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Where the Guns are Aimed on Election Day

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What explains why some militant groups employ a high level of indiscriminate violence with high proportions of civilian casualties, while others employ highly selective violence with low proportions of civilian casualties? This research explores whether a militant group's relationship to a political party contributes to answering this question. Specifically, I utilize a typology of militant group-political party relationships created by Paul Staniland and Aila Matanock to study the Troubles of Northern Ireland, a conflict spanning decades and with multiple militant groups. The findings reveal mixed support for the hypothesis that militant groups with direct, public relationships with political parties utilize more selective violence.

Keywords: Northern Ireland, The Troubles, Indiscriminate Violence, Terrorism, Paramilitaries

INTRODUCTION

Disagreement exists in the academic community on the effect of electoral participation on the behavior of *militant groups*, non-state actors who may or may not be engaged in a civil war with the state but operate a recognized campaign of violence to achieve political ends. Specifically, there are theorists who hold that militant groups reduce or end their level of armed violence upon joining the electoral system, that is by participating in democratic elections as a recognized political party, while others argue that militant groups maintain the use of violence after entering elections.[1] I believe there is a way to reconcile these two viewpoints. While the

[1] Aila M. Matanock, and Paul Staniland, "How and Why Armed Groups Participate in Elections," *Perspectives on Politics* 16, no. 3 (2018).

debate has hinged on whether or not violence persists, scholars have not examined whether the character of the violence changes. Specifically, they have not examined whether armed groups reduce the proportion or number of civilian casualties.[2] By examining the relationships between the multiple militant groups and political parties active during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, this research seeks to determine whether armed groups with closely associated political wings engaged in the electoral process kill a smaller proportion of civilians than those with loosely associated or no political wings engaged in the electoral process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A variety of literature has been put forward attempting to explain why political actors employ indiscriminate violence. Noting the broad scope of potential literature and theories, I contain this literature review to a survey of explanations for indiscriminate violence in intrastate conflicts with a focus on insurgent groups rather than states. This review shows five major influences on the use of violence by political actors: cost to the enemy, intergroup competition, affordability, territorial control, economic resources, and political goals.

The first school of thought proposes that killing civilians is a strategic choice to exact costs on the militant group's enemy, most often incumbent states. Politically motivated civilians who supply material and informational resources to the opposition are viewed as valuable, and therefore, militant groups are likely to direct violence toward these civilians.[3] This school also argues that democracies are especially vulnerable to the costs of civilian casualties for three reasons.[4] These include: a) civilians are more exposed to targeting in democracies, b) democracies are more constrained in their response by the rule of law and the need for political support, and c) civilians can more easily pressure their government to concede to terrorists.[5]

Other scholars view civilian violence as strategic for insurgent groups in the face of rising competition from fellow non-state insurgents. Intergroup competition threatens pools of

[2] Ibid.

[3] Laia Balcells, "Rivalry and Revenge: Violence against Civilians in Conventional Civil Wars," *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2010): 296

[4] Lisa Hultman, "Attacks on Civilians in Civil War: Targeting the Achilles Heel of Democratic Governments," *International Interactions* 38, no. 2 (2012): 166-167.

[5] Ibid., 168.

resources and would divide the spoils from a negotiated agreement with the incumbent state.[6] Committing violence improves the group's bargaining position with the state and increases control of civilians. Wood and Kathman argue violence deters civilian defection and undermines competitors' claims to provide protection for defectors.[7] However, Stathis Kalyvas argues that indiscriminate violence is only useful in deterring defections when there is a large power imbalance and the alternative group cannot provide credible protection.[8]

Indiscriminate violence is also seen as cheaper than selective violence. Hultman argues that insurgent groups pursue violence against civilians when they are outmatched in direct conflict with the incumbent state forces. Through indiscriminate violence, insurgent groups can impose outsized costs on the state for continuing the conflict.[9]

A militant group's level of territorial control has been theorized to influence the selectivity of violence. Scholars argue that territorial control grants increased information of an area, which in turn allows for more selective violence.[10] When insurgent groups cannot identify their enemies and friends, they will lack the means to selectively target violence and utilize indiscriminate violence instead.[11,12]

Kalyvas also links territorial control to a group's ability to protect civilians. He argues that incumbent states utilize indiscriminate violence when citizens cannot turn to insurgent groups as credible protectors.[13] Where such groups can offer protection, civilians will defect from the indiscriminate group to the selective group. Finally, Paul Staniland sees territorial control as a factor in levels of violence against civilians. In his typology of wartime political orders, he argues the highest level of indiscriminate violence is found in areas where "insurgent and state forces are intertwined in the same physical spaces."[14]

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[6] Reed M. Wood and Jacob D. Kathman, "Competing for the Crown: Inter-rebel Competition and Civilian Targeting in Civil War," *Political Research Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2015): 168.

[7] Ibid., 170.

[8] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 167.

[9] Lisa Hultman, "The Power to Hurt in Civil War: The Strategic Aim of RENAMO Violence," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009): 823.

[10] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, 170.

[11] Ibid., 148-149.

[12] Hultman, *The Power to Hurt*, 823.

[13] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, 167.

[14] Paul Staniland, "States, Insurgents, and Wartime Political Orders," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 2 (2012): 252.

