Leadership Dynamics and Dynamics of Contention

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Leadership is one of the most extensively researched topics in psychology and organization studies (Rosenbach and Taylor 1993; Sashkin and Lassey 1983). A focus on leadership as the wellspring of political action is found in Carlyle (1849), Freud (1965), Lasswell (1948), and Weber (1954), among many others. Despite this vast outpouring of scholarship, most research has focused on explaining leadership itself, rather than on its effects. That is, the bulk of scholarship is devoted to describing what kind of person (in terms of background or personal characteristics) becomes a leader (Mazlish 1976; Rejai and Phillips 1979), the various types of leadership (Sashkin and Rosenbach 1993; Weber 1954), the situations in which leadership emerges (Burns 1978), the relations between leaders and followers (Fiedler 1967), and the detailed lives or psychohistories of individual leaders (Erikson 1962; 1969; Wolfenstein 1967). Surprisingly little scholarship, particularly in regard to social movements and revolutions, has sought to determine the effect that variation in leadership dynamics—that is, in the relationships among revolutionary leaders, or between leaders and followers—have on the course and outcomes of contentious politics.

There are three main perspectives on the effect of leadership dynamics on movement dynamics in the classic sociological literature: the circulation of elites (Pareto), the tendency to oligarchy of elites (Michels), and the need to rationalize or institutionalize charismatic leadership (Weber). All are surprisingly negative in assessing the potential for revolutionary leadership to make a significant difference. Pareto (1935) argued in effect that once in power, revolutionary leaders lose their edge, and are overtaken by a new generation of leaders who simply continue the cycle, with one elite substituting for another. Michels (1959) argued even more vehemently that movement leaders will become captured by the organizational logic of the position of leadership, by their prerogatives and power, and thus become guardians of their own power rather than their original revolutionary cause. Revolutionaries thus will inevitably turn counterrevolutionary and conservative once in power. Weber (1954), although arguing that charismatic leaders have in themselves the extraordinary power to challenge and overturn existing institutions, further suggested that unless that charisma is somehow "routinized" by becoming embedded in rational, bureaucratic institutions, the accomplishments of charismatic leaders will pass from the scene with their demise.

Those perspectives that are more optimistic about the impact of movements and revolutions to effect lasting change are, perhaps surprisingly, more diffident about the role of individuals as leaders. Instead, these perspectives follow what today is known as the "contingency" or "situational" approach to leadership (Fiedler 1967; Hersey and Blanchard 1982). In this view, leaders are essentially servants of their followers, or their historical situation. In the Marxist view of revolutions as the product of class struggles, even in the Leninist "vanguard party" form, or in the political process view of social movements as responses to the intersection of popular grievances or demands with increased political opportunities (McAdam 1982), leaders play a critical, but subordinate role, helping their followers steer through the shoals of history to reach their destined goals.

Although the social movement leader or professional revolutionary plays an essential role in framing and articulating issues (Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982; Snow and Benford 1992), and in activating networks and mobilizing supporters, the emphasis in these approaches is on the movement versus the state, with leaders acting as intermediaries, facilitators, and motivators, as tacticians and foci of events, rather than as independent shapers of the course and outcomes of contention.

The tendency to relegate leadership to the status of a dependent or indirect variable, and thereby rob it of much of its agency, can be seen in all three of today's major theoretical approaches to the study of collective action and social change. Structuralists (Goldstone 1991; Skocpol 1979) explain movements and revolutions as outcomes of broad-change processes that shift resources and political opportunities; culturalists (Baker 1990; Hunt 1989) point to disembodied discourses and shared meanings; and rationalists (Chong 1991; Popkin 1979), although pointing out the role of entrepreneurs in arranging the selective incentives that
motivate individuals to participate, stress the configuration of individual costs and benefits as determining action and its results. In none of these approaches does variation in leadership figure as a key factor in explaining variations in the outcomes of contention. To be sure, empirical accounts of social movements by scholars in all three traditions do afford a substantial role to particular leaders. In theoretical terms, however, leaders usually are pictured as little more than instruments for enforcing structural, cultural, or rational imperatives.

In part, this is understandable given that some of the things that successful leaders do best are to take advantage of structural opportunities, to articulate cultural themes, and to manipulate incentives for action. Thus, if we examine only successful movements and revolutions, there is an inevitable confounding of the actions of individual leaders with the generalities of structural, cultural, and rationalist theories of contention, and the former tend to disappear behind the latter. Moreover, if we only give analytical attention to the origins and outcomes of contention, we will fail to see the key turning points, to note the range of plausible counterfactuals about what might have happened, and to trace the critical role of leaders in guiding the process of contention to particular outcomes. Goldstone (1991) has argued that such “process tracing” plays an important role in understanding causation in historical and comparative sociology. It is only if we examine the course of leadership actions, noting instances of success and failure in social movements and revolutions, and showing how particular outcomes arise that are often not achieved, such as the creation of democratic institutions, that we can hope to identify the pivotal role of leadership dynamics in contentious politics.

