

Social Networks and Rebellion^{*}

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Abstract

Country-orientated studies of civil war are problematic for several reasons. They lump geographically disparate conflicts; they can fail to recognize changes in major actors; they can fail to pick up the end of one conflict and the beginning of a new one with different rebel groups. In short, they aggregate too much information into the broad unit of analysis that is the country-year. To overcome these drawbacks, we examine civil conflict as a system of relationships within society over time. The government-rebel relationship is but one of the relationships that exist from this perspective. The rebel group itself emerges from among the set of relationships in society, first as dissenters and only later as rebels. We seek to determine what patterns of social relationships (or networks) lead to civil war onset, produce long or short civil wars, and how social networks change over time to facilitate civil war termination. This paper presents our initial theorizing on this subject and a case study of the evolution of the rebel sides in the Nicaraguan civil wars that both illustrate and illuminate the value of using social network analysis to understand the onset, duration, and termination of civil wars.

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INTRODUCTION

To understand the end of a civil war we must know why it started in the first place and what factors sustained the fighting.¹ Conflict termination cannot be taken out of context. To understand why belligerents lay down their arms we must understand why they fought. We also need to know about the groups that fought and the nature of their relationship(s). In the process of this dissection, we point out ways in which the common country-year level of analysis obscures much of our understanding of civil wars.

In this paper we address the major limitations within the current study of civil war. We discuss how, given their emphasis or reliance on the dyadic country year unit of analysis, current studies limit our understanding of civil war and conflict termination by failing to recognize their inherent dynamic or evolutionary nature. We then discuss the appropriateness of a social network framework of analysis to account for these common pitfalls, and offering a more complete and nuanced understanding of civil war. In addition, we argue that employing a social network approach will give us new insight into the current debate on the differences and similarities between intrastate and interstate war. We will then demonstrate the utility of this new model with a case study examining the evolution of rebel movements in Nicaragua. Whereas most datasets code on the country year, or the country-conflict year (as in Fearon 2004), this study would change the unit of analysis in order to better capture group cohesion, both on the state and opposition/rebel side, over time. In other words, if there is a change in the leadership, is there a subsequent change in the objectives, goals, or strategies of the organization? Does the new leader still represent the same basic interests of the group? Are the group's goals contingent upon the person in the position of authority, or are they more consistent and stable over time? Presumably if the interests of the group change with a change in leadership, this will impact the nature of the conflict—i.e. could affect war strategies, duration of conflict, possibility for negotiations, probability of successful negotiations, etc.

¹ We employ a fairly general definition of civil war: *an armed conflict between representatives of the state and another organized domestic party over a contested political incompatibility resulting in a number of casualties exceeding a certain threshold for both parties* (Gates 2004). This definition reflects the definition used to operationalize different forms of armed conflict in the Uppsala/PRIO dataset (Gleditsch, et al 2002) to which we will turn later in this paper. We also use the terms civil war and intrastate conflict synonymously, unless we specify a 1000 battle death criterion. For the most part, however, we will not focus on a threshold criterion to determine whether an armed conflict is a war or not.

Most civil war research, particularly the quantitative variety, takes a non-dynamic approach. Statistical analyses are essentially based on a series of cross-sectional snapshots of data. Patterns are identified on the basis of the existence or non-existence (or varying degrees) of particular factors associated with conflict. But for the most part, the dynamic interaction of these factors plays no role in determining the probability of conflict. Notions of reciprocity and strategic dependence are ignored. While the non-independence of country specific factors are increasingly recognized, the second-order forms of dependence, such as reciprocity and the variance exhibited in a single actor (the rebel group or the government) are ignored. We need to account for these second and third-order dependence problems, which are exaggerated with a dyadic research design (Hoff & Ward 2004).

Another problem with most of the civil war research is that it takes the country year as the favored unit of analysis. Thankfully, more and more analysis is now being conducted with data from the Uppsala Armed Conflict Database, which allows for the disaggregation of conflict. A considerable number of countries experience contemporaneous conflict, especially the larger ones like India and Indonesia. Focusing on the conflict as the unit of analysis rather than the country as a whole allows for the researcher to consider more than one conflict in a country. This approach also allows for the inclusion of geographic characteristics specific to the conflict that would otherwise be overlooked or exaggerated in a country-year analysis.

One innovative extension of the country-year format is to focus on rebel-government dyads (Cunningham, Gleditsch, Saleyan 2005).² This approach addresses a number of the problems that affect country-year or conflict based analyses, but these same problems inherently affect the dyadic approach as well. The first problem is how to account for the dynamic and evolving nature of an insurgency group. Processes of fusion and fission occur all the time. Such processes make the data gathering process nightmarish and any attempt to address the problem while maintaining the dyadic structure will lead to over counting or undercounting of groups. The statistical dependence between these groups also must be addressed. The second problem with a dyadic approach is that it inadequately accounts for the independent structure of other groups that also may be fighting the government. Such groups may have a completely different genesis, but should not be regarded as statistically independent entities. The dyadic approach

² One should also applaud their considerable effort in developing such a dataset.

also limits the ability to weight the degrees of independence between groups, not to mention their strategic interdependence.

This approach is further limited in that it only counts those groups that are already fighting. There is no primordial accounting for actors. The process by which a group organizes, arms itself, and begins to engage in deadly violence cannot be assessed. It insufficiently accounts for the dynamic qualities of civil war.