Jeremy Weinstein looks at whether groups emerge in resource-rich environments (opportunistic movements) or resource-poor environments (activist movements). Weinstein argues that those groups which emerge in resource-rich environments will be more prone to indiscriminate violence.[15] Whereas opportunistic movements attract members who are likely there for the loot, activist movement leaders know their members are true believers bonded to the group through shared values because there is no loot to be had. Opportunistic leaders must allow indiscipline in order to maintain their membership, while activist group leaders can impose group discipline.[16] Activist movements also have strong ties with civilian communities, while opportunistic movements are likely to face resistance, feeding a cycle of increasing violence.[17]

The final theory seeks to explain why some insurgent groups choose selective violence over indiscriminate violence. Jacob Shapiro examines the Northern Ireland conflict and theorizes that the political goals of groups shape their discrimination of violence. Specifically, the Provisional Irish Republican Army's (PIRA) greater emphasis on reaching a peace agreement with the United Kingdom caused them to impose tighter control on the use of violence and limit that violence to selective acts.[18] In contrast, the Loyalist paramilitaries did not hold such important political goals, but rather sought to keep the status quo. As a result, they exercised less control on the selectivity of violence.[19] While Shapiro's study approximates my own by utilizing the case of Northern Ireland and focusing on groups' political aspirations, my study differs in that it focuses on the specific relationship militant groups have with political parties. This allows for a formal typology of different armed group-political party relationships applicable across various conflicts, creating the possibilities for multi-case studies and comparisons.

These established schools of thought all offer useful insights into why groups choose to employ varying levels of indiscriminate violence. However, the literature fails to acknowledge the electoral politics co-existent with civil conflict, as demonstrated by the literature surveying relationships between political parties and non-state militant groups. Weinberg, Pedahzur, and

[15] Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8.

[16] Ibid., 10.

[17] Ibid., 10-11.

[18] Jacob N. Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 172.

[19] Ibid., 173

Perlinger categorize these relationships by religion, region, state political system, and other factors.[20] Krista Wiegand investigates why groups simultaneously engaged in violence and peaceful electoral politics use violence in some cases but not in others, as well as how such "dual status" groups achieve their political objectives by using both concurrently.[21] Benedetta Berti also examines the intersection of militant groups and electoral politics, and the determinants of political wing formation, and when these political wings lead to disarmament.[22] This literature demonstrates the intersectionality of militant groups, political parties, and electoral politics, but a theory is needed which links this acknowledged relationship with the selectivity of an armed group' violence.

METHODOLOGY

I hypothesize that militant groups with closer and more public relationships between their militant wing and political party will be more selective in violence deployment. Militant groups are defined as non-state actors who may or may not be engaged in a civil war with the state, but operate a recognized campaign of violence to achieve political ends. In addition to the definition of militant groups given above, I define political parties as organizations which compete in elections to hold seats in various local, regional, and national democratic bodies. Finally, I define selectivity of violence as a measure of how many active combatants a group kills of the total number of individuals (active combatant and civilians) the group kills.

I operationalize the strength and proximity of a relationship between a militant group and political party using Staniland and Matanock's typology, which defines the nature of the relationship along two dimensions - whether the relationship is covert or overt, and whether the relationship is direct or indirect. The covert/overt dimension refers to whether a party and militant group publicly acknowledge a relationship with a political party. The direct/indirect dimension refers to the actual ties between the groups.[23] In direct relationships, the same people

[20] Ami Pedahzur, Leonard Weinberg, and Arie Perliger, *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups* (Routledge, 2008).

[21] Krista E. Wiegand, *Bombs and Ballots: Governance by Islamist Terrorist and Guerilla Groups* (Ashgate, 2010), 2.

[22] Benedetta Berti, *Armed Political Organizations: From Conflict to Integration* (JHU Press, 2013), 3.

[23] Matanock and Staniland, *How and Why Armed Groups Participate in Elections*, 713.

firing the guns are those running for office or coordinating electoral campaigns. In indirect relationships, the militant wing funnels resources to the party while conducting violence against competing parties in support of the related party.

I argue that militant groups with *overt and direct* relationships to political parties will have the lowest proportion of civilian casualties. Militant groups with *overt but indirect* ties to political parties will have a higher proportion of civilian casualties as parties attempt to discourage such killings but have little means to do so. Militant groups with *covert but direct* ties to political parties will experience similar proportions of civilian casualties as parties have high capability but little motivation to discourage such behavior. Militant groups with *covert and indirect* ties to political parties will have the highest proportion of civilian killings, as parties have neither connections nor the motivation to limit indiscriminate violence.

Two causal mechanisms drawn from Staniland and Matanock's[24] typology underpin this hypothesis. The first causal mechanism is the ability of political parties to plausibly deny involvement in armed attacks. If political parties have overt ties to militant groups, their ability to plausibly deny involvement in armed attacks with high proportions of civilian casualties decreases. Indiscriminate killing hurts a political party's chances to gain support from potential voters outside their central base while possibly turning away formerly loyal supporters. Thus, parties with overt ties to militant groups will strongly discourage individuals within the militant group from killing civilians, especially cases of indiscriminate violence.

The second causal mechanism draws from the dimension of directness, specifically the ability of political parties to influence militant groups. While parties with overt ties have the incentive to limit their related militant group's killing of civilians, do they have the ability? Drawing from Staniland and Matanock's discussion of direct versus indirect participation, I theorize that parties with direct ties into the militant group will have greater ability to discourage indiscriminate violence.

Research Design

This study proceeds with a case study research design due to several reasons. No database currently exists of political party-militant group relationships broken down into varying

[24] Staniland and Matanock, "How and Why Armed Groups Participate in Elections."

levels of strength. The time involved in identifying the type of party-militant group relationship is a barrier to the creation of a new quantitative data set, as is the lack of cases available in all four categories.[25] And for the cases that do qualify, evidence on militant groups' civilian casualty rates may be limited or non-existent. Case study research also allows for an expansive discussion of the type of relationship between the party and militant group. It enables an examination of the specific actions political parties take toward persuading militant groups to control or redirect violence, and accounts for the evolution of the party, militant group, and their relationship over an extended period of time. Finally, case study research allows for the researcher to parse out the various factors which may influence the rate of indiscriminate violence.

