Accumulations of Legitimacy:
Exploring Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency Dynamics

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Abstract

We explore the dynamics of regime-changing insurgencies by examining elements of traditional insurgency studies (e.g., Beckett 2001; O'Neill 2005) in light of Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice. In particular, we examine the insurgent and counterinsurgent activities as a contest for creating accumulations of *legitimacy* through which incumbent state organizations—and insurgent organizations that seek to become state organizations—shape the very categories of thought that people use to recognize and interpret "state" organizations and their activities. We use system dynamics causal-loop and stock-flow mapping to conceptualize the accumulations of social capital and the activities that generate and deteriorate these accumulations according to the cause-and-effect relations asserted by political-science and military-history studies of insurgency and counterinsurgency. We lay out an agenda for formalizing and simulating the conceptualized structures to check for internal consistency with the historical dynamics as well as for consistency with, or contradiction of, organizational studies of legitimacy. Through this research, we offer to integrate historical insights with insights from organization theory. We hope to contribute to understanding of points of leverage in diffusing and addressing insurgent and counterinsurgent activities. We also hope to inform and extend understanding of the organizational-infrastructure construct of legitimacy and how it is created and undermined by examining these critical contests for leadership and governance.

Introduction

Historically speaking, guerilla warfare itself is an ancient phenomenon. Raiding, from which "guerilla" warfare developed, in fact predates conventional warfare (Keegan 1994). And it has continued as the favored means of warfare by the poor (Becket 2001). However, insurgencies, which marry guerilla warfare to a revolutionary ethic began only in the eighteenth century with the American Revolution (Beckett 2001). Further it seems to have developed its full potential as a substitute for conventional forces only since the First World War with the development of asymmetric weapons such as smokeless powder, high velocity rifles, rapid communication via the mass media, urbanization, and sophisticated commercial networks.

Insurgencies have arguably been the dominant mode of warfare (at least in terms of numbers of conflicts) during the past fifty years (O'Neill 1990). Some nations suffering from insurgent warfare would include the Philippines, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, Kashmir, Yemen, Djibouti, Columbia, and Sri Lanka (Kaplan 2005, *Economist* 2005a, *Economist* 2005b, *Economist* 2006). Many of these insurgencies have religious or ethnic overtones, although some do not (O'Neill 1990). For example, drug trafficking appears to be a key driver in Columbia (Kaplan 2005) and political ideology in Peru (O'Neill 1990).

These factors taken together make the management of insurgencies more difficult than in former times. Understanding the interplay of modern insurgent and counterinsurgent activities bears all the hallmarks of a complex problem, including dense interrelationships of communication and

financial networks; nonlinear changes in population responses to violence (by the incumbent government's counterinsurgent activities as well as insurgent activities), and asymmetric delays in building up and deteriorating accumulations of physical capital—such as societal infrastructure, visual propaganda, weapons, and logistical and financial resources—and intangible capital—such as cultural or political identity with one group or another, or widespread belief that a particular group has legitimate right to govern as "the state."

Many studies of insurgency have unfolded in the realms of political science or military strategy, areas that draw upon a wide range of disciplines, including economics and history in large measure, and psychology, sociology, and philosophy to varying (lesser) degrees. We believe that insurgent and counterinsurgent groups are some of the most influential organizations affecting the quality of societal life, and they are some of the most rapidly and widely changing organizations in existence. Therefore we assert that examining insurgencies and counterinsurgencies in light of organization theory could reveal points of leverage perhaps overlooked by economical and historical approaches. Moreover, we suspect that developing a coherent understanding of the dynamics of insurgent and counterinsurgent organizations and their lifecycles will stretch and contribute to more robust organization theory.