Another problem regards intermittent conflicts (i.e., ones that appear to start and stop). Within any civil conflict, there will naturally be periods of slowed fighting, allowing soldiers to rest and refresh their supplies or to engage in tentative peace talks with the government, as well as periods of resurgence. How long of a gap in which the casualty rate is below a certain threshold (Uppsala's threshold is 25 battle deaths per year) does one allow and still consider the conflict to be on-going? Do the dyads really consist of the same actors after a lull in conflict? Also some groups change considerably from one Uppsala conflict to another.

The real problem does not lie with intermittent conflicts, but on the inherent definition of a civil conflict or war as having passed some casualty threshold. Counting war or conflict as being on or off depending on whether it meets the criterion of battle deaths is problematic. The period just before a conflict crosses the threshold obviously holds critical information about the origins of the conflict, but it is treated as if it were a period of peace. Even more problematic are the periods of lull in an intermittent conflict. These years too may be counted as peaceful, depending on how one treats these periods. But even if they are treated as conflict periods, this is not quite accurate either as they are periods of reduced violence. The real problem with a threshold criterion is that peace and war are treated dichotomously and non-dynamically. Clearly, all periods of war are not identical, nor are all years of peace.

This problem stems from the literature's presumption that civil and interstate wars are similar. With a stable set of actors, interstate conflict has been depicted as an eruption of violence. But emerging in the fields of international relations and conflict studies is a debate about the characteristics of interstate and civil war. Are these phenomena as different as we claim them to be, so different to warrant separate analysis? Some scholars (Gleditsch and Walter 2004) have begun to address this question, arguing that many civil wars exhibit features or elements of interstate conflict. While indeed a persuasive and interesting argument, there are inherent differences between civil and interstate war that lend themselves well to separate

analysis. One of these differences—the formation and emergence of the actors—is the subject of this study. Civil wars are distinct in that there is a rebel or opposition group whose emergence and survival requires explanation. In interstate wars, on the other hand, both states have access to professionalized, standing armies.

By comparing intrastate and interstate conflict, we demonstrate the utility of using a social network approach to understanding war termination.³ We begin by comparing the actors in interstate and intrastate conflict. The actors in interstate wars—states and their governments—are established well before fighting begins and usually persist well after the war ends. The international system further lends a sense of juridical legitimacy and sovereignty to nation-states. Indeed, even states with limited authority are recognized as sovereign governments constituted by a defined territory and population. In addition, states have maintained standing armies for over three hundred years as preparation for and guard against war. In contrast, neither side in a civil war may recognize the other as a legitimate actor with which to negotiate. Sovereignty is not recognized. In addition, at least one collective actor in a civil war (i.e., the rebels) are not formed much prior to the onset of the war, both in terms of having a collective identity and, especially, in terms of possessing an army with which to fight. Of course, in the case of intermittent conflicts (wars defined by intermittent fighting, but involving the same belligerents) these collective action problems have already been solved and there may indeed be an army with a cache of weapons ready to re-deploy.⁴ But such cases only further demonstrate the need to examine war termination from a relational perspective.

These differences in mechanisms affect conflict termination and peaceful reintegration after a civil war. As international relations scholars turned their attention to civil wars, many used their familiar concept of security dilemmas to gain understanding in what seemed an inherently similar phenomenon (cf. Lake and Rothchild 1996; Kaufmann 1996; Morrow 1993). Nonetheless, we must consider that security dilemmas exist at several levels. For traditional international relations theorists, “the” security dilemma is a dilemma faced by states. This works in the context of interstate war; terminating a war—even without a broader settlement—simply brings the states back to their earlier security dilemma. But in the context of a civil war, the

³ Civil wars can of course become internationalized. They originate as intrastate conflicts but external actors intervene, e.g. the US intervention in Afghanistan. In contrast, interstate conflicts can start to look like civil wars, e.g. the US invasion of Iraq. Indeed, any definition of civil war exhibits some ambiguities.

⁴ See Gates (2004) and Gates & Strand (2004) for a discussion of how the coding of such wars has serious implications for our statistical analysis of intrastate conflict.

security dilemma is one faced by individuals. Ending formal hostilities does not remove the security dilemma of revenge and retribution—whether government sponsored or individually based. As Kalyvas (2002) demonstrates, opportunistic individual violence plays a significant role in civil wars. If the prewar situation was one of relative harmony, then the post-civil war environment poses a dilemma that was not present beforehand. If the prewar situation involved government oppression, it was likely a cause of the war to which the repressed would not want a return.

Now consider the problem from the other direction. Define human security as protecting individuals from politically motivated harm. Achieving human security is of interest for both civil and interstate wars. After a negotiated end to an interstate war, each respective government could simply patrol their borders to prevent the former enemy from infiltrating and harming their citizens. This has not generally been the case after civil wars. (Of course there are cases in which post-war reconstruction looks similar across the two types of war. Consider the cases of reconstruction after the American Civil War and the reconstruction of Germany after WWII.)