The selection of the Troubles in Northern Ireland as the test case provides several advantages. First, the conflict spanned roughly 25 years, thus providing an abundance of case material and allowing for a study of changes in militant group-political party relationships. The Troubles also contained several political party-militant group partnerships, which fill all four possible categories of party-group relations. Electoral processes persisted throughout the conflict or were restarted by the U.K. government. Significant amounts of both qualitative and quantitative data exist on the conflict, including a database of total and civilian casualties committed by each militant group. While the Irish Republican Army (IRA) has received extensive commentary and study, a significant less amount of work has been done on Loyalist paramilitaries and associated parties.

In sum, the Troubles provide enough case material to limit my analysis to one context. While this limits the study's external validity, internal validity is the primary benefit and aim of qualitative research; containing the analysis to one case maximizes that by controlling the various factors which vary from conflict to conflict. Tracing groups through different types of relationships overtime further improves internal validity by comparing civilian casualty rates within the same militant group. Finally, having multiple groups active at the same time allows for comparison within the same time period, thus controlling the various environment factors which vary across time.

To operationalize my case study research, I refer to existing descriptive and analytical

[25] Staniland and Matanock, "How and Why Armed Groups Participate in Elections," 712-713.

research to identify the type of relationship in each case. I also use existing research to determine whether and how political parties pressured militant groups to change the selectivity of their violence. To further test my hypothesis, I use Malcom Sutton's "Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Northern Ireland."[26] I record the total number of yearly kills by each group and the number of yearly civilian kills by each group, and then calculate the yearly civilian casualty ratio (number of killed civilians/number of total killed). My research, findings, and analysis follow.

CASE ANALYSIS

The militant and political players of the Troubles can be broadly divided into Catholic and Protestant camps (Table 1). The Catholic Irish Republican Army divided into the Provisional and Official Irish Republican Armies in 1969. Catholic political parties included the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP) and Sinn Fein. The SLDP condemned violence while Sinn Fein was linked to the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), and the SLDP also often participated in electoral politics when Sinn Fein abstained. The two primary non-state militant actors battling Catholics were the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA). When discussing Protestant political actors, it is important to note the distinction between Loyalists and Unionists. While both rejected unification with Ireland and opposed greater Catholic political representation, they were divided along class lines. The term "Loyalist" referred to the working-class Protestants who constituted the majority of Protestant paramilitaries and their political wings. The term "Unionist" referred to the middle and upper-class Protestants who constituted the majority of the major Protestant political parties who kept greater distance from paramilitaries. The two primary Loyalist political parties were the Ulster Democratic Party (associated with the UDA) and the Progressive Unionist Party (associated with the UVF). The two main Unionist political parties were the Official Unionist Party (OUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

[26] Malcom Sutton, "An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland," *Conflict Archive on the Internet*.

Table 1

Summary of Military and Political Groups during the Troubles

Religious Affiliation	Militant Group	Political Organization
Catholic	Provisional Irish Republican Army	Sinn Fein Social Democratic and Labor Party
	Official Irish Republican Army	
Protestant	Ulster Volunteer Force Ulster Defense Association	Official Unionist Party Democratic Unionist Party Ulster Democratic Party Progressive Unionist Party

In the following case studies, I trace the political evolutions of the PIRA, UVF, and UDA. I explain the party-militant group relationship that existed in each case, before examining qualitative and quantitative evidence to test my hypothesis. I also consider other explanatory factors and attempt to explain any deviations from the predicted results.

The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)

The PIRA: 1981-1994

Although formed in 1969, the PIRA and Provisional Sinn Fein abstained from all elections until 1981, when Sinn Fein became an active political party in contesting elections.[27] Keeping with my operational definition of a political party as an entity actively competing in elections, I focus the analysis of the PIRA and Sinn Fein from this starting point in 1981. I categorize the relationship between the PIRA and Sinn Fein as covert and direct. Through discussion of the organizational structure of the two groups and their relationship, I shall defend this categorization.

From the birth of the Provisional Sinn Fein and Provisional Irish Republican Army, the two were linked in a tightly knit relationship despite public denial of such formal ties. Although both organizations had separate executive bodies, Berti writes, "there was an overlap in the membership of the two organizations regarding bases, leadership, and political candidates chosen by the party to run for office."[28] In addition to this membership overlap, both groups also worked to respect the prerogatives of the other. Not only did Sinn Fein reportedly abide by the PIRA

[27] Staniland and Matanock, "How and Why Armed Groups Participate in Elections," 20.
[28] Berti, *Armed Political Organizations*, 138.

Army Council's decisions, but it pledged allegiance to the Council. Meanwhile, the PIRA held cease-fires to strengthen the electoral campaigns of Sinn Fein.[29] Sinn Fein's decision to begin contesting elections was endorsed in parallel by the leadership of both Sinn Fein and the PIRA.[30] The party's decision in 1986 to end parliamentary abstentionism and take seats they won in the Irish Parliament required the approval of the PIRA.[31] This organization overlap and cooperation indicates a direct relationship.

However, Berti also writes that Sinn Fein publicly denied influencing, or being influenced by, the PIRA.[32] Such denial was practiced by Gerry Adams who became President of Sinn Fein in 1983. Despite being arrested on accusations of IRA membership multiple times, Gerry Adams only admitted to IRA membership once, while writing a political column in the Provisional newspaper *Republican News*.[33] In every other case, he denied membership. Adams was not alone; Taylor writes that the PIRA and Sinn Fein insisted on holding separate identities.[34] This public denial of association and public portrayal of separation qualifies this case as covert.