Therefore we take as our focus for this research: How can organization theory, particularly Bourdieu's theory of practice (1990) shed light on regime-changing insurgencies? We undertake to explore the dynamics of insurgencies using the analytic approach of system dynamics because it is well suited to represent the nonlinear behaviors, interconnected variables, and physical and intangible accumulations described above. We undertake to use Bourdieu's theory of practice as our organizational theory lens because it provides clear focus on accumulations of capital, the activities enabled and constrained by those accumulations, and the recursive interrelationships between activities and accumulations (Black, Carlile, Repenning 2004). Below we briefly describe a practice-theory view of insurgent and counterinsurgent activities, offer some causal loops for conceptualization of insurgencies in light of this theory, and lay out an agenda for model formalization and simulated analyses. We conclude with preliminary insights and strategies for future research.

Examining insurgencies in light of practice theory

In insurgency and counterinsurgency activities, what is most at stake is who has *legitimacy* to be the state. Even when insurgents do not seek to take over the role of governing but rather to reform existing government, the goal of insurgent activities is to raise questions in the minds of the populace about the legitimacy of the state's actions and thereby to bring pressure on the government to change those actions. In revolutionary insurgencies, the objective is both to undermine the legitimacy of the incumbent government and to establish the legitimacy of those who would become the government.

The legitimacy of the state is an accumulation of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1998) or a "reservoir" that remains stable as long as it remains above a particular threshold (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_legitimacy). As Bourdieu has argued, the notion of capital (any kind of capital, physical or intangible) has meaning within the context of a practice

(Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992), an ongoing socially constructed understanding of what is valued, and therefore valuable. Conceiving capital as accumulations helps us recognize, first, capital endures longer than the activities that generate it; second, the accumulations of capital claimed by a person in turn influence, predispose, and shape activities in which she or he engages; and, third, the intangible accumulations of esteem, prestige, respect, et cetera that we seek are inexorably tied to the physical accumulations of everyday living such as money, property, certifications and degrees, friends, et cetera. Symbolic capital refers to those intangible accumulations that are rich with widely socially shared meanings that are often rooted in accumulations of physical capital but nevertheless distinct. So when we acknowledge that the legitimacy of the state is an accumulation of symbolic capital, we assert that the legitimacy of the state depends certainly on the state's access to physical capital but also, critically, on the populace's perception of the state's sustained, effective use of that capital in ways of which the populace approves. This is consistent with Alagappa's (1995) assertion that legitimacy is a relational construct between the governed and the governing; in that context, legitimacy comprises shared norms and values, conformity with established rules for acquiring power, "proper and effective" use of power, and consent of the governed (Alagappa, 1995: 15). Here, power refers to use of physical capital and / or symbolic capital.

We assert that, in the context of the state and the relationship between the governing and the governed, there is fungibility between physical capital and symbolic capital in a way similar to the "exchanges" of economic and cultural capital in society that Bourdieu discussed (1998). In other words, a large accumulation of one kind of capital might substitute, at least partially, for lack of accumulation in another kind of capital. The "exchange rates" among forms of capital depend on the socially generated and socially shared interpretations of activities enabled (and constrained) by that capital (Bourdieu 1990, Coicaud 1992, Mao, 1961). Gurr (1970) asserted that a key cause of violent conflict lay in a populace's declining "value capabilities," or people's abilities to achieve and maintain their values through personal, societal, and political opportunities, which would include access to symbolic as well as physical capital. (Notably, Gurr maintains that it is the *rate* of change in value capabilities, rather than its absolute level at any one time, that fuels a sense of relative deprivation and so increases the potential for violence). In a similar manner, Casebeer (2005) suggests that one way to modify an insurgency's evolution is to change the narrative that the affected populace uses to interpret violent acts by the insurgents.

Coicaud (1992) extends this interpretation by suggesting that if a government is overthrown by an insurgency, it is likely that the cultural capital of that society will also deteriorate. If this occurs, new governments cannot rebuild it overnight (Alagappa, 1995). Hence, numerous revolutionary rebellions, even after they have been "won" against the original government, degenerate into a period of civil war with numerous subsequent changes in government. The paradigm for this is the revolution of the French Revolution, which consisted of at least four changes of governmental structure and leadership. Other good examples (from merely Western contexts) include the aftermaths of the English Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Mexican Revolution. Insurgencies, in which revolutionary thought is married to guerilla warfare, behave similarly. A good example of this is the Anglo-Irish War of 1916-21 in which an Irish insurgency that resulted in winning effective independence from the United Kingdom was followed immediately by a civil war, in which more people were killed than in the original

conflict against the U.K. (Kautt 1999). A more recent and much bloodier example is the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly known as Zaire) from 1994 to the present has resulted in almost 4 million deaths so far (*The New York Times,* 2006), and the current government is still perceived by many as unstable (*The Economist*, //).