We can easily think of movements (China’s Taiping Rebellion, India’s Civil Disobedience, the Protestant Reformation) that might never have occurred — and would certainly never have taken the form they did — without the initiative and inventiveness of specific trail-blazing individuals. In such cases, leaders function not merely as dutiful stewards of social, cultural, and economic forces but also as powerful pacesetters in their own right. Suppose then that we were to put leaders at the center of our analysis, to view them as independent — rather than simply dependent or intervening — variables in the formation of social movements. Would we have anything new to say about contentious politics? Do different sorts of leaders contribute to the emergence and evolution of different types of social movements?

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Types of Leadership: Two Dichotomies

Since Weber, the image of the “charismatic leader” has seemed an essential part of revolutionary movements. Of course, the image goes back much further; the prototypical charismatic protest leader was Jesus Christ. If we can believe the gospels, Jesus was nonviolent, an impressive orator, and inspired devout loyalty among his followers. For these skills, he was crucified as a rebel leader by the Romans. Yet there is no single “type” of charismatic leader. In the French Revolution, Danton was flamboyant, Robespierre austere; the Russian Revolution featured the dashing Trotsky and the severe Lenin. The American Revolution was led by stoic George Washington, but given its voice by the rhetorical fire of Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine; the Chinese Communist Revolution was stirred by the passions of Mao Zedong, but organized by the bureaucratic formality of Liu Shaoqi. The U.S. Civil Rights Movement showed the same range, with leaders varying in style from the preacherly Martin Luther King to the radical Malcolm X.

What revolutionary leaders do share is an uncommon devotion to their cause. They live for it, are willing to suffer (though they may manage to avoid dying) for it, and they inspire others to do the same. To succeed, they must convince people that they are working for a public good, rather than personal advantage. And they must manage to blend a diversity of leadership styles and attributes, including those that they themselves do not possess, but may find among other leaders, both formal and informal.

Of course, there are many more important topics in the general field of leadership and contentious politics than we can begin to address in this chapter, many of which have been the subject of excellent studies: the gendered nature of leadership (Barnett 1993; Robinett 1996), the role of intellectual leaders in movements (Gouldner 1979; Pinard and Hamilton 1989); the professionalization of movement leaders and the differences between formal and informal leadership (McCarthy and Zald 1973). However, our focus here will be on how, given the emergence of a certain set of movement leaders, their goals and relationships can lead to specific outcomes.

The most consistent finding of the vast literature on leadership is that there are basically two “dimensions” of leadership that appear in virtually all settings (Bales and Slater 1955; Sashkin and Lassey 1983; Sashkin and Rosenbach 1993): task oriented and people oriented. Task-oriented leaders, or leadership actions, are concerned with assembling the resources
and executing the actions needed to accomplish a particular goal. Task-oriented leaders and actions are sometimes referred to in terms of "pragmatic" or (in Weber's terms) "rationalized" leadership. People-oriented leaders, or leadership actions, are concerned with evoking a particular emotional state in people, namely a state of motivation and commitment, often identification, with the leader or with a movement or goal. People-oriented leaders and actions are sometimes referred to as "visionary" or (in Weber's terms) "charismatic" leadership. Although many leaders are capable of both task-oriented and people-oriented leadership, many are not, and specialize in one or the other dimension. In such cases, various scholars have argued that cooperation between leaders of the different types is essential to the success of the group.

The people-oriented or "charismatic" type of leadership draws heavily on the emotional aspect of movement politics that we examine in more detail elsewhere in this volume. The leadership skills involved in charismatic interactions with followers, argues Patricia Waselewski (1985) in her study of the speeches of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, include an ability to skillfully evoke, revoke, and reframe emotions and emotion rules. Charismatic leaders evoke emotions that create a community of feeling, revoke emotions by creating affective dissonance that leads followers to rethink their worldviews, and reframe emotions by introducing new meaning structures that reshape their followers' interpretations of the world and emotional responses to it. Charismatic leaders are less likely than bureaucratic leaders to use a distancing and instrumentalist professional discourse, which translates emotional expressions of suffering into grievances that can be rationally bargained over, and more likely to express the angry voices and emotional experiences of the oppressed.

Eric Selbin's (1993) study of modern Latin American revolutions argues that only those revolutions that combined both visionary and task-oriented (which he labels organizational) leadership were able to succeed in both consolidating their hold on popular allegiance and in institutionalizing their revolutionary policies. Of the four cases that he examines (Nicaragua, Grenada, Cuba, Bolivia), only the first succeeded in both respects, due to effective deployment of organizational and visionary leadership. But a closer look at his cases shows that it was not elements of revolutionary leadership that were missing that led to failure. Grenada had both a visionary leader (Maurice Bishop) and a great organizational leader (Bernard Coard). Cuba had masterful organizational leaders (Raul Castro and Camilo Cienfuegos) to complement Fidel Castro's passion and vision. And Bolivia had a great visionary ("Che" Guevarra) to complement its disciplined organization of mine workers. But in all three of the latter cases, leadership dynamics went awry: Individual actions led to the death or exile or domination of one set of leaders, so that leadership became unbalanced and ultimately unsuccessful. Bolivia's revolution failed to consolidate popular allegiance to the revolutionary cause; Cuba's revolution may not outlive its leader Fidel Castro, due to the failure of the revolution to achieve success in building viable political and economic institutions; and Grenada's revolution self-destructed in less than a decade. This suggests that leadership dynamics may have a more crucial independent effect on movement outcomes and dynamics than is generally appreciated.