To begin testing the theory, I first examine whether the two aspects of the militant group-political party relationship operated as expected. The covert relationship should lend less incentive for the political party to press the militant group for fewer civilian casualties than an overt relationship. Sinn Fein's support, as well as support for the Republican (i.e. supporting unification with the Republic of Ireland). movement more broadly, was affected by the PIRA's violence and, in particular, violence toward non-combatants. Flawed PIRA operations in the late 1980s that resulted in civilian casualties shrank support for the Republican organizations and prevented Sinn Fein from attracting new voters beyond their core voter base.[35] Sinn Fein's attempts to compete in the Irish parliamentary elections, even ending parliamentary abstentionism in 1986, were hampered by continuing PIRA brutality.[36] In 1987, the PIRA and

[29] Berti, *Armed Political Organizations,* 138-139.
[30] Staniland and Matanock, "How and Why Armed Groups Participate in Elections," 20.
[31] Peter Taylor *Behind the Mask: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (TV Books Incorporated, 1999), 83.
[32] Berti, *Armed Political Organizations*, 138.
[33] Taylor, *Behind the Mask*, 234-235.
[34] Ibid., 247.
[35] Bell, J. Bowyer. *The Secret Army: the IRA, 1916-1979* (Dublin: Academy Press, 1979), 592.
[36] Ibid., 543

Sinn Fein suffered further from the Enniskillen bombing, which killed 11 and injured 63, most of which were civilians.[37] Taylor writes that the Enniskillen bombing's civilian casualties "jeopardized all the political support that Sinn Fein had so assiduously built up."[38]

The question then becomes whether Sinn Fein was able to use its connections with the PIRA to influence civilian casualty rates. With its direct relationship, the theory predicts that Sinn Fein should have been able to hold such influence. Sinn Fein did make some attempts to pressure the PIRA to reduce civilian casualties. Aside from public statements of regret for civilian killings, Adams took real action with the expulsion of Ivor Bell, a former PIRA chief of staff, from the organization after Bell attempted to persuade the Army Council to shift focus from Sinn Fein back to the PIRA.[39] The PIRA disbanded the Fermanagh unit, due to its continued sectarian killings, as well as the unit responsible for the Enniskellen bombing.[40] Operational changes were also made in order to increase the selectivity of targeting and reduce civilian casualties. Jacob Shapiro writes: "In spring 1986, Northern Command (the PIRA's lead decision-making body in Northern Ireland) sought and received permission from the Army Council to vet most tactical operations in order to prevent electoral damage."[41] The PIRA's leadership further expanded their tactical oversight in 1988 to review retaliation plans following Loyalist killings, and only authorize plans if one of the planned targets had been involved in the killings.

Despite these improvements, the nature of the PIRA's organization hindered the ability of leaders to translate pressure into real results. Although operational oversight did expand in the late 80s, operational tactics had been previously controlled at the local level, and PIRA leaders were largely relegated to making strategic decisions. The Army Council had even less control over the bombing campaigns in England which ramped up in the 1980s. The PIRA also held less concern for civilian casualties in England.[42] Not only was direct control difficult to implement,

[37] Taylor, *Behind the Mask*, 324.
[38] Ibid., 330.
[39] Bell, *The Secret Army*, 557.
[40] Ibid., 610.
[41] Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, quoted in Jacob N. Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 187.
[42] Bell, *The Secret Army*, 469 and 545.

but civilian casualties were often not the product of malicious intent, but of accidental error.[43]

To evaluate whether Sinn Fein's covert and direct relationship with the PIRA affected civilian casualty rates, I examine the yearly rates of civilian casualties. According to the theory, this relationship should have produced civilian casualty rates lower than covert/indirect groups, around the same as overt/indirect groups, and higher than overt/direct groups. The PIRA's civilian casualty rate from the group's founding in 1981 to the major ceasefires of 1994 was 29 percent, far lower than any other case presented here and not predicted by my theory.

Although Sinn Fein and the PIRA did not switch relationship types, there are organizational and contextual changes that should have enhanced Sinn Fein's political influence. First, the influence of Sinn Fein should have been especially effective on the PIRA during election years, and major elections occurred in nine of the 14 years under study. However, the average civilian casualty rate was actually slightly higher (31 percent) in those election years. I also expect that civilian death rates further fell in 1984 with the election of Gerry Adams as President of Sinn Fein on November 13, 1983. The previous President, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, opposed the move to begin contesting elections, despite his party moving forward.[44] In contrast, Adams had articulated the need for a dual strategy including political activism since the 1970s. With Adams in power, Sinn Fein was firmly committed in its move toward electoral politics. The PIRA's average civilian casualty rate two years before the 1983 shift was 20 percent, the transition year was 22 percent, and the two following years had a rate of 24 percent. Therefore, Adams appears to have been unsuccessful in his attempts to drive civilian casualty rates down once he obtained power.

The Troubles, such as any other conflict of its duration and magnitude, are immensely complex, and other factors could account for the low civilian casualty rates in the 1980s and early 90s. I broadly categorize these possible competing factors into those internal and external to the group. Internally, the PIRA experienced a significant reorganization in the late 1970s when it shifted towards a more cellular structure.[45] However, the organizational changes were primarily intended to increase the security of the PIRA from British military and intelligence forces, rather than increase the selectivity of targeting. Shapiro writes that "on balance, the

[43] Ibid., 545.
[45] Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma*, 183.

reorganization appears to have marginally increased leaders' control over big operations but decreased control over responses to sectarian killings."[46] Thus, the reorganization failed to take the measures to ensure selective targeting. Also occurring internally was a rebalancing of the leadership from Ireland to Northern Ireland. However, the new leadership of the PIRA primarily consisted of elements of the Republican movement associated with Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness who embraced a dual strategy approach of violence and electoral politics. This development is thus already encapsulated in the theory presented here.