Civil wars can be categorized by the manner in which the rebel group is recruited. At one extreme are civil wars that are marked by the division of the existing government's military into opposing sides. These could be coup d'états, but not necessarily. At the other extreme are civil wars that have a rebel group whose soldiers have had no previous experience in combat. The first case is closer in quality to that of an interstate war; the second case has few parallels with interstate wars, except cases of extreme military imbalance, e.g. US-Granada. It should be noted for this second case that the relative lack of political capacity on the part of the government produces windows of opportunity for some would-be rebel leader. The lower the political capacity (or low capability level) of the government, the easier it is to recruit a small rebel group for local exploitation. Thus, the political capacity of the government shapes the ability to recruit soldiers for a rebel army as well as the strategies employed by the rebels. Many groups with a limited capacity to recruit rely on terrorist activities, since such tactics do not require a standing army per se, e.g. the Red Brigade. To organize a full-fledged army is much easier in an environment of a weak state. But even with opposing armies, the typical pattern in countries with low political capacity is for neither army to engage one another, but rather to target unarmed civilians (Azam 2001). The relative capacities of the two respective sides are what is important.

We begin by breaking open the government/rebel group relationship over time to understand how a rebel group forms and how it maintains support during long campaigns against its governmental opponent. For this, the government is the traditional comparative definition in which a particular clique of people runs the regime. Focusing on relationships gets around the problem of a civil war ending simply because violence is below some prescribed threshold. Instead, the conflict *of interest* continues—with or without violence—until the underlying dispute is resolved or one side yields or disappears from the scene. We started by examining government/rebel group dyads in the Armed Conflict Dataset (Wallensteen & Sollenberg 2000; Gleditsch, et al 2001). Close inspection of the data reveals some interesting features. For example, the importance of coding changes in the government is highlighted by the Nicaraguan civil war. This case exemplifies the need to consider the realms of social movements and rebel recruitment (Gates 2002). It also emphasizes the importance of understanding both forming a collective identity and creating and maintaining an army with which to fight.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL ORDER

The components of a social network are individuals, their physical location within some geographical space, and their relationships with other individuals. Any society is comprised of innumerable interpersonal relationships. Familial and friendship relations constitute most of an individual's social network, with economic relationships likely being the next largest component of that network. An additional network of political relationships includes an individual's dealings with his or her government. While an individual has many relationships, not all of these will be active at any one time. Individuals also have some choice over whether to interact with an individual with whom they have an existing relationship or to initiate an interaction with someone "new". Economic relationships generally have this voluntary quality while political relationships—especially with one's government—do not.⁵

For any given individual, their interactions with their government may be positive, negative, or neutral. In addition, one's information regarding the conduct of government is gleaned from one's personal and economic relationships with others. Thus, social relations within one's network are both a source of benefit (or loss) and a source of information regarding

⁵ Indeed, it is through the threat of activating the government relationship that economic contracts are typically enforced.

the larger network. The benefits an individual receives from her government range from diffuse public goods to personal patronage. “Losses” include the ordinary costs of maintaining government (i.e., taxes) as well as selective losses (such as fees, fines, graft, and expropriation). These losses can create an associated feeling of grievance if they are perceived as unjust.

From a political point of view, grievance is the most important information to be transmitted within a social network. Individuals’ reactions to signals of grievance can lead to localized disgruntlement—presuming that such information shapes one’s perceptions and future actions (see Calvert 1998)—but may have no other consequences. When these localized pockets are further linked together, a nascent dissenting organization can form. With a sufficiently large network of dissenters—some providing their resources, some providing their labor—a group may then seek redress to their grievances. If the dissenters use violent means to seek redress, we then label them a rebel group. Thus, rebel groups are formed through a complex evolution that can be stemmed or redirected in many ways. Some social networks will make the formation of a rebel group more likely while others will not. In this way, armed civil conflict is the product of a self-generative process “whereby the dynamics of lower-level conflict behavior mobilize contending actors into civil war” (Lichbach, Davenport, and Armstrong 2004: 1). These dynamics will be more clearly illustrated in the Nicaraguan case study.

The net benefits or losses resulting from one’s interactions with the government plus the information one receives from others regarding their interactions with the government generates a kind of flow potential. Net benefits and positive information feedback produce a positive flow potential and loyalty to the government. Net losses and negative information feedback produce a negative flow potential and dissent toward the government. Most individuals would have some mix of the two (such as net benefits (losses) and negative (positive) information feedback) and may have no particular attachment to, nor complaint against the government. In addition, whether the “flow potential” leads to action is a question of strategic decision and resource mobilization.

We seek to determine what patterns of social networks constitute the inherent characteristics of a country that affect the development and formation of rebel groups. For instance, what characteristics of a social network are transmitters of dissent? Understanding this then allows for an understanding of civil war onset because rebel groups are a prerequisite to the initiation of a civil war. Indeed, before the existence of a rebel army there was a nascent rebel

organization and, before that, there was a dissident movement, or organized protest, or some other form of low-level conflict. Conflict itself begets conflict, which can generate into violent conflict. It is clear that social networks associated with armed intrastate conflict are quite dynamic. Understanding how social networks change before and after civil war initiation allows for an understanding of how long a civil war will last and how it is likely to end. This will be the subject of the Nicaraguan case study.

