJQ therefore attained an Eigenvector centrality out of proportion with a simple count of its members. In practical terms this meant that members of the JJQ could draw on preexisting relations of trust to facilitate coalition-building with other centers of the FSLN’s organization.

At the beginning of 1975, immediately after the raid, the JJQ operational network possessed an Eigenvector centrality of 0.549, third behind the FER (.927) and MCR (.512) canteras. In mid-1975, the FSLN-TP splintered, taking most of the MCR recruits with it. After removing the members of FSLN-TP from my dataset, I re-calculated the FSLN’s Eigenvector centralities for 1975. This revealed a starkly divided organization: Aráuz’s FER (.914) and Contreras’ JJQ (1.0) are far and away the most central nodes, at near parity with each other (see Figure 8). My theory predicts a leadership dispute between incumbent Aráuz and challenger Contreras ending in an organizational split. Both predictions are accurate. A leadership dispute between Aráuz and Contreras unfolded throughout 1976 and featured two behaviors central to the theory: internal sanctions and coalition-building.

At the end of 1974, Contreras’ arrival in Cuba—where he arrived with not only his assault team and the freed prisoners, but “vested with all the authority of a successful, spectacular blow” against the Somoza regime—radically shifted the balance of power between himself and Aráuz.147 One interviewee told me that at this point Contreras “aspired to be the maximum leader” of the FSLN, replacing both Fonseca as titular leader and Aráuz as de facto leader of the organization.148 According to Belli,149 once in Cuba Contreras began to shift his strategic leanings from Aráuz’s guerra popular prolongada to the insurrectional strategy proposed by Humberto Ortega. Worried by Contreras’ growing influence and independence, Aráuz took two steps: first, he sought an alliance with Carlos Fonseca, and second, he invoked his formal power, arguing that Contreras had no authority while outside Nicaragua.150 Contreras and Ortega responded by arranging a meeting with Jaime Wheelock, in an attempt to reincorporate the embryonic FSLN-TP into the FSLN

147 Interview 16, Laguna de Apoyo, June 2016.
148 Interview 17, Managua, June 2016.
150 This was the same resolution Aráuz and Contreras had earlier used to strip the exiled Fonseca of his decision-making powers the previous year.
structures on their side of the leadership dispute. After siding with Wheelock, Contreras and Ortega mobilized their own power base against Aráuz: by “carry[ing] the discussion to the bases of the organization in the exterior [of Nicaragua], at the same time as they foment it in the bases in the interior to which they can gain access.”

Fonseca returned to Nicaragua in December 1975. He called for a meeting of all major FSLN commanders, to be held at Zínica in northern Nicaragua, where flanked by Henry Ruiz’s guerrilla column, he hoped “to demonstrate that he had maximum authority over The Organization [FSLN]” and to re-unite the factions forming under Aráuz and Contreras. Fonseca’s gambit failed. He never reached the column; instead he was caught and killed in November 1976 by National Guardsmen. During Fonseca’s time isolated in the mountains, Aráuz had closed his

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151 Fonseca Amador, El Último Documento de Carlos Fonseca, 5.
152 Ibid., 8.
153 Zimmermann, Sandinista, 186.
155 IES, Carlos: el eslabón vital.
structures to FSLN members in Cuba. In response, Contreras and Ortega reentered Nicaragua in April 1976, and, calling a meeting of elite FSLN commanders linked to them by *cantera* or Contreras’ operational command, founded the FSLN-TI.\(^{156}\) With Fonseca’s death, Aráuz was left without his major ally and did not have a realistic chance to build a larger coalition than Contreras. Unable to win the leadership dispute, he settled for a draw: he formed a rump FSLN he called the FSLN-*Guerra Popular Prolongada* (FSLN-GPP), and sent directives to his fighters that “the comrades from the other tendencies, from the Tercerista tendency and the Proletaria tendency, were to be considered as traitors.”\(^{157}\) The FSLN, already divided into two organizations, had now split into three.