Externally, killings of Catholics by Loyalist paramilitaries decreased from the 1970s into the 1980s, which may have led to fewer violent sectarian retaliations. British security forces also became increasingly effective in preventing and exposing planned PIRA attacks. The British security forces' increasing intelligence capabilities required the IRA to be more careful in planning operations.[47] This increased planning likely increased the PIRA's selectivity in targeting.

The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)

Although not as well-recognized as the PIRA, the UVF was nevertheless a significant paramilitary force during the Troubles; UVF would go on to hold political ties, develop its own political ideology, and later formed a political party. The UVF went through several stages of political engagement from its renewal in 1966 to its ceasefire in 1994. As such, I will define the UVF's different stages of political engagement and support these characterizations. Additionally, the UVF sometimes operated under different names, or "flags of convenience."[48] These included the Protestant Action Force (PAF), the Protestant Action Group (PAG), and the closely related Red Hand Commando (RHC). Due to their additional degree of separation from an associated political party, I predict that the civilian casualty rates for the three combined were always higher than the UVF's rate.

The UVF: 1971-1973

During its early years, the UVF had no real political ambitions and lacked a widespread

[46] Ibid., 185.
[47] Bell, *The Secret Army*, 526.
[48] Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 119.

desire to become politically engaged. The prominent former UVF member Billy Mitchell stated that the average UVF man joined to oppose Republicans and keep Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom, not to get involved with politics.[49] However, it is also undeniable that the UVF and Unionist political parties shared the same overarching goals of opposing any sort of unification with Ireland and preserving the relationship with Britain. Sarah Nelson writes that the UVF felt they were helping the Unionist parties.[50] Links existed between Unionist parties and the UVF, as the UVF's Brigadier General commented that UVF members included Democratic Unionist Party members.[51] Therefore, I identify the UVF as holding a covert indirect relationship with the two main Unionist political parties: the Official Unionist Party (OUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

The first component of this relationship is its covert nature. Unionist politicians of the OUP and DUP were cautious about keeping their distance from Loyalist paramilitaries, including the UVF. As Steve Bruce writes, "the politicians were concerned about the rogue elephant nature of Loyalist paramilitarism and the possible costs of being too closely associated with murderers and bombers."[52] Unionist political leaders both initially opposed a 1974 electricity workers strike organized by Loyalist groups, and even after its success in bringing down the Sunningdale Power-Sharing Assembly, they prevented Loyalists from gaining real political traction by purposely not selecting any Loyalists to participate in the Convention of May 1975, Britain's constitutional peacebuilding attempt.[53] Unionist political figures were wise to keep their distance from paramilitaries as the political fates of Loyalists with ties to paramilitaries was influenced by the strength of those ties, with loosely affiliated individuals performing better in elections than undeniable paramilitary members.[54] All of this supports that the UVF's relationship with the mainstream Unionist parties, the OUP and DUP, was covert; the UVF did not openly advertise a relationship with the parties and the party leaders worked to disassociate themselves with Loyalist paramilitaries such as the UVF.

[49] Graham Spencer, *The State of Loyalism in Northern Ireland* (Springer, 2008), 47.
[50] Sarah Nelson, *Ulster's Uncertain Defenders: Protestant Political, Paramilitary and Community Groups and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Appletree Press, 1984.), 64.
[51] Spencer, *The State of Loyalism*, 50.
[52] Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 87.
[53] Ibid., 102.
[54] Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 91.

Secondly, I argue the relationship for this period was indirect. The OUP or DUP were not established as political wings of the UVF as the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) would later be. Although their aims overlapped, their organizational structures and membership largely did not. Unlike the PIRA and Sinn Fein, OUP and DUP political decisions did not depend upon the UVF's consent and vice versa. As the UVF's Brigadier General said, "although the UVF membership has had DUP Unionists in its ranks, it has no political structure as Sinn Fein does, therefore its political influence is slight."[55] Not only does this support the characterization of an indirect relationship, it also supports the theory's assumption that covert indirect relationships produce little political influence upon the militant group.

Indeed, little evidence seems to suggest that the OUP and DUP actively worked to discourage the UVF's violence and sectarian killings. In fact, there are indications that the Unionist parties encouraged Loyalist paramilitary violence. According to Peter Taylor, "Loyalists believed politicians were giving them the green light to hit back at the IRA."[56] Chief among the Unionist politicians giving this green light was the DUP leader Ian Paisley. Although Unionist politicians may have stoked anti-Catholic sentiment, they appeared to have stopped short of calling for violence against Catholic civilians. In sum, Unionists, especially Paisley, took advantage of their ability to avoid the ramifications of sectarian killings by the nature of the covert relationship with the UVF. And as the UVF Brigadier General said, the indirect nature of this relationship denied Unionist parties the means to politically influence the UVF.

With this in mind, the UVF's civilian casualty rates should be relatively high. I average the UVF's civilian casualty rate, or the number of citizens killed as a percentage of the total killed, for the three years (1971-1973) this covert indirect relationship existed. Contrary to the theory, the UVF's civilian casualty rate was an astounding 95 percent. As expected, the PAF/PAG/RHC groups had an even higher rate at 100 percent.