While an individual-level empirical analysis of a country's social network is an impossible task, there are certain data that could be used to ascertain the dynamic aspects of conflict. The most prominent and most popular intrastate conflict datasets lack such data. As noted by Lichbach, Davenport, and Armstrong (2004: 6):

at present, the civil war literature includes no variables within estimated models that consider whether a rebel organization actually exists or how active or effective it is at pre-civil war recruiting, mobilization, and small-scale guerilla activity. Additionally, the literature includes no variables that consider the activity or effectiveness of state counter-insurgent efforts.

Also of relevance is data on the dynamic patterns of repression and dissent. Although not playing prominently in civil war research, good datasets exist. Banks' Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive (Banks 2001) provides good information on riots, demonstrations, and other lower levels of intrastate conflict that may not necessarily cross a casualty threshold of 25 battle deaths. Taylor and Jodice's *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators* (Taylor and Jodice 1983) have measures of government repression. Combining these data allows one to examine the aspects of reciprocity, conflict escalation and de-escalation (Moore 1998; Lichbach, Davenport, and Armstrong 2004).

In the Armed Conflict Dataset, the Nicaraguan civil war is given one start-date over four observations. Reading from the dataset, the first killing is in December of 1974, the Sandinistas engage in high level violence against the government in 1978 and 1979, the Contras then began low level violence against the government in 1981 and 1982, escalate to a high level conflict in 1983 until 1988, and then de-escalate again to a moderate level violence and war termination in 1989. The issue at stake for all four observations is control of the government. The only indication that something unique happened in 1981 is that the civil war is given a new subID.

From the Armed Conflict Dataset, we can get a general picture or snapshot of what civil conflicts look like across a large number of cases and years. We cannot, however, answer important questions about the nature of the conflict, who the primary actors are, where they came from, and/or what they are fighting for.

NETWORK RELATIONSHIPS AND REBELLION IN NICARAGUA

This section will look at the emergence and formation of the Sandinista revolutionary opposition in the beginning of the 1960's, its evolution into a formidable guerrilla army and its later transition into a legal, legitimate political party in the years following the overthrow of the Somoza regime. In so doing, we will look at the dynamics within the group over time, paying particular attention to the factionalization and splintering that took place among members.

The group now commonly referred to as the Sandinistas or the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) dates back to the late 1950s as a radical student activist group at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN) in Managua. Two of these students, José Carlos Fonseca Amador and Tomás Borge Martínez, joined the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN) and founded Nicaragua's Patriotic Youth (a cell of the PSN's youth movement) to organize and mobilize university students against the Somoza regime. Fonseca and Borge initially resisted forming alliances or strategic coalitions with the conservative and traditional sectors of society in favor of a more ideologically purist approach. After becoming disillusioned with these reformist strategies of the PSN, these founding students officially broke ranks with the organization in 1960 in order to create their own revolutionary opposition group (Vanden and Prevost 1993:33-36; Gilbert 1988). Thus the FSLN was formally organized in 1961 during a meeting between founding members, Fonseca, Silvio Mayorga, Borge, and Noel Guerrero Santiago in Havana, Cuba (Brown 2000; Vanden and Prevost 1993).⁷ In its first years, the FSLN boasted a mere twelve members.

⁶ Later, the FSLN (particularly the Tercerista faction) explicitly encouraged such coalitions. Eventually, this strategy became a point of contention that led to a temporary three-way split in the FSLN.

⁷ Noel Guerrero left the organization soon after the 1961 meeting, and as a result, most accounts do not include him as a founding member. There are a number of conflicting reports on where the organization was originally founded. Some reports, including Vanden and Prevost claim that the meeting between founding members took place in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, while others, including Brown (2000) and several CIA reports claim that it actually occurred in Havana, Cuba. In his account, Brown cites conversations with José Obidio "Pepe" Puente León, a Mexican national with close ties to the highest ranking Sandinista leaders, and who was present at many of the initial meetings. According to "Pepe," the reports of the origination meeting taking place in Honduras were a cover

The organization was to be modeled after the foquista ideologies and strategies of Ernesto Che Guevera and Fidel Castro. FSLN leaders believed that in order to be successful in their military overthrow of the dictatorship, they would need to employ a guerrilla warfare strategy, recruiting members from the peasantry bases in the rural countryside. By galvanizing support among the masses of campesinos and rural farmers, the Sandinistas believed that they could launch a massive revolt against the state. Recruitment efforts appear to have begun in the north central region of the country, in the highlands and mountains of Zinica. (For the FSLN's official program see Appendix 1.) By the late 1960s, however, it was clear that foquismo was not an effective strategy and was having little impact on the Somoza regime.

It was this strategic failure that led the FSLN to split into three factions. The first, called *Los Preletarios* (the Proletarians) or the *Movimiento Pueblo Unido* (MPU, the United People's Movement), was headed by Jaime Wheelock Román and Luis Carrion and pursued a strategy of mobilizing factory workers and residents of poor neighborhoods (barrios). The second, led by Borge, Henry Ruiz and Ricardo Morales was called the *Guerra Popular Prolongada* (GPP, the People's Prolonged War) and followed a Maoist strategy of a combined peasant and worker-led insurrection. The last faction of the FSLN was known as *La Tercerista* (The Third Way) and was led by Daniel Ortega Saavedra, his brother Humberto, and Edén Pastora, who favored a more moderate strategy of alliance building with other sectors and cohorts of society, including some non-Marxist groups (Gilbert 1988; Vanden and Prevost 1993; Hall and Brignoli 2003).