We also wish to highlight a second dichotomy. Many scholars have noted a difference between "autocratic" and "democratic"-type leaders; however, this has often been taken simply as a matter of "style," either of which might, given the right circumstances, be useful for movement success. White and Lippitt (1960) even assimilated this difference to the two above-noted dimensions of leadership, arguing that autocratic leaders were just extremely task oriented, while democratic leaders were so people oriented that they sought broad participation.

However, we wish to go beyond these observations and argue that there is a crucial, independent dimension of revolutionary or movement leadership that we would define as ranging from "self-effacing" to "self-aggrandizing." Self-effacing leaders, though greatly concerned with their place in history and the success of their movement, nonetheless separate those issues from their personal power; they are thus willing to share power, and indeed to institutionalize its wide distribution, if that will help procure the success of their goals. Their careers give the impression that power came to them unsought, and that their influence depended more on personal example and virtue than on their formal authority. Examples include George Washington (who twice stepped down from positions of peak power, once as commander-in-chief of the new U.S. military and again after his second term as president), Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Ghandi, Corazon Aquino, and Vaclav Havel. Their legacies include not only success of their revolutionary movements, but the institutionalization of key elements of democracy — including separation of powers, binding consultation of government with a more-or-less extensive citizenry, and limits on the arbitrary authority of state leaders (Tilly 1998). This kind of leader, however, is fairly rare. More common are self-aggrandizing leaders,
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who cannot separate their personal authority from the success of their mission. Examples include Stalin, Castro, Robespierre, and Mao. For this kind of leader, a challenge to their personal leadership is tantamount to challenging the legitimacy of the movement they lead. Such leaders often are successful in leading movements or revolutions, but they do not produce democratic regimes. Often, quite the reverse; their leadership is associated with purges, terror, and cults of personality. This is not only true of revolutionary leaders, but leaders of cults (for example, Jonestown) and other movements.

We therefore wish to propose at least two ways in which dynamics of leadership influence the course and outcomes of political conflicts. First, the potential conflict or cooperation between “task oriented” or organizational and “people oriented” or visionary actions, or between different leaders who emphasize one or the other of these dimensions, is an independent shaper of the course of movement events. For example, the cultural revolution in China can be seen in part as a conflict over the priority of organizational tasks versus maintaining a certain visionary and emotional orientation. Indeed, both sides in the cultural revolution recruited supporters from the broader population that seem to divide in their own orientation along these lines.

Second, the question of whether a revolution leads to a democratic outcome does not depend simply on favorable or unfavorable social-structural conditions for the emergence of democracy, but also on the character of the chief revolutionary leaders. For example, even rather poor countries that seem unprepared for democracy (India, the Philippines, South Africa) have been able to achieve a measure of democracy under self-effacing leaders. In contrast, Cuba— which had a prior history of democracy and was the most urbanized and literate society in Latin America—failed to achieve democracy under Castro’s leadership.

This chapter traces out these examples in more detail to underscore these points. We first look at how a struggle between two different “types” of leadership produced success and failure in different phases of the Chinese revolution, and particularly how this struggle gave rise to that great social movement within the revolution, the Cultural Revolution of 1965-70. Next we turn to the case of Tanganyika, where the structural realities of a colonial order promoted racial nationalism and civic exclusion based on race, but the initiatives of one forceful leader facilitated a racially inclusive vision of citizenship and a nonviolent path to indepen-

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dence. Finally we survey four revolutionary movements in the Americas, arguing that different types of leaders contributed to fundamentally different political outcomes.

A See-Saw Hypothesis of Revolutionary Success: The Chinese Case

Surveying the record of Chinese social movements, one can readily detect the complementary (and competitive) contributions of two quite different types of political leaders—a yin and yang of movement instigators, if you will. Political scientist Lucian Pye attributes this alternation between what he refers to as “mandarins” and “rebels” to a fundamental polarity in Chinese political culture: “at one extreme, an emphasis on conformity, repressive centralized controls, and orthodox beliefs and discipline. At the other extreme are a greater tolerance for private initiatives, a relaxation of controls, decentralization, and a liberation from orthodoxy” (Pye 1988:38–39). According to Pye this basic duality runs through the history of Chinese political culture from Confucianism to communism, helping to generate the violent policy oscillations for which the Chinese political system is famous.