What might explain this high civilian casualty rate that far exceeded the politically-unengaged PIRA's rate of 27 percent during the same period? One explanation cited in the literature is the UVF's difficulty in easily identifying combatant targets. The PIRA's primary

[55] Spencer, *The State of Loyalism*, 50.

[56] Peter Taylor, "Provos, Loyalists, and Brits - Loyalists: No Surrender (Part 1)," August 1, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WY4aeo5vNMM&list=PLYRSFu5IDQUNS3oHZety3VSwVUqmO14XY.

combatant targets included the police and the British army, both of which wore uniforms, patrolled the streets, and engaged in traditional fighting methods rather than guerilla warfare. All of this made such groups easily identifiable targets. In contrast, the UVF's primary targets were the PIRA and the OIRA, both of which engaged in terrorism and guerilla-style warfare, and whose members generally wore civilian clothes. This made finding and identifying such targets difficult. The UVF then resorted to killing civilians, either on purpose, or after mistakenly identifying them as the PIRA.[57, 58] Other alternative explanations point out that the UVF had to compete with the state for recruitment of personnel, while the PIRA did not. More disciplined and intelligent supporters of Unionism joined the state police and military forces, leaving pro-state paramilitaries such as the UVF with the individuals who were either mentally or physically unfit for the state forces, or held darker motives more likely to be fulfilled by joining a paramilitary than a state security force.[59] Bruce also cites the lack of organizational centralization of Loyalist paramilitaries compared to the PIRA.[60] This is something I account for by tracing the UVF across more than twenty years of organizational development and change, and by examining both the UVF and UDA, which had differing levels of organizational centralization. Finally, Bruce argues that Loyalists had fewer political thinkers than Republicans and less of an opening for the development of a political identity.[61] I attempt to capture the UVF at times when it did have an increased political presence.

The UVF: 1975-1978

After a brief stint with its own political party in 1974, the UVF once again resumed its covert indirect relationship with the OUP and DUP and maintained this position from 1975-1978. The civilian casualty rate over this time period was an average of 77 percent, a noticeable decrease from the previous period. The PAF/PAG/RHC rate remained at 100 percent. Explanations for the decrease can be broken down into organizational and environmental factors. Internally, the UVF experienced a leadership change in late 1975 which brought in new senior staff who were more disciplined and worked to expel internal feuding and sectarian killings from

[58] Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 278.
[59] Ibid., 271.
[60] Ibid., 286.
[61] Ibid., 280.

the organization.[62] The UVF also shifted away from using bombings as a means of violence.[63] Bombings are naturally less discriminate in their targeting and are more prone to cause at least some civilian casualties. Despite these internal changes, UVF leaders still failed to tightly control the organization's operations, as evidenced by the reluctance to stop the Shankill Butchers, an especially violent and sectarian group within the UVF.[64] The security environment around the UVF also changed. The British and Ulster security forces were increasingly successful in stopping the Loyalist paramilitary operations and arresting members.[65] The increased security presence also decreased the paramilitaries' perceived need for their activity.[66]

The UVF: 1979-1994

In 1979, the UVF shifted to an overt direct political engagement with the establishment of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), which was established by the UVF leadership. The PUP leaders even consulted UVF prisoners on the selection of the party name.[67] This all indicates a direct relationship. While the formation of the PUP indicates the direct nature of its relationship with the UVF, its prominent role in the 1990s peace process supports the overt nature of its relationship. Leaders of the PUP appeared alongside senior UVF leader Gusty Spence to declare a ceasefire by the Loyalist paramilitaries in 1994.[68] Such a public appearance demonstrated the openness the PUP had in being recognized as being directly tied to the UVF.

With its public ties to the UVF and direct access, the PUP should have had both the means and motivation to reduce indiscriminate violence. Based upon its efforts in working for a peaceful resolution to the Northern Ireland conflict, the PUP did arguably act to reduce indiscriminate violence. It published two major policy documents that proposed detailed plans for a devolved government of Northern Ireland as part of a larger peace process. As PUP leader David Ervine pushed the UVF toward a final peaceful end to the Troubles, he lamented the UVF's return to violence following a 1991 ceasefire and described the UVF's retaliatory attack

[62] Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 130.
[63] Ibid., 145.
[64] Peter Taylor, *Loyalists: War and Peace in Northern Ireland* (New York: TV Books, 1999), 152.
[65] Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 138.
[66] Ibid., 135-136.
[67] Spencer, *The State of Loyalism*, 69.
[68] Taylor, *Loyalists*, 233.

killing six Catholic civilians in 1994 as the worst day of his life.[69] Although the PUP demonstrated efforts to end sectarian violence, these efforts seem to have been more driven by a desire to reach a peace agreement than to win electoral votes. Regardless, we should see reduced sectarian violence during this time period.

The UVF's average civilian casualty rate from the PUP's beginning to the 1994 Loyalist ceasefire (1979-1994) was 83 percent, while the PAF/PAG/RHC rate ticked down to 97 percent. Contrary to the theory's predictions, the publicly and directly connected PUP did not appear to be any more successful in limiting UVF civilian violence than the privately and distantly connected OUP and DUP. Once again, a couple factors should be taken into account to explain the failure to see the predicted the result. First, Loyalist paramilitaries had developed a common thought that the war had to be intensified to bring the PIRA to the negotiating table.[70] While this primarily meant hitting PIRA members harder, it also encompassed the murdering of Republican politicians, who are considered civilians in the data set. Secondly, despite the PUP and UVF leaders' pressure to limit sectarian killings, individual UVF units still had the autonomy to retaliate against Republican attacks.[71] This is a key difference with the PIRA, whose members lost such autonomy later in the conflict.