Events in the early 1970s, including the embezzlement of more than \$32 million in international humanitarian aid in the aftermath of the 1972 earthquake in Managua⁸ and the later assassination of Conservative opposition party leader and editor of *La Prensa*, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal on January 10 1978, led to widespread public disdain for and greater mobilization against the Somoza regime (Hall and Brignoli 2003).⁹ These events are indicative

story initiated by Borge in *La Paciente* in order to distance the organization's ties with Cuba and to give the perception that the movement was really a nationalistic one (see Brown 2000:28-29).

⁸ The regime's misappropriation of aid and monopolization of reconstruction opportunities demonstrated to the business elite class that Somoza had no intentions of breaking up his economic empire, which spanned the agricultural, financial, commercial manufacturing and industrial sectors of the Nicaraguan economy. In the 1970's the family's private fortune and net worth were estimated at between \$400 and \$900 million, representing more than one third of the entire national economy (Gilbert 1988:105-106; Hall and Brignoli 2003:263-264).

⁹ Newly formed opposition groups include:

1) *Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada* (COSEP), the Superior Council of Private Enterprise, which was the country's leading business organization

of the kind of grievances and/or external shocks that we discussed above as stimuli for the strengthening of existing social network ties and the creation of new linkages. The Tercerista faction capitalized on this burgeoning public opposition to the regime and used established social networks as a means to transmit grievance information and to organize future plans for action.¹⁰ As we mentioned previously, this was a point of contention between the founding members and led to the split in the FSLN. The other two factions were not able to exploit this growing opposition and recruit a broad-base of members in the same way that the Terceristas were.

The splintering of the FSLN did not signal the dissolution or end of the Sandinista armed movement against the regime. Rather, each faction went on to continue its operations independently, and each had its own successes. The three factions began to coalesce in 1978-79, in response to the incredible uprisings following the assassination of Chamorro. Everyone began to recognize the need for broad-based support in order to limit future military defeats. In March 1978, leaders from the Terceristas, the GPP, and the MPU signed an official reunification agreement, formally uniting them under the FSLN banner. The newly reunified FSLN assumed the leadership of Ortega and the ideology and military strategies of the Tercerista faction. The

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- 2) *Los Doces*, the Group of Twelve, a committee comprised of business elite, intellectuals, and religious leaders. Even members within the Catholic Church supported the Sandinistas, most notably the *Instituto de Promoción Humana*, (INPRHU) Institute for Human Promotion, which following the emerging liberation theology movement began to support the FSLN. In the 1970's several prominent leaders in the Catholic Church community, including Ernesto and Fernando Cardenal and Miguel D'Escoto formally joined ranks with the Sandinistas (all of whom went on to assume top-ranking positions within the Sandinista organization and governing junta, Minister of Culture, Director of the Sandinista Youth and later Minister of Education, and Foreign Minister respectively) (see Williams). Several members of the Group of Twelve were also secret members of the FSLN.
 - 3) *Union Democrática de Liberación* (UDEL), the Democratic Liberation Union, which represented a broad coalition whose members ranged from labor activists to conservative politicians, but all shared the same goal of overthrowing the regime. UDEL was led by Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal, a vehement critic of the Somozas. In 1959 Chamorro led a band of 100 armed men in a military attack against the Luis Somoza Debayle government (eldest son of Anastasio Somoza García). The military operation was hugely unsuccessful; its members were quickly captured by the National Guard and their leader was sentenced to nine years in prison for treason (Gilbert 1988:106-107). Chamorro was later murdered; his widow, Violeta Barrios Chamorro went on to become the UNO candidate and President of Nicaragua. UDEL later became the *Frente Amplio de Oposición* (FAO), the Broad Opposition Front (the FSLN later withdrew its support in October 1978 from the FAO when it agreed to US-sponsored mediations). COSEP was one of its member organizations.
 - 4) *Latin American Political Leaders*, ex-President José Figueres and President Rodrigo Carazo of Costa Rica, General Omar Torrijos of Panama, and President Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela all lent their support to the FSLN.

¹⁰ The Terceristas emphasized building inclusive coalitions in part to take advantage of the increased recruitment opportunities afforded by the 1972 earthquake scandal and the 1978 political assassination of Chamorro, but also in part out of fear that the emerging opposition within the traditional sectors of society might successfully oust the dictator, co-opting their opportunity for revolutionary change and installing a government that was “*Somocismo without Somoza*” (Gilbert 1988:107).

three groups collaborated to form the *Frente Patriótico Nacional* (FPN, the National Patriotic Front) with the MPU at its forefront (Vanden and Prevost 1993:44-46). In order to capture the support of the business class and political elites (who wanted a Western style democratic political system and a free-market capitalist economy), the Sandinistas espoused a strategy of a pluralistic political government and a mixed economic approach whereby private property laws would be respected and upheld. At the same time, however the FSLN was also courting the support of the masses and popular classes, who wanted to ensure their voices would still be represented and their needs met after the revolution.