Other hypotheses find only mixed support. Material resources may have reinforced Contreras’ relative power as his faction likely controlled the bulk of funds from the Chema Castillo raid.\(^{158}\) Yet memoirs and field interviews offer no evidence of distributional conflicts linked to these funds.\(^{159}\) Nor did Contreras opportunistically splinter to maintain control over money; rather, incumbent Aráuz preventatively split the FSLN to maximize control over the organization. There is also little evidence the dispute was caused by battlefield shocks. No significant leaders were killed between Turcios’ and Fonseca’s deaths (the latter the culmination, rather than the cause, of the division between FSLN-GPP and FSLN-TI). The asymmetric battlefield losses mechanism is not well-supported either: contrary to Christia’s expectations,\(^{160}\) battlefield losses prior to the split clustered in the incumbent, rather than challenging, rebel faction.

Finally, there is only mixed support for strategic disagreement, and evidence for elite “cheap talk.” Strategic differences did feature in the rhetoric of disputants on both sides. But strategic positions were instrumentalized according to the needs of individual FSLN leaders. For example, Humberto Ortega

migrates to Costa Rica without any intention of entering Nicaragua and as Henry Ruiz rightly said, what’s he going to come back for? He’s an ungainly, skinny man with [health] problems and can’t shoot. So what’s he going to come do in an armed struggle?

\(^{156}\) Baltodano, *Memorias de la lucha sandinista II*; Ortega Saavedra, *La epopeya de la insurrección*, 292.
\(^{157}\) Rivera Quintero and Ramírez, *La marca del Zorro*, 141–42.
\(^{158}\) Cardenal, *Las Ínsulas extrañas*, 481.
\(^{159}\) Also Mateo Jarquín and Kai Thaler, personal communication, January 2019.
\(^{160}\) Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*. 

39
So he stays there, but he develops the thesis that affirms that the leadership doesn’t necessarily have to be inside.\textsuperscript{161}

Claimed strategic differences acted as claims to rightful leadership, “because obviously if someone accepts this new vision, well, those who were the creators and promoters [of the old vision] cease to be the leaders, of course. That is, you can’t hold on to leadership if you’ve been upholding a failed thesis.”\textsuperscript{162} Yet the strategic differences claimed by leaders often failed to correspond with their actions. For example, the FSLN-TI and the FSLN-GPP independently planned to capture the National Palace in 1978—a quintessential urban commando raid, ostensibly the TI’s strategic innovation.\textsuperscript{163}

In sum, while strategic differences may have again triggered various episodes within the dispute and lent differing identities to the disputants, there is little evidence that disputants in their actions were motivated by strategic commitments as opposed to their relative power. Meanwhile, a comparison of the balance of loyalties between rebel leaders, unlike strategic differences, successfully predicts the timing of disputes, identities of disputants, and outcome of disputes.

\textbf{Results of process-tracing tests}

Table 6 compares my theory with alternative hypotheses. In short, process tracing uncovered strong evidence that shifts in rebel recruitment and operational networks caused the FSLN’s leadership disputes, internal coups, and organizational splits. The alternative hypotheses largely fail congruence tests, or were not backed by process tracing evidence. The FSLN received no external support during the case study period, and though hostage-taking and bank robberies produced significant funds, they could not be linked to opportunism or distributional conflict. The FSLN suffered constant battlefield shocks, yet process tracing revealed only limited evidence connecting these events to the disputes and splinters that followed. Moreover, battlefield defeats and leadership decapitations also punctuated the FSLN’s periods of unity: guerrilla \textit{focos} were annihilated at Raiti-Bocay in 1963 and Pancasán in 1967, with Carlos Fonseca’s imprisonment following each disaster, yet neither led to a leadership dispute. Depredations from 1976 to 1978, when leaders of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{161}Interview 16, Laguna de Apoyo, June 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{162}Interview 17, Managua, June 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{163}Interview of Henry Ruiz in Baltodano, \textit{Memorias de la lucha sandinista I}.
\end{itemize}
Table 6: Evaluating hypotheses across four leadership disputes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Dispute 1: CF vs. OT (1971-3)</th>
<th>Dispute 2: CF vs. PA (1973-4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Result: Power-sharing accord</td>
<td>Result: Internal coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material resources</td>
<td>Correct prediction?</td>
<td>Correct prediction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence for mechanism?</td>
<td>Evidence for mechanism?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battlefield shocks</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological/strategic disagreements</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance of loyalties</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Result: Split</td>
<td>Result: Split</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material resources</td>
<td>Correct prediction?</td>
<td>Correct prediction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence for mechanism?</td>
<td>Evidence for mechanism?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battlefield shocks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance of loyalties</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

all three tendencies were killed, helped convince the factions to *reunify*.\(^{164}\)