Taking a page from Daoist notions of symmetry and flux, let us propose a “see-saw hypothesis of revolutionary success.” In China, as elsewhere, the capacity of a social movement to attain its goals hinges in large measure upon maintaining some balance between contradictory human impulses. When leaders with opposing styles are able to work out an effective modus vivendi that affords due play to their competing approaches, the likelihood of movement success is greatly enhanced. However, if one leadership style dominates to the exclusion of all competition, the enterprise is apt to founder.

The contrast between “mandarin” and “rebel” leadership has contributed to fundamental tensions—productive as well as destructive—within Chinese social movements. A clear example can be seen in the relationship between two of the chief engineers of the communist revolution, Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi. Whereas “rebel” Mao was renowned for his rowdy populism, “mandarin” Liu stood as the enforcer of party discipline. To some degree, these differences reflected a natural division of labor in a complex revolutionary situation. According to an early study by John Lewis, the contrast derived in good measure from the two men’s dissimilar experiences in the mobilizing enterprise. While Mao Zedong was
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defining his role as inspirational guerrilla leader in the revolutionary capital of Yan'an, Liu Shaoqi was serving as senior political commissar behind enemy lines – an assignment that demanded strict obedience to organizational norms. Where Mao felt free to encourage such "egalitarian" practices as the mass line and open-door rectification, Liu was drawn to a hierarchical style of command that stressed party solidarity and inner-party struggle. Lewis argues that although Mao was a consummate warrior, after the victory of the revolution and consolidation of political power, his unruly methods became an increasing liability.

Uniquely suited to the wartime environment, Mao's system was singularly inappropriate for ruling a country moving toward modernization. Even though Mao recognized that the requirements for leadership would change after the seizure of power, he rejected the notion that the essential attributes of his system would also need to change... It was virtually inevitable that Mao's previous charismatic role would lose its centrality... The problem was that Mao, the charismatic personality, was not inclined to "crystallize" and continue a new institutional structure. As the leader, Mao insisted instead that his potential heirs acquire those intangible qualities found in his revolutionary role rather than those of the political commissar. (Lewis 1968:459-60)

The full dimensions of this contradiction between rebel and mandarin, Lewis suggests, unfolded only in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution when Mao lashed out against the commissars and the bureaucratic edifice that they had erected during the initial seventeen years of communist rule. In Weberian terms, the Cultural Revolution represented an irreconcilable confrontation between Mao's "charismatic" leadership on the one hand and the "rational" bureaucrats of the new communist order on the other.

Whether we choose to frame the issue in Weberian or Chinese categories, the question remains: What are the origins and, more importantly, the consequences of different types of leadership? Lewis offers a functionalist explanation for the contrast between Mao and Liu: Mao's populism was an effective response to the requirements of rural revolution in the "red" base areas, just as Liu Shaoqi's authoritarian style was better suited to the difficulties of organizing in the "white" areas under Japanese and Guomindang control. But Mao's revolutionary tactics, Lewis cautions, lost their efficacy when confronted with the sober business of economic development.

Although historical experiences and exigencies undoubtedly do play a considerable part in accounting for the emergence and influence of divergent leadership styles, the explanation is not quite so simple. For as Mao's pivotal role in the Cultural Revolution suggests, leaders may exert enormous influence over the course of a social movement even when their methods seem woefully out of step with the "objective" demands of the day. A strictly functional answer is thus insufficient to make sense of the many instances in which forceful leaders redefine situational imperatives in keeping with their own idiosyncratic visions of the world.

That some individuals swim against the tides of history – and manage moreover to convince millions of converts to follow in their wake – calls for a closer look at the roots of rebel leadership. Why are some individuals self-confident enough to defy "objective" circumstances in a seemingly irrational bid to satisfy their political imaginations whereas others adopt a more risk averse approach? Common sense suggests that the answer must lie in part in the psychological makeup of the rebel leader him/herself. But social science offers few clues on how to follow up on this common-sense proposition. Political psychology, once a staple ingredient in theories of revolutionary movements, has fallen from scholarly grace. The amateurish manner in which psychological studies of revolutionary leaders were often conducted may have rightfully condemned them to the dustbin of theory, yet the result is that we find ourselves largely bereft of conceptual tools for probing one of the most fascinating issues surrounding social movements.

Studies of Chinese politics have often noted the differences in temperament between Chairman Mao and his rival, Liu Shaoqi. As Lowell Dittmer wrote at the time of the Cultural Revolution, "Mao seems to be a more spontaneously emotional person than Liu; in meetings with subordinates he has been known to weep or to become violently angry and curse his antagonist in blunt, colorful language... Liu, on the other hand, is emotionally withdrawn a 'cold fish'... Liu's political errors... usually consisted of excessive rigor in the enforcement of justice. He tries to display rationality and unbending rectitude... Mao evidently believes in his emotions as indicators of a more compelling truth. Liu... showed a constant preoccupation with the 'costs' of things" (Dittmer 1974:174-96). This oft noted difference between the "upright" Liu and the unrestrained Mao was matched by stark contrasts in their style of leadership: Mao's conception of the proper relationship between leader and led is unmediated contact... Liu has a contrasting tendency to mediate and formalize relationships between people... While Liu's leadership style is formal and routinized, Mao's is episodic and provocative... Mao exhibits a flexibility in switching positions or allies that prevents any stabilization.