Because a significant part of insurgency and counterinsurgency studies focus on violence, we find it useful to consider the possibility that there is also fungibility between physical violence and symbolic violence. The objective of violent activities conducted by insurgents is often not so much to destroy physical capital as much as it is to destroy people's belief in the efficacy of that capital in the hands of the incumbent government. In other words, violence destroys the symbolic capital of government effectiveness and therefore the symbolic capital of government legitimacy. Terrorist acts, in particular, are specifically designed as acts of physical violence that destroy tremendous amounts of symbolic capital relative to the physical destruction rendered. If we accept the Hobbes's assertion in *Leviathan* (shared by other later social contract theorists) that a cardinal, if not the prime, function of government is to guarantee the safety of the people governed by preventing *bellum omnium contra omnes* (war of all against all), then this exchange between physical violence and symbolic violence must lie near the center of efforts to understand the dynamics of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. Other acts, even when for ostensibly "military purposes," often contain a symbolic element as well. A quotation from a movie of Michael Collins's (head of intelligence and finance for the Irish insurgent movement during the Anglo-Irish War of 1916-21) life illustrates this point nicely: "I am Minister for Gun-running, Daylight Robbery, and General Mayhem."

In order to develop a coherent understanding of insurgency and counterinsurgency activities— which have long been considered intractable by both political scientists and military strategists— we need conceptualizing tools and analytical methods that help us examine the shifting dynamics among accumulations of physical and social capital and the effects on perceived legitimacy of the state from multiple (direct and indirect) causes. System dynamics (Forrester 1961; Sterman 2000) provides a useful tool for these explorations because the grammar explicitly distinguishes enduring accumulations from in-the-moment activities and accommodates intangible as well as tangible variables; system dynamics conceptualization insists that we specify our hypotheses in explicit cause-effect relationships; and simulation provides a rigorous check on the internal consistency of our assertions about what leads to and mitigates insurgency and counterinsurgency activities.