The Ulster Defense Association (UDA)

Compared to the UVF, the UDA was less secretive, larger, and had a more decentralized organizational structure. However, it was still a deadly Loyalist paramilitary with political ties of varying forms. It also had its own *flag of convenience* organization, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), who conducted a significant portion of the UDA's military operations. Although the UFF was more integral to the UDA than the UVF's related groups, I still predict they had higher civilian casualty rates than the UDA at all levels of political engagement.

The UDA: 1972-1975

The UDA began life in the summer of 1971 and began its violent campaign in 1972, which is where the analysis therefore begins. Also emerging at this time was William Craig's Vanguard Movement, later named the Vanguard Unionist Party (VUP). I argue that Vanguard

[69] Taylor, *Loyalists*, 230.
[70] Ibid., 232.
[71] Ibid., 230.

became an overt indirect political partner of the UDA's. Evidence of this overt relationship can be seen in the statements of the UDA's support for Craig and the appearances Craig and the UDA made together. The Woodvale company of the UDA wrote, "we, the members of the Defense Volunteers . . . have pledged our full support to this vast, and ever-growing organization (Vanguard)."[72] The UDA announced a series of mass rallies supporting Vanguard and Craig appeared as the main speaker at one of these rallies managed by the UDA. However, the Vanguard Movement formed independently of the UDA in contrast to the PUP. Instead, Craig described Vanguard as "an umbrella movement for traditional Loyalist groupings."[73] This situates Vanguard as an overt indirect partner of the UDA's.

Vanguard should have had the motivation if not the access to limit the UDA's indiscriminate violence. However, this does not seem to have been the case. Instead, Craig often seemed to support or condone sectarian killings in his speeches and UDA members believed that Craig was permitting sectarian violence against Catholics.[74] It is not as if the electoral incentives to limit indiscriminate violence were nonexistent – Sarah Nelson reports that the sectarian killings cost Vanguard support – Craig just seemed to ignore them.[75] Nelson supports my argument that parties hold power to control killings, as she writes that Vanguard's willingness "to make excuses for it (sectarian violence) contributed to the general lack of urgency about stopping the killings."[76] However, Craig's behavior does not support my assumption that political parties discourage indiscriminate violence. Therefore, the overt nature of the relationship is not expected to hold its desired effect of depressing indiscriminate violence.

Averaging the UDA's civilian casualty rate for the time this overt indirect relationship existed (1972-1975), I find that 84 percent of the UDA's victims were civilians. This matches the rate of the UVF, who were covert and indirectly engaged, for the same years, excluding the UVF's overt direct period in 1974. This supports my prediction that the overt relationship would not contain indiscriminate violence any further than covert relations. The UFF matched the PAF/PAG/RHC civilian casualty rate of 100 percent over this time period.

[72] Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 85.
[73] Nelson, *Ulster's Uncertain Defenders*, 104.
[74] Ibid., 123.
[75] Ibid., 124.
[76] Ibid., 125.

The UDA: 1976-1977

Craig's proposal during the 1975 constitutional convention to form a voluntary coalition with the Catholic SLDP caused the VUP to split and the UDA to pull its outspoken support for Craig. Following this, the UDA was left with the DUP as its main political ally. I categorize the UDA-DUP relationship as covert and indirect for reasons similar to the UVF – the presence of overarching shared goals and the careful distancing of DUP leader Ian Paisley. The difference is that the UDA only held these ties with the DUP, whose working-class roots and culture resonated more with UDA members than the stuffier Official Unionist Party (OUP).[77] Also indicative of a relationship between the two was the UDA's willingness to attempt to enforce a 1977 labor strike called for by Paisley.

Paisley's inflammatory language may have indirectly motivated sectarian killings discussed in the UVF case study and also holds constant for the UDA's case. The UDA's civilian casualty rate in 1976 was 76 percent and only 50 percent in 1977, a year in which the UDA and DUP split. This is a significant drop in the UDA's rate and much lower than the UVF's rate of 80 percent during the same period, who were also covert and indirectly engaged. Colin Crawford points to a lack of military strategy, corruption, and police infiltration as reasons for the drop in total deaths committed by the UDA following 1976.[78] Out of these, police infiltration is the most likely factor contributing to the falling rates of indiscriminate violence as well. However, the UFF civilian casualty rate remained at 100 percent.

The UDA: 1989-1994

I argue the UDA entered its final phase of political relations in 1989 with the formation of the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). Gary McMichael, whose father had led both the UDA and the UDP's precursor party, the Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party (ULDP), was the head of the new party, signaling a direct relationship between the UDA and UDP. Along with the PUP, UDP leaders also publicly appeared with the Loyalist paramilitary leadership upon the announcement of the Loyalist ceasefire in 1994, indicating an overt relationship.[79] Further evidence of an overt direct relationship comes from the party's demise. In 1998, the UDP was expelled from formal

[77] Spencer, *The State of Loyalism*, 41.
[78] Colin Crawford, *Inside the UDA: Volunteers and Violence* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 36.
[79] Taylor, *Loyalists*, 233.

peace negotiations after the UFF broke its ceasefire, and the UDA dissolved the party in 2001 following a decline in support for the Good Friday Agreement.[80] The connections between the two were overt and direct to the extent that the party was linked to the paramilitary group in the eyes of the leading political figures, and to the extent that the paramilitary group could dissolve the party.