This polarity between "rebel" and "mandarin" styles of leadership goes well beyond the individual cases of Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi. In his detailed study of a Chinese village under communism, sociologist Richard Madsen comes up with a parallel dichotomy of leadership styles at the grassroots level. He finds that political life in Chen village was deeply influenced by competition between two leaders "committed to a distinctly different concept of local moral order" (Madsen 1984:34). One of these village leaders, whom Madsen characterizes as a "member of the Communist gentry" (246) – roughly equivalent to Lucian Pye's "mandarin," relied upon familiar methods of dispensing patronage to build up his power base. The other, whom Madsen dubs a "Communist rebel" (249), activated the resentment of marginal members of the village to strive toward a new, more egalitarian rural community.

The dualism has counterparts in other cultural traditions, as well, of course: the dichotomy in Greek mythology between Apollonian order and Dionysian disorder; the contradiction in Christian theology between upholders of church authority and adherents of antinomianism, and so forth. These binary oppositions point to fundamental tensions within the human psyche itself. If fruitfully combined, such seemingly contradictory – yet mutually constituted – tendencies can lend tremendous dynamism and dedication to collective action. The so-called "Yan’an roundtable," in which China’s revolutionary leaders managed to transcend widely disparate backgrounds and mobilizational styles to cooperate in fighting first the Japanese and then the Guomindang, was a critical ingredient in the communists’ impressive rise to power. By the same token, the unraveling of this collaborative effort spilled disaster for the revolutionary enterprise – as exemplified in the internecine conflicts that led directly to the Cultural Revolution (MacFarquhar 1974–77).

Although the Cultural Revolution is sometimes treated simply as a "two-line struggle" between rabble-rouser Mao Zedong and organization-man Liu Shaoqi, such conflicts within the political elite bespoke an equally deep cleavage cutting across society at large. China's Cultural Revolution was not simply a mobilization effort manipulated from on high, but a mass movement in which rival local leaders competed ferociously for control. Nowhere was this clearer than in the city of Shanghai, where worker rebels wielded enormous authority – first as instigators of popular unrest and then as officials in the newly constituted "revolutionary" order. But rebel hegemony did not emerge unchallenged. In Shanghai, as elsewhere in China, the early years of the Cultural Revolution were marked by battles between "rebels" (zaofan pai) seeking to overthrow local powerholders and "conservatives" (baoshou pai) struggling to protect them. All across the country, rebels challenged the revolutionary credentials of leading cadres whereas conservatives supported the powers-that-be. William Hinton, commenting on the ubiquity of this phenomenon, notes that the basic dichotomy occurred “with such regularity and persistence that it had to be recognized as some sort of law of the political sphere as universal as Boyle’s law in chemistry or Newton’s law in physics.” (Hinton 1983:611)

The differences in personality and operating styles that helped to define the confrontation between Mao and Liu were mirrored at the local level. An examination of leaders of the two major worker factions in Shanghai reveals that such individuals were divided not only by competing political agendas, but by temperament and demeanor as well (Perry and Li 1997). Whereas the commanders of the rebel Workers' General Headquarters were known for their fiery personalities, the rival Scarlet Guard conservatives were a decidedly circumspect lot.

Rebel leaders were famed for profanity and violence – habits that long predated the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. Many of them also favored personal hobbies and apparel that set them apart from the typical Chinese urbanite of the time. As one Workers’ General Headquarters leader recalled his youthful exploits during this period of general conformity to drab Maoist standards:

I grew a beard and spend most of my non-working hours playing cards in the club. On Sundays I went to the suburbs to fish instead of engaging in proper duties. I even bought a necklace and then went to a shop that sold exotic to buy a used western suit. Sometimes I ventured to the city center in coat and tie. When I saw people wearing leather jackets, I spent more than 40 yuan to buy one. I was totally preoccupied with my boyish lifestyle. My frivolous habits gave the older workers a very bad impression. I organized dances and the like, which the older workers didn’t appreciate. (Huang Jinhai April 5, 1977)

Although we now know that Chairman Mao himself was enjoying dance parties – and more – at this very time, such frivolity was not sanctioned for the populace at large (Li 1994:93–94, 280, 345–46, 356, 479). As political scientist Wang Shaoguang points out, the bleak economic situation following the Great Leap Forward had generated a strong ascetic
tendency: “Now one might be considered backward if any aspect of one’s life-style was out of the ordinary, such as wearing brightly colored clothes, applying hair oil, going to a restaurant, cultivating flowers, raising goldfish, or playing chess” (Wang 1995:34).