Finally, some evidence supports the role of ideological and strategic disagreements; however, evidence of genuine ideological commitment must be balanced against equally abundant evidence of “cheap talk”: elites instrumentally developed ideologies that justified their own claims to leadership, invented ideologies *post hoc* as “justifying narratives”\(^{165}\) to explain their participation in power struggles, and frequently abandoned their own ostensible strategies for tactics indistinguishable from those of their ideological opponents. Moreover, the whole history of the FSLN is rife with ideological and strategic disagreements: until the final leadership dispute, internal debates were not only tolerated but encouraged. Ideological and strategic differences are too ubiquitous to explain leadership disputes, yet may serve as triggering mechanisms and self-justification for disputes rooted in changing balances of loyalties.

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\(^{164}\) Interview 26, Managua, December 2016.

To what extent are the logics of rebel factional struggles sketched in this study generalizable? Rebel organizations and the violent contexts in which they operate are remarkably heterogeneous. Scholars seeking insight into other cases should be attentive to these differences. For example, the FSLN’s small size meant that relations between its leaders and rank-and-file militants were intimate, in a way that would be unlikely for the 60,000-strong Taliban in Afghanistan. Would the dynamics outlined in this paper scale up to such a large group? Would fighter loyalties still map onto networks in conflicts where rebel groups resort to kidnapping new recruits (as in Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF))?\(^{166}\) How might rebel organizations sometimes avoid factional disputes predicted by this theory? To what extent do individual rebel leaders matter?\(^{167}\) Are some rebel organizational structures more resilient in the face of shifting recruitment patterns than others? These questions remain open pending further research.

Nonetheless, some examples suggest that scholars may well identify these dynamics outside of Nicaragua. For example, Kenny reports that the Irish Republican Army’s 1969-1970 split into the evenly-sized Provisional Irish Republican Army and Official Irish Republican Army “was as much a battle among political entrepreneurs for control of the flood of potential new recruits as it was the fragmentation of a pre-existing organization.”\(^{168}\) In Liberia, Charles Taylor “delegated power to Prince Johnson, a mid-level commander, to lead one of the fronts. Johnson’s forces increasingly grew independent from Taylor’s,” and ultimately “Johnson mobilized the troops in his jurisdiction to join an independent insurgency named the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL).”\(^{169}\) Adnan Uqlah, a commander in the late-1970s Syrian jihadist group al-Talia al-Muqatila, pushed aside more senior leaders and inaugurated an era of “one-man rule” by drawing on a new influx of fighters “recruited just out of the mosques, universities and even high schools.”\(^{170}\) In 1968, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) began recruiting fighters primarily among national minorities through “tribal warlords who enjoyed considerable local support.” In 1989, the CPB’s rank-and-file


mutinied, overthrowing the despised ethnic Burmese-dominated leadership and splintering into a half-dozen successor groups centered on tribal networks.\textsuperscript{171} Meanwhile, “Abimael Guzmán, leader of the Shining Path in Peru, was so paranoid about being ousted in a coup that he ‘surrounded himself with female lieutenants but readied none to command in his absence.’”\textsuperscript{172}