The FSLN learned a major lesson from splintering of its leadership and organizational base: “division is perilous, open conflict at the top is potentially catastrophic” (Vanden and Prevost 1993:45). Ultimately, it was this understanding that allowed the FSLN to coalesce in 1978-79, to capitalize and organize the massive popular mobilization, and to lead a successful popular insurrection in 1979, resulting in the disposal of Somoza. At the time of their final offensive, it is estimated that the FSLN had approximately 1,500 members, whereas just two years before in 1977, they had a mere 200, demonstrating their successful efforts at mobilizing and organizing the masses (Vanden and Prevost 1993).

Next we show how the Contra leadership failed to absorb this lesson, to follow the successful strategies of the FSLN, which ultimately contributed to their own splintering, their weak organizational and military capacity and later to their political failings. However, the FSLN also failed to maintain their own coalition, feeding supporters to the Contras.

In 1979, the FSLN successfully ousted Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the youngest son and the last of three Somozas to rule Nicaragua during a 42-year reign, and installed a Governing Junta of National Reconstruction (JGRN). The governing junta was led by Daniel Ortega Saavadra, Moisés Hassán Morales (both of whom were members of the Sandinistas), Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (an anti-Somozista bourgeoisie), Alfonso Robelo (also an anti-Somozista bourgeoisie and businessman from the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement, which was a political organization formed and comprised mostly of middle and upper class business leaders and politicians) and Sergio Ramírez Mercado (member of the Sandinistas). With this composition, the governing junta looked to be following the pluralist political system that the Sandinistas had emphasized. In fact, three of the key economic posts within the government—the Planning Ministry, the Finance Ministry, and the Central Bank—went to prominent businessmen,

reassuring the elite opposition forces that the FSLN was sincere in its pledges to pursue both private and state-led economic policies.

However, this leadership was intact only until 1980. From 1980-1981 Ortega, Morales, Mercado Rafael Córdova Rivas and Arutro Cruz occupied the leadership positions; and from 1981-1985 the junta was led by Ortega, Mercado and Rivas alone. Chamorro and Robelo resigned from their positions in the governing junta in April 1980 when it became clear that the FSLN was consolidating its power and control. Their resignation was prompted over disputes regarding the composition of the Council of State, the legislative body of the government. Initially, the FSLN with its elite base of support had agreed that the Council of State would reflect the pre-1979 composition of the opposition coalition forces, including several reserved seats for members of *Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada* (COSEP, the Superior Council of Private Enterprise). However in 1980, just before the Council was scheduled to hold its first meeting, the junta, under the command and leadership of Ortega, added 14 seats which were to be filled by Sandinistas and Sandinista supporters (Gilbert 1988:12-14, 108-110). In 1984 COSEP entirely withdrew its membership and support from the Council of State after one of its leaders, Jorge Salazar, had been killed by Sandinista state security agents.

Just as quickly as the FSLN successfully overthrew the Somoza regime and instituted a governing junta, it began to face opposition from more moderate and rightwing sectors of society as well as from within the governing coalition. The counterrevolutionaries, or Contras, is in fact a quite diverse organization, comprised of several different groups and factions representing different sectors of society. In this section, we describe the evolution of these factions during the armed conflict against the Sandinista government, as well as their transformation or transition to political opposition groups and in some cases legitimate political parties.

Soon after the FSLN triumph, members of the Guardia Nacional (GN, National Guard)—who were exiled after FSLN purges of the state armed forces—began to organize in opposition to FSLN rule. A major component of this group was the Honduran-based 15th of September Legion (the military wing of ARDEN, the Nicaraguan Democratic Revolutionary Alliance). It was led by Enrique Bermudez Varela, an officer in the Nicaraguan National Guard Corps of Engineers and the last military attaché to the United States under the Somoza government (Kornbluh 1987; Rosset and Vandermeer 1983). In Guatemala City on August 10 1981, the 15th of September Legion merged with the Miami-based *Union Democrática Nicaraguense* (UDN,

Nicaraguan Democratic Union) to form the *Fuerza Democrática Nicaraguense* (FDN, Nicaraguan Democratic Front). The FDN became one of the major opposition organizations, leading the Contra war against the FSLN. By 1984, it boasted a membership between 10,000 and 15,000 people (Gilbert 1988). It remained based in Honduras and operated primarily in the northern borderlands of Nicaragua. Throughout the war, the FDN retained strong ties with the broader GN. In fact, a U.S. Congressional Report released in 1985 stated that 46 of the 48 command posts within the FDN were held by former officers and soldiers of the GN (Kornbluh 1987).¹¹

However, the opposition to the FSLN was not limited to former Somocistas and conservative economic elites within society. As we mentioned previously, several moderate supporters of the revolution, including Violeta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo who had been members of the original governing coalition, began to distance themselves from the junta and the Sandinista leadership. Even former Sandinistas grew disillusioned with FSLN rule and their growing dominance over the governing junta as well as the Council of State, breaking ranks to join the mounting opposition movement. Representing this mixed base was the *Alianza Revolucionaria Democrática* (ARDE, Democratic Revolutionary Alliance). ARDE was founded in Costa Rica in September 1982 by Edén Pastora Gómez (also known as Commandante Zero, the Sandinista soldier who led the attack against the National Palace in 1978), and Alfonso Robelo (a member of Nicaragua's economic elite). Both were former members of the FSLN governing junta (Kornbluh 1987; Rosset and Vandermeer 1983). Based in Costa Rica, ARDE made up the southern front of the Contra war. Comparatively, it was much weaker than the FDN's northern forces, producing only one significant military success in the town of San Juan del Norte in the Rio San Juan Department. Its members numbered around 3,000 (Walker 1991). That said, however, with its anti-Somoza credentials ARDE carried much more legitimacy and credibility with the public (Hall and Brignoli 2003).