Yet, years before the start of the Cultural Revolution, those who became the most prominent rebel leaders had already attained notoriety for a willingness to buck such social restrictions. Sociologist Gong Xiaoxia, who interviewed a number of Cultural Revolution leaders, observes that “most rebel leaders I met had some peculiar hobby, such as photography, writing, painting, singing, etc.... which I did not see among the conservative leaders I know... Evidence suggests that many early rebel organizations were formed on the basis of such shared personalities” (Gong, personal communication, November 2, 1995).

Rebel personalities are not born, but made. The wider social environment defines what is considered “rebellious” behavior, and it is only in the course of interacting with that environment that individuals develop defiant or compliant strategies. But this does not mean that explanations of rebel leadership can be reduced to environmental circumstances. For between environmental pressures and individual responses there lies a good deal of latitude for personal ingenuity and agency. Individual emotions and interpretations, while poorly understood by social scientists, figure significantly in this complex process. For some, social rules exist to be bent or broken — and the more cleverly one does so, the more elated one feels; for others, living by established rules is the sine qua non of self-respect. Although it is obviously emphatically not the case that “unruly” individuals turn inevitably to political rebellion, it does appear that such identities contribute to a particular style of rebel leadership.

Movements seeking radical social transformation need both rule breakers and rule makers. The former play an obvious role in persuading people to transgress prevailing norms in favor of new values and modes of behavior. For a movement to succeed in effecting genuine social change, however, it must also ensure a certain level of compliance to its own norms. The “commissar” performs a critical function in enforcing revolutionary discipline.

The Chinese communists’ remarkable rise to power was facilitated by a conscious strategy of balancing these twin demands. In the revolutionary base areas, an audacious party secretary would be assigned a cautious deputy; a radical policy initiative would be followed by criticism of those cadres who had resorted to excessive force in carrying out the initiative; and so forth. After the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949, this see-saw pattern continued in the numerous “mass campaigns” — from the effort to eradicate flies to the implementation of People’s Communes — that marked the first seventeen years of communist rule. (Admittedly the see-saw began to list in an evermore leftist direction from at least the time of the Great Leap Forward in 1959. Yet as the retrenchment of the early 1960s — spearheaded by Liu Shaoqi — indicated, the teeter-totter was still in operation.) Thus it was only natural at the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 that “conservatives” expected to play a key role in the eventual resolution of the movement.

The Cultural Revolution saw a dramatic change in the rules of the political game, however. Aware that he was entering his final political battle, an aging Mao Zedong abandoned his earlier commitment to “the correct handling of contradictions among the people” in favor of an all-out embrace of rebellion. The unrestrained inclinations of grassroots rebel leaders elicited a positive response from Chairman Mao, who stood as the ultimate arbiter of Chinese politics during the Cultural Revolution. By August 1973, the commander of the Workers’ General Headquarters in Shanghai — Wang Hongwen — had gained a “helicopter” promotion to vice-chair of the Chinese Communist Party, tapped by Mao as his putative successor.

If Mao’s approval ensured the dominance of the rebel faction (albeit only until his death in the fall of 1976), it also sealed the fate of the conservative Scarlet Guards. In Shanghai, the Scarlet Guard leaders — to a person — were drawn from the ranks of party activists. In contrast to the colorful rebels (some of whom were party members, others of whom were ordinary workers, and yet others of whom had been designated as “bad elements” prior to the Cultural Revolution), the Scarlet Guards were a rather bland lot who had gained their stake in the system by carefully toeing the party line. Their opposition to the rebels stemmed as much from differences in personal style as from any deep-seated ideological divide. As one Scarlet Guard commander put it, “I couldn’t stand those Workers’ General Headquarters leaders. They were rascals. We were, after all, party members and were used to strict demands on ourselves. During the Cultural Revolution I never could get along with those other people” (Tang Wenlan, May 17, 1992 interview).

The Scarlet Guards formed as an indignant reaction against what its members perceived as rebel excesses. Those who organized conservative groups were repelled by the lawless initiatives of those on the rebel side.
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The worker rebels engaged in a series of sensational maneuvers — lying on the railroad tracks, stealing dossiers, assaulting leading cadres and work team representatives — that provoked the ire of many of the party activists among the workforce. As one Scarlet Guard leader recalled of the rebels at his factory:

Those who put up big-character posters all belonged to a group of people whose demeanor (biaoxian) was usually pretty poor. Some of them were not diligent workers, who even after the Cultural Revolution didn't change their ways. They were careless and irresponsible. . . . So at that time I was really dismayed. I felt that these people's basic character was bad and yet here they were, issuing commands and criticisms of the Shanghai Party Committee . . . Whenever they got off work they just went wild. (Li Jianyu July 3, 1992)