Causal-loop diagram of central insurgency dynamics

Figure 1 presents a causal-loop diagram of the proposed model that includes legitimacy and performance as well as physical and cultural capital.
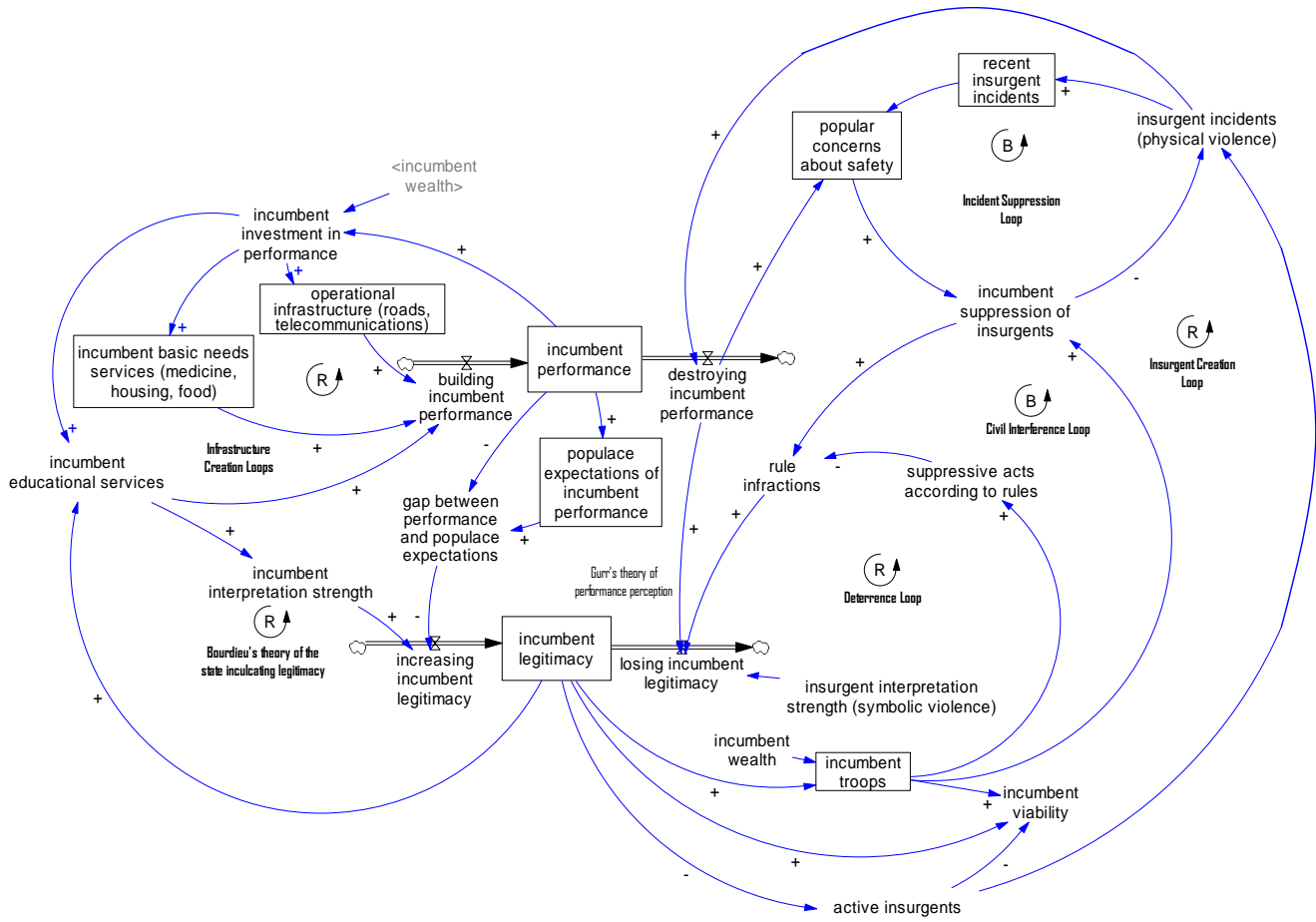
Figure 1: Causal-Loop Diagram of Performance, Legitimacy, and Insurgencies Central Core:
Performance, Expectations, and Legitimacy

Central Core: Performance, Expectations, and Legitimacy
Gurr's theory of relative deprivation postulated that the propensity for violence was a function of
the perceived gap between expected and actual performance of the incumbent regime as
perceived by the populace. "Performance" includes a number of criteria, including the degree of
economic development, personal safety, and other issues such as human and political rights.
Because performance cannot be measured instantaneously, but is a function form of popular
opinion, we operationalize it as a stock variable following Forrester (1961). Similarly, we
follow Boudieu's (1998) implicit postulate that legitimacy grows and wanes over time as a result
of several reinforcing loops by representing legitimacy as a stock as well. Because legitimacy is
a stock, it cannot be affected directly except through inflows and outflows (Sterman 2000).
Hence, the impact of Gurr's postulated gap between the incumbent government's performance
and popular expectations for that performance as a driver behind the inflow to incumbent
legitimacy. Finally, incumbent viability, i.e. whether it or the insurgency is in power, is
operationalized as a function of the legitimacy of the incumbent as well as the physical capital of
itself (incumbent troops) and the insurgency (active insurgents).

Infrastructure Creation Loops
As *incumbent investment in performance* increases so too, with time, so too will the stock of operational infrastructure (roads, telecommunications, etc.) and services (medical care, housing, food, etc). As this infrastructure increases, so too will the inflow to incumbent performance increase, which will allow it to invest yet more in future performance, completing the reinforcing loop.