In 1984 ARDE split into two factions when Pastora refused to join forces with the FDN to create a two front opposition force, with the FDN moving into Nicaragua from the north and ARDE moving in from the south. After an assassination attempt on Pastora, he pulled his troops

¹¹ The directorate included: Edgar Chamorro (who was exiled in Miami at the time); Enrique Bermudez Varela; Lucía Cardenal (member of a wealthy coffee family); Alfonso Callejas Deshán (Vice President under Somoza); Adolfo Calero (former leader of Conservative Party); Indalecio Rodríguez; and Marco Zeledan (former leader of COSEP, also living in Miami at the time) (Rosset and Vandermeer 1983).

out of ARDE; however, Robelo agreed to join the FDN coalition with the remainder of the ARDE troops (Kornbluh 1987).

Geographically dividing these two opposition movements was the disaffected indigenous population from the Atlantic coastal region (generally considered the Departments of Zelaya, and Rio San Juan, which together comprise the entire eastern half of the country).¹² The first efforts at indigenous mobilization began in the early 1970s with the foundation of the *Alianza de Progreso de los Miskitus y Sumus* (ALPROMISU, Alliance for the Progress of the Miskitu and Sumu) in 1973. Originally formed in the Somoza era to demand property rights and protect the commercial interests of the indigenous peoples, ALPROMISU was replaced by *Miskitu, Sumu, Rama, Sandinistas Asla Takanka* (MISURASATA, Miskitu, Sumu, Rama and Sandinistas Working Together) after the Sandinistas came to power in 1979. Initially the group had hopes of working with the new governing coalition to improve the standard of living within the coastal region, to advance their political rights as well as to include English and Miskito within the FSLN's literacy campaign (Diskin 1987). MISURASATA leader, Steadman Fagoth Mueller even held a seat within the Council of State. However, each group soon became suspicious and distrusting of the other. The FSLN had growing concerns that MISURASATA favored a separatist strategy; in turn MISURASATA feared the FSLN's agenda was one of Pacific assimilation and had no intentions of providing autonomy to the Atlantic indigenous populations (Rosset and Vandermeer 1983). In 1981, the indigenous coalition split into two groups, *Mikitu, Sumu and Rama* (MISURA), led by Steadman and aligned first with the 15th of September Legion and later with the FDN, and MISURASATA, led by Brooklyn Rivera Bryan and aligned with ARDE (Butler 1997; Kornbluh 1987; Hall and Brignoli 2003).

By the mid-1980s it was evident that the Contras were unable to establish themselves as a viable guerilla army, especially against the FSLN forces (the EPS), which had been swelling since the government reinstated the military draft (Armony 1997). Despite the incredible devastation to the Nicaraguan economy and infrastructure and the enormous cost in human lives, the Contra forces had never posed a significant threat to Managua or other major cities in the country. By 1985, despite over \$150 million in U.S. aid, the Contras had virtually ceased

¹² The indigenous populations of the Atlantic coastal region consist of the Miskitu (numbering 67,000), the Sumu (5,000), the Ramas (800), the black Creoles (25,000-30,000), and the Garifonas (1,500) (Diskin 1987; Rosset and Vandermeer 1983; and Freeland 1988). Combined these indigenous groups comprise 12 percent of the national population.

military operations all together. In 1987 the northern and southern fronts of the military opposition united under the umbrella organization, the *Resistencia Nicaraguense* (RN).¹³ Despite their efforts to build a stronger, unified front, most of the remaining troops, numbering between 10,000 and 12,000 (although FSLN reports claim the figure to be around 6,000), had been forced back over the Honduran border by the EPS (Kornbluh 1987). In effect, the war had reached a mutually hurting stalemate encouraging both sides to seek a political or electoral resolution to the civil conflict (Hall and Brignoli 2003; Spalding 1999).

Unlike the FSLN, which despite its political factions and internal disputes, has successfully emerged from the post-conflict era and the peace process as a formidable political contender in the electoral arena, the Contras have been unable to establish themselves as a unified political front. In fact, their only civilian political front, the Nicaraguan Democratic Union (UNO), suffered from extreme internal divisions and eventually disintegrated as a political party and ceased to exist altogether, despite its 1990 electoral success.

CONCLUSIONS

Focusing on the emergence and formation of opposition groups is key to distinguishing the study of civil and interstate war. Because opposition parties in civil wars must mobilize sufficient resources—both human and capital—in order to launch a formidable military or political campaign against the existing government, competing actors or parties will temporarily put aside their conflicting interests and cooperate in a mutual effort to overthrow the regime. There are cases throughout history of opposition parties who, upon gaining control of the state, depart from their pluralistic policies or philosophies and abandon or exclude former allies from state power. This is clearly demonstrated by the mobilization of both the Sandinista opposition to the Somoza regime and the Contra opposition (or multiple oppositions) to the Sandinista government.