Conservatives were the obedient and risk-averse counterpart to the errant and reckless rebels. To some extent these polar identities were a product of different social roles. Whereas many rebels had been nurtured on the margins of Maoist society, conservatives were part and parcel of the party system itself. However, considering that a substantial proportion of rebel leaders (about one-third of the top commanders of the Workers' General Headquarters) were themselves party members, the fit between sociopolitical position and personality was far from perfect. Moreover, to the extent that this correlation did obtain (Scarlet Guard leaders were all drawn from the ranks of factory cadres), one is hard pressed to determine cause and effect. It is entirely conceivable, for example, that cadres had been promoted to their positions of authority precisely because of their restrained, disciplined temperament. As long as both sides of the revolutionary equation could be amply accommodated, the Chinese Communists compiled a stunning record of accomplishments: a decisive military victory that sent the American-backed Guomindang into permanent exile, a land reform that effectively eliminated the old rural elite, a socialization of industry that gave the state complete control over the industrial economy, and so on. When the leadership balance was broken by the Cultural Revolution, however, an unprecedented reign of terror ensued. The brutal death of Liu Shaoqi in 1969 symbolized the demise of restraining forces within the revolutionary leadership. Given the green light to proceed with abandon, those intent on eliminating the opposition unleashed a torrent of destructive violence whose repercussions reverberate to this day. The "One Strike Three Antis" Campaign, which rolled across the country in the early 1970s, was a terrifying expression of unbridled vengeance on both elite and mass levels.

Large-scale social movements are complex affairs containing deeply incongruous strains. The examples discussed above suggest that such contradictions may be promoted by contrasting leadership types reflective of basic tensions in the wider political culture. The cultural alternatives, moreover, seem to reflect fundamental differences in individual identities. If these assumptions are correct, they point toward a new direction for the study of movement leadership — a direction that lies in between the well trodden paths of a fascination with the uniquely (aberrant) personalities of individual leaders, on the one hand, and a fixation with social structure at the expense of human agency on the other. While the first approach, essential as it may be in the explanation of particular social movements, is usually too idiosyncratic to sustain wider generalization, the second underestimates the catalytic role that different types of leaders may play in giving rise to different forms of contentious politics. In "bringing leadership back in," analysts will be well advised to treat leadership as a variable that oscillates between certain culturally intelligible values, rather than as either an inimitable concatenation of individual eccentricities or an automatic outgrowth of environmental imperatives.

The Chinese experience indicates, furthermore, that the manner in which such contradictions are (or are not) resolved can tell us a good deal about the ultimate fate of social movements. So long as the paramount leaders of the Communist Revolution managed to harness their substantial differences to a common revolutionary cause, the movement was virtually unstoppable. An agreed-upon division of labor between "rebels" Mao and "mandarin" Liu fused populist spontaneity with party discipline into a powerful combination that helped ensure revolutionary success. But once that potent synthesis came unhinged — most notably during the Cultural Revolution — the enterprise careened out of control. A previously productive division of labor gave way to a destructive factionalism. Differences in personality and leadership style, once a source of constructive collaboration, were now a font of deadly strife. Whereas a movement able to contain such antinomies is capable of bringing about startling social transformation, a movement that allows but a single variant to predominate may be doomed to self-destruction.

The importance of harmonizing contradictory strains within the leadership applies in other countries and across other cleavages as well. In
many social movements, gender is a significant dividing line. Although the top leadership of revolutionary and nationalist movements is typically dominated by men, during the early days of high-risk activism, women often play a central role in the day-to-day organizing tasks that build movements at the local level. Susan Geiger's (1997) study of the Tanganyikan nationalist struggle documents the importance of grassroots indigenous female organizers in the early mobilization of activists. In a situation of high-risk activism, where wage labor employment meant vulnerability and fear of employer reprisals, the independent and collaborative income-earning activities of women, coupled with strong informal social networks that cut across ethnic boundaries, enabled them to occupy leadership roles in the early nationalist movement. A similar pattern occurred during the early days of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, also a period of high risk activism. “Men led, but women organized,” argues Charles Payne (1990), not because of a difference in threats or exposure to reprisals, but because women had a stronger sense of efficacy fostered by religious beliefs and a greater sense of personal investment in kin and communal networks.

The authority exercised by the female leaders in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the nationalist movement in Tanganyika cannot be understood in terms of traditional sociological categories, such as Max Weber’s concept of charismatic leadership. Weber conceptualized charismatic leadership in a manner that privileges masculinity, as based on actions that are heroic, disruptive, and removed from the mundane considerations of everyday life. The activities of these female activists correspond more closely to a form of charisma that is not detached from everyday life. This form of leadership, which Kathleen Jones (1993:116) labels “prudentialized charisma,” involves mundane yet creative activities that foster dignity, build on daily survival and resistance strategies, challenge routine practices, and create and sustain dialogue and action networks. “Charismatic leadership,” writes Jones (1993:115), “becomes not the isolated heroic action of the saint but the collective, creative, even mundane activity of an otherwise marginalized group to evidence grace under pressure as a way of securing dignity.”

Again, our point is that successful movements tend to reflect a balance between disparate leadership styles, whether differentiated along lines of personality, gender, or other key cleavages. Such a division of labor allows a movement to appeal to a variegated constituency and to surmount a variety of organizational challenges.