Bourdieu's Theory of the State Inculcating Legitimacy Loop
Bourdieu (1998) argued that the State, by providing educational services, was in a position to direct the formation of the *weltanschauung* of the populace in a favorable manner. This would increase the legitimacy of the incumbent government. Hence, by being in power, which is a function of legitimacy, a government can make itself yet more legitimate with time.

Incident Suppression Loop
Anderson's (2006) system dynamics model of the Anglo-Irish War of 1916-1921 postulated that the recent number of violent incidents committed by insurgents (physical violence) would create popular concerns about safety that would demand that the incumbent government deploy its physical capital (police forces, military troops, etc.) to suppress the insurgents through such actions as detentions and house searches. This would, in the short-term at least, reduce the number of insurgents and, hence, the number of insurgent acts of physical violence, thus completing the balancing loop. Another and, from the insurgent point of view, often the most important effect of these acts of physical violence is their effect on eroding the perception of the incumbent's performance.

Civil Interference, Insurgent Creation, and Deterrence Loops
Anderson's (2006) model also noted, however, that based on the experiences of the Anglo-Irish War and many other conflicts, that suppressive acts by the incumbent would, in the long-term, lead to interference in civil life (e.g. curfews, house searches, etc.) that would be unpopular, which is termed *rules infractions* in the model. This, following Alagappa (1995) has a positive link to the destruction of incumbent legitimacy. Hence, the incumbent becomes less popular and the insurgent more so, *ceteris paribus,* leading to more active insurgents. These new insurgents then would create more incidents, creating a reinforcing loop. To some extent, however, this vicious cycle might be ameliorated by having sufficient military and police strength to enable them to utilize suppressive acts that are less inimical to the social contract, such as deterrence. To do so, however, requires a great number of troops relative to the size of the populace (Gordon 2007).

Advancing the work

We believe that more thoroughly analyzing and exploring the dynamics summarily sketched above will contribute to understanding points of leverage in destabilizing incumbent and insurgent legitimacy and so, also, points of leverage for creating and preserving stability and peace. Here we describe some of the approaches we are taking, as well as some of the issues with which we are grappling, as we address formalizing a model of insurgency and counterinsurgency dynamics.

Arraying key variables by insurgent, incumbent dimensions. The causal-loop diagram above frames the dynamic issues around the incumbent performance and incumbent legitimacy, with insurgent incidents triggering destabilizing and reinforcing interactions that may overtake and dominate the reinforcing dynamics securing the incumbent in place in society. But the legitimacy of the insurgency is also at stake, and, as an insurgency movement grows, its performance in terms of basic-need services and educational services also becomes at issue, as more successful rebellions often result in the creation and ongoing operations of "shadow" governments, such as the Irish Dial during the Anglo-Irish War and, more recently, Hezbollah in Lebanon. For these reasons, we will approach formalization of the model by arraying in two dimensions (insurgent and incumbent) many of the variables portrayed above. Some variables such as operational infrastructure (roads, telecommunications, etc.), populace concerns about safety, and rule infractions can be appropriated (in the case of infrastructure) or triggered (in the case of concerns and infractions) by either incumbent or insurgent forces and so will not be arrayed. Variables that we foresee arraying in the incumbent and insurgent dimensions include:

- performance
- legitimacy
- incidents
- recent incidents
- basic needs services
- educational services
- investment in performance
- troops
- wealth

- interpretation strength
- populace expectations of performance
- gap between performance and populace expectations
- suppression
- suppressive acts according to rules
- viability
- active participants

Model validation and parameterization. We intend first to validate the model relationships and establish model parameters based on the history of the Anglo-Irish War of 1916-1921 because it is often considered the first modern urban insurgency (Keegan and Wheatcroft 2001), which has influenced subsequent insurgencies, perhaps in part because the conflict was well documented. During the war, modern rifles rendered violence asymmetrical, since assailants could attack from greater distances and therefore less risk than ever before; contemporary media to disseminate news and propaganda; weapons were relatively plentiful because of financial assistance for the insurgency from foreign donors; and contemporary media were exploited to disseminate news and propaganda. We intend to conduct preliminary analyses in the context of understanding insurgency and counterinsurgency dynamics in this conflict before extending the model to explore the dynamics of other well-documented insurgencies and compare and contrast findings of simulated analyses across case studies.