The UDA experienced other organizational changes with potential effects on their civilian casualty rate in 1989. Widespread arrests of the UDA leadership in 1989 replaced the corrupt old guard with competent new young leaders.[81] This new leadership refocused the organization on killing the IRA and Sinn Fein.[82] While the increased focus on killing the IRA should have lowered the civilian casualty rate, the data set considers Sinn Fein members as civilians. The final change in the UDA was the accelerating shift of military responsibilities from the UDA to the UFF. Whether that shift was a political calculation of the UDP's to create further distance between itself and the organization's military operations is unknown. However, Steve Bruce writes, "the military wing (the UFF) constantly provides Loyalist critics with grounds for ignoring or campaigning against the social and political activities of the organization."[83] Even shifting military activities to the UFF did not provide enough separation for the UDP to politically flourish.

There is some evidence that the UDP was able to capitalize on its position as a political party with overt direct relations with the UDA. Crawford writes that "the old strategy of randomly killing Catholics was demonstrably abandoned."[84] And the UDP convinced the UFF to declare a ceasefire in 1994.[85] Looking at the dataset, only three deaths were attributed to the UDA from 1989 to 1994, making it virtually impossible to compare civilian casualty rates. However, the UFF killed a total of 89 people and an equal 89 percent of them were civilians. This is a marginal decrease from the 91 percent witnessed in the previous period. Whether this decrease was due to the UDA's revamped leadership or political pressure remains debatable.

[80] Martin Melaugh, "Abstracts on Organizations," Conflict Archive on the Internet, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm#udp.
[81] Crawford, *Inside the UDA*, 30.
[82] Crawford, *Inside the UDA*, 37.
[83] Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 266.
[84] Crawford, *Inside the UDA*, 42.
[85] Ibid., 42.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In Table 2 below, I include every relationship examined in the case studies and organize them by their relationship type. I also include the civilian casualty rate.

Table 2

Military Group-Political Party Typology

	Overt	**Covert**
Direct	‡UVF—PUP (83%) ‡UDA/UFF—UDP: (89%)	† PIRA—Sinn Fein: (29%)
Indirect	‡UDA—Vanguard: (84%)	‡UVF—DUP&OUP: (95%), (77%) ‡UDA—DUP: (63%)

Note: Percentage of civil deaths attributed to the military groups is noted in each parenthesis. † indicates Catholic organizations; ‡ indicates Protestant organizations

As is evident from the preceding analysis and table, my hypothesis is supported in some cases and not in others. The PIRA's casualty rate falls both below the covert indirect rate as expected, but also below the overt direct rate as not predicted. I therefore conclude that my hypothesis that militant groups with more direct and public ties to political parties is partially supported with two major caveats revealed by the examination of Loyalist case studies.

First, political parties must actually desire and stress a reduction of indiscriminate violence. In the case of Ian Paisley and William Craig, they arguably did the opposite and encouraged violence while failing to condemn indiscriminate violence. I operated under the assumption that parties would discourage indiscriminate violence, which was underpinned by two further assumptions: one, that political party leaders are rational in their pursuit of votes, and two, that indiscriminate violence turns voters away. Examination of the Loyalist case studies revealed that early in the conflict, indiscriminate violence was either disregarded or accepted by Protestant voters. Even later in the conflict when Protestants' tolerance for indiscriminate violence decreased, party leaders such as Craig and Paisley still failed to condemn such violence, indicating irrational behavior. Without their push for selective violence, a key causal mechanism was lost.

Secondly, political parties must have widespread buy-in from the militant group. Although a party may have public and direct ties to the leadership of the militant group, their influence is restrained if the rank-and-file remain non-believers in political expansion. This was especially problematic in militant groups such as the UVF and UDA, which lacked strong organizational cohesion and hierarchy. The lack of buy-in the UDP and PUP received from the UDA and UVF contrasts with the PIRA membership, who's members, although politically removed before 1981, were invested after Bobby Sands' hunger strike and the electoral activation of Sinn Fein. This likely explains the failure to see overt and direct party relationships suppress civilian casualty rates of associated militant groups.

The importance of parties obtaining widespread buy-in from the militant group perhaps reflects a need to redefine *direct* in the typology, or expand the typology to include a third dimension to capture whether the party has widespread support of the militant group. The research is further compromised by its inability to show the proportion of civilians killed who were politicians. While politicians should be treated as civilians, examining how many politicians were killed as a proportion of the total number of civilians killed would lend further insight into the motives and strategies of the militant groups. For example, if the UDA turned out to have killed a higher proportion of politicians per civilians during periods of overt direct engagement than in periods of covert indirect engagement, it would lend further credence back to my theory and push the theory toward further refinement. Other compromises in this body of research include the UDA and UVF's periods of single-digit yearly killings, which limited the ability of average civilian casualty rates to serve as a precise test of the hypothesis. This study's external validity could be improved by including cases from other civil conflicts, especially those marked by high casualty rates. Finally, the dependent variable ultimately seeks to reflect the level of violence committed against civilians. This deserves other measures beside civilian casualty rates, which while accessible, paint a less than complete picture. Including the number of injured civilians and the number of civilian women raped would better reflect the total amount of violence aimed at civilians.

Despite facing these methodological constraints, this study has made key advances in the research on militant groups, political parties, and indiscriminate violence. Rarely have the three components been linked together in a formal research study. I have also demonstrated the

versatility and applicability of Matanock and Staniland's new typology of militant group political engagements. My adaptation of this typology can be further expanded by applying it in other civil wars and intrastate conflicts. Such contexts include Columbia in the 1980s with FARC and other rebel groups, as well as Palestine with the political evolution of Hamas. Finally, I have helped to solve the original tension posed in this paper between those who argue political engagement brings militant group violence to a close and those who argue it persists in spite of political engagement. With the noted caveats, this study has shown that while militant groups continue to employ violence long after entering into electoral politics, alliances with political parties moderate the use of indiscriminate violence.

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