On the FSLN side, we see how the group started in conjunction with an existing political party. It broke away from that party in an attempt to maintain ideological purity, but never managed to increase its numbers sufficiently to have its desired impact. This strategic failure led

¹³ The RN had a large base of support in sheer numbers, but represented a motley organization with diverse political identities and loyalties, resulting in a large degree of distrust, tension, and division. In 1990, for instance, there was an internal uprising led by Israel Galeano against Enrique Bermudez, an RN military commander (for more on this and other coup attempts with the opposition, see Spalding; Rosset and Vandermeer 1983).

to distinct divisions based on new strategic visions, each competing with the others for members and resources. After two successive political shocks that lowered the value of loyalty to Somoza among the business elite, the more inclusive faction of the FSLN began increasing in sympathy and support. Witnessing this success, the other two factions renewed positive relations with this faction, producing a united front strong enough to defeat Somoza. On the Contra side, we see an initial kernel of Somoza's National Guard, soldiers and officers who knew one another through shared service. To this they added support from those who soon became disaffected with Ortega's rule. Unlike the FSLN, however, no unifying leadership or strategy emerged. This, coupled with the drop in American assistance, forced the Contras to negotiate an end to the civil war while they were still in a position to do so. While a broad coalition was able to defeat the FSLN in the first post-civil war election, the lack of unity produced a political umbrella party that disintegrated.

How does a social-networking framework help us make sense of this case in ways that neither a country-year approach nor a dyadic approach can? Country-level analyses focus on variables that either do not change (such as terrain, mineral resources, or presence of an ethnic minority) or that change little over time (such as the relative poverty of the country). While such factors may help us understand the relative risk of a country having a civil war *compared to other countries*, they help not one bit in explaining why a country that had had a stable economy and political system could devolve into violence. Put bluntly, the factors analyzed in country-level analyses are the same for a given country during war and peace, and are therefore incapable in predicting shifts from one period to the other.

The dyadic approach is better than the country-level approach, but still misses key aspects of social network dynamics. This approach presumes the existence of the rebel group in order to apply international relations concepts like relative capabilities to the conflict. But this approach ignores, by the nature of its focus, divisions within a rebel group that can incapacitate a comparatively large force. In the Nicaraguan case, for example, the FSLN defeated the Somoza government having at best 3,000 troops against the state's 10,000. In contrast, the Contras failed to defeat the Sandinista government having at best 15,000 troops against the state's 70,000 (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2005). Thus, each rebel group was outnumbered by government forces (10 to 3 for the FSLN and 14 to 3 for the Contras), but the unity of the FSLN allowed it to do what the splintered Contras could not.

The exact path by which the FSLN achieved this unity is spelled out by taking a social-networking approach. Some initial seeds of rebellion are generally always present in society: some small group of people are always disaffected by their government. It is only through taking advantage of some wide-spread, if temporary, disaffection that such a seed can take root and branch out.

Appendix 1
Official Program of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*¹⁴

1. Nationalize Somoza property
2. Agrarian revolution, including reforms of land redistribution, sale, tenancy, and rental
3. Improved rural working conditions and pay
4. Improved working conditions (pay, hours, vacation, social security, etc)
5. Free unionization for all workers, rural and urban
6. Control of living costs, especially basic necessities
7. Improved and generalized availability of public services (public transportation, electricity, water, sanitation, social security, etc)
8. Rent control and improvement of housing conditions
9. Improvement of education (mandatory, free through high school)
10. Nationalization and protection of natural resources, including mines
11. Development of the Atlantic Coast region and its integration into the nation
12. Elimination of organized crime, police corruption
13. Abolition of torture and political assassination
14. Equality for women
15. Formation of a new democratic and popular army under the leadership of the FSLN

¹⁴ More information available on the FSLN's official website www.fsln-nicaragua.com

Appendix 2

Two Decades of Civil Conflict in Nicaragua: A Comparison of Rebel Networking

		SANDINISTAS		CONTRAS	
		Years	Significant Events	Years	Significant Events
Stages of Group Evolution	Early Formation & Mobilization Efforts	1950s	Early student activist organizations; participation in PSN	1979	Immediate aftermath of the Sandinista revolution First attempts and discussions of opposition
		1961	FSLN established		
	Active Opposition	1975	FSLN splits into three factions	1980-1984	FDN forms in Honduras, establishes Northern Front ARDE forms in Costa Rica; establishes Southern Front
		1978	Attack on National Palace		
1979		FSLN final offensive			
Turning Points in Opposition Movement	1972	Earthquake in Managua Embezzlement of international humanitarian assistance	1985-1986	Military operations virtually cease U.S. military assistance is withdrawn	
	1978	Political assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro; FSLN reunites, coalesces under a single banner with a unified opposition strategy	1987	FDN and southern forces under Robelo join forces and establish the RN; ARDE under Pastora remains separate, anti-Sandinista force	
Group Evolution in Post-Conflict Society	1979-1984	Rule of the FSLN Governing Junta; Counterinsurgency warfare against the Contras	1985	UNO emerges; Contras are unable to establish a viable political party of their own and thus establish a tenuous and uneasy alliances with UNO in 1989	
	1984	Election Results: FSLN wins 67% of popular vote			
	1985-1990	Daniel Ortega occupies office of Presidency; counterinsurgency campaign against the Contras continues			
	Post 1990	FSLN transitions into a legitimate political party			Post 1990

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