Additional theory / model conceptualization. We must sharpen our understanding of the links between physical and symbolic capital. In the causal-loop diagram above, the "exchange" between physical and symbolic capital is portrayed by variables of incumbent / insurgent interpretation strength and by a link between the outflow of incumbent performance to the outflow of incumbent legitimacy. Certainly competing interpretations disseminated through news and propaganda play a powerful role in communicating to a populace how a single building's destruction (such as a store, train station, or office building) can *signify* the ineffective use of power (such as the government's not being able to defend the structure, or the

insurgency's reckless disregard for public using the structure). But the fungibility of physical and symbolic capital may also depend on other factors, which we have yet to articulate clearly.

Time parameters. Explicit articulation of time parameters will play a key role in explicating and exploring the dynamics of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. Our hypothesis is that the time to build services based on physical capital accumulations that manifest in performance and therefore in enduring symbolic capital is longer than the time to set or re-set the populace's expectation of performance. This would enable insurgent movements to destabilize expectations faster than the incumbent could stabilize them, allowing insurgents effectively to operate within the incumbents' OODA (Observe-Orient-Decide-Act) cycle (Boyd 1992, Haekel 1999), if the incumbent's balancing activities did not effectively (and quickly) weaken insurgency momentum. This would also explain why, once a revolutionary insurgency gains control of infrastructure, competing insurgent groups may create a series of destabilizing periods, so that the society is in turmoil long after the original insurgency "won."

Curvilinear effects and threshold values. We hypothesize that certain relationships between variables may be governed by curvilinear effects. For example, some incumbent suppression of insurgent incidents may dispel populace sympathy for insurgents, but more suppression may actually fuel insurgency popularity. We hypothesize, too, that there are key threshold variables that play key roles in stabilizing a society within either the realm of incumbent reinforcing dynamics or insurgent reinforcing dynamics. For example, a "legitimacy threshold" such as that conceptualized by political science scholar Robert Dahl or a "performance gap threshold" could mean that incumbent legitimacy or performance could fall but not result in insurgent gains if the accumulation of legitimacy still remains above the threshold. Similarly, perhaps an "active participant threshold" could govern the point at which an insurgency movement gains critical momentum that overtakes incumbent legitimacy. Our intent, beyond validating the model against the Anglo-Irish War to test the internal consistency of the hypothesized relationships and the model's consistency with recorded historical trajectories, is to explore dominant dynamics' sensitivity to these curvilinear effects and threshold values and perhaps redefine them in terms of their relationships to other critical variables in the model.

Simulation analyses. We propose to not only calibrate the resulting model against the Anglo-Irish War but also to at a minimum qualitatively match the behavior of other insurgencies such as the Malaya Emergency (the suppression of which was successful) and French Algeria (which was not). Hence, we will validate the structure above by using the family member test (Forrester and Senge 1980).

Preliminary contributions

The issues described above, which arise from the rigor of formalizing a conceptual model, already point to some insights into the topic of insurgency and counterinsurgency dynamics. Most broadly, the reinforcing dynamics that fuel either incumbent-driven stability or insurgent-driven instability suggest that a more specific, structural description (perhaps in terms of relative accumulations) of the tipping point that sends a society from one dynamic "regime" (pun intended) to another would be useful to scholars and practitioners of public policy and possibly also to organization theorists and practitioners dealing with issues of change and resistance to

change. Exploring the possibility that insurgents also have accumulations of legitimacy at stake, when most insurgency studies focus solely on the legitimacy of the incumbent government, could advance a more structurally oriented (rather than military-oriented) view of incidents aimed at political reform or change. Furthermore, a closer examination of the concept of "exchange" between physical and symbolic capital, and between physical and symbolic violence, could yield more provocative theory to prompt reexamination of data-rich studies of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies.

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