Stepping outside of the civil war context (but remaining within revolutionary organizations), Sheila Fitzpatrick, in her analysis of the leadership struggle between Joseph Stalin and the war hero Leon Trotsky, points out that “Stalin had none of the attributes that the Bolsheviks normally associated with outstanding leadership.”\textsuperscript{173} Rather, as General Secretary he “was in a position to manipulate what one scholar has labelled a ‘circular flow of power:’” by controlling recruitment to the Communist Party, he was able to both stock the Party’s ranks with loyalists and to assure their continued loyalty. Even as far afield as the Roman Empire during the Crisis of the Third Century (235–284 AD), rival imperial claimants split—fragmented—the Empire into three parts when “control over a significant body of troops had to be delegated to a subordinate general. Success on the part of this man, or even just the prospect of the cash payment traditionally given out on the occasion of a change in the holder of the imperial office, could lead his army to proclaim him emperor.”\textsuperscript{174} In this way the basic ingredients for leadership disputes put forward in this paper—a disjuncture between formal and \textit{de facto} power, with the currency of \textit{de facto} power the loyalty of subordinates gained through recruitment or operational control—appear common to poorly-policed human institutions, great and small.

\section{Conclusion}

This paper makes several important contributions. It presents a microfoundational theory of factional struggles within rebel organizations based on \textit{social} rather than material power. Thus, rather than displacing theories of rebel fragmentation developed in more violent and resource-rich contexts, my theory can integrate existing insights into a more complete explanation. For example, whereas Tamm’s and Seymour’s accounts of resource-driven fragmentation assumes latent rivalries

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{171}Bertil Lintner, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB)} (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1990), 26.
\textsuperscript{174}Roger Collins, \textit{Early Medieval Europe, 300-1000} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7.
\end{footnotesize}
between factional leaders already “at the apex of informal networks through which they mobilize followers and command their loyalty,” my study fills in how such factional leaders emerge. My theory also contributes new mechanisms supporting Woldemariam’s argument that rebels’ territorial gains and losses spur fragmentation through preference divergence and commitment problems. Evidence from the Eritrean War of Independence shows how territorial gains also provided new sources of recruitment while losses exposed rebels to attrition that overturned an existing balance of loyalties. Similarly, this study helps explain why “mismanaged expansion” can fragment even “integrated” rebel groups.

Studying the balance of loyalties inside rebel organizations also opens the door to new answers for a range of important questions. Numerous studies, for example have proposed rational bases for rebel violence against civilians and for terrorism, although this behavior is often counterproductive for a given rebel group’s overarching goals. Some scholars, disaggregating rebel movements into distinct groups, have advanced explanations based in the “dual contest” that rebels fight with the state on the one hand and competing rebel groups on the other hand. However, this paper points to a third contest: the struggle inside of rebel groups between leaders and their lieutenants for the loyalties of rank-and-file fighters. This third contest may well help to explain much behavior that otherwise seems irrational. In the FSLN’s leadership disputes, for example, one emerging faction’s decision to carry out ostentatious hostage-taking operations was as much a product of their internal struggle with the incumbent leadership as of the organization’s struggle with the state. A similar logic may explain the choice of terrorist tactics in other conflicts. As scholars investigate the sources of rebel group behaviors, they must take into account the pressures and incentives of this

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177 Staniland, Networks of rebellion, 41–43.
179 In contrast with a view of terrorism as “the coercive instrument of choice” directed at states; see Robert A. Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” American Political Science Review 97, no. 03 (2003): 344.
“third contest.”

Finally, this paper offers a methodological model for scholars seeking to reconstruct processes within clandestine organizations. In low information environments, even participants’ knowledge of events is limited by compartmentalization; in network analysis terms, participants see only their immediate ego-centric network, but not events within the organization as a whole. Given the extreme fragmentation of knowledge about the FSLN’s leadership struggles, interview research on its own was unlikely to shed enough light on the events in question. Thus, this paper highlights the utility of formal network analysis in overcoming the limitations of ego-centric interview research. Likewise, the FSLN Commander Dataset represents a major empirical contribution. While comprehensive network datasets of the internal structure of numerous organizations (businesses, karate clubs, social movements) exist in great quantities, few analogous datasets cover rebel organizations. As key network and process tracing evidence became available only decades after the events under investigation, this study also testifies to the enduring value of historical research in conflict studies.

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181 Stathis N. Kalyvas, ““New” and “Old” Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?,” *World Politics* 54, no. 01 (2001): 118.