Leadership Matters: Turning Points in the Struggle for Tanganyikan Independence

In highlighting the ability of successful movements to maintain a creative tension between potentially antagonistic leadership patterns, we do not mean to suggest that the importance of leaders in contentious politics can be understood simply in terms of generic leadership styles. Flesh and blood individuals do, indeed, make a difference.

The history of the Tanganyikan struggle for national independence illustrates the decisive role that a creative leader can play in determining the trajectory of a nationalist movement. In contrast to neighboring Kenya, where the violent Mau Mau uprising produced widespread bloodshed, the struggle for Tanganyikan independence was peaceful, in large part because of the leadership of Julius Nyerere. At key turning points in the struggle for independence, his leadership of the Tanganyikan African National Union (TANU) was a critical factor in determining the course of events, producing a nonviolent and racially inclusive path to national independence. In the absence of Nyerere’s forceful leadership, proponents of an alternative racial nationalism would probably have triumphed, making the subsequent history of the Tanganyikan nation more similar to Uganda, where Asian residents were expelled in 1972. Although he later became the architect of an authoritarian state that repressed organized dissent, Nyerere was always a strong advocate of nonracial citizenship and the protection of minority rights.

Structural factors alone cannot account for this outcome. There were structural factors that help to account for the movement’s nonracial nationalism and nonviolent character, including the absence of a large European settler community and Tanganyika’s status as a United Nations Trust Territory. The former meant few potentially violent conflicts over land while the latter encouraged nationalists to pursue a nonviolent strategy of bringing international pressure to bear on British colonial officials. But there were more powerful structural forces encouraging a violent racialized struggle for independence, especially the class inequalities of a tripartite colonial racial order. This colonial racial system constituted Asians (that is, people of Indian and Pakistani origin), Europeans (that is, all whites), and Africans (that is, all blacks) as distinct races and relegated Africans to the lowest position in economic, political, and social hierarchies. Colonial economic policies effectively closed off commercial activities to Africans while a racial salary structure and segregated schools,
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decided before the conference to support TANU participation in the election, on the grounds that this concession would speed up the attainment of independence and avoid unnecessary bloodshed.

Divisions among nationalist leaders over participation in the 1958-59 election were rooted in contrasting visions of nationhood and citizenship. The group that coalesced around Nyerere favored electoral participation and advocated a nonracial nationalism that would grant citizenship to European and Asian residents. Nyerere was strongly in favor of allowing Europeans and Asians to join the nationalist movement but was unable to persuade his fellow nationalists to do so until after independence, in 1963.

A decision to participate in the 1958 election constituted an opening wedge, since in order to win a majority on the Legislative Council, TANU would have to run Asian and European candidates sympathetic to their struggle, even though they were not allowed to join TANU. Those opposed to the decision to participate in the election demanded a redistribution of wealth and power along racial lines. Some insisted that self-government would mean the immediate forced departure of all Europeans and Asians. Opponents of participation included Zuberi Mteneu, a TANU provincial secretary who, following the Tabora decision, went on to form an opposition political party, the African National Congress, which advocated "Africa for the Africans" and espoused a vision of racial nationalism that included citizenship for indigenous Africans only, a government composed only of Africans, an all-African civil service, and the redistribution of wealth and income away from the dominant European and Asian groups toward the historically oppressed and disadvantaged African majority (National Archives 1960-61: Accession 540, 17C).

At the outset of the Tabora conference, the majority of delegates favored boycotting the election. Many advocated launching a general strike (Listowel 1965:304). "There was considerable sentiment among the delegates for a boycott," writes Hugh Stephens (1968:142), "and it required the full use of his [Nyerere's] persuasive powers during the four-day meeting to carry his point of view." According to the account of one prominent delegate, Bibi Titi Mohammed: "Nyerere had a real problem, and I am sure he stayed for three days without eating anything and just drinking milk. Because people were saying we should fight, and Joseph Nyerere [his brother] said he would go and beat him up. Everybody was against him! . . . It was very chaotic. They were completely against this [tripartite voting] . . ." (Geiger 1997:100). The four days of lively debate among nationalist leaders included a good deal of shouting and screaming.

hospitals, prisons, social clubs, and residences ensured that access to all scarce and valued resources was unequally distributed along racial lines. The top ranks of all state institutions were staffed by non-Africans, from the professional civil service to the military to the judicial system. This tripartite racial order produced nationalist leaders who espoused a racially exclusive vision of the nation as well as leaders advocating nonracial nationalism. As the following account suggests, the trajectory of Tanganyika's anticolonial struggle for independence was a product of intense conflict among nationalist leaders, not the inevitable result of inherent social structures. Decisive influences on this trajectory were Julius Nyerere's persuasive powers and his staunch commitment to nonviolence and nonracial citizenship.

The importance of Nyerere's charismatic leadership is evident in a major turning point in the nationalist struggle: the decision of January 1958 to participate in racially based elections. In response to a growing independence movement demanding majority rule, colonial authorities organized the first general elections, which were to take place in two stages, in September 1958 and February 1959. Each of the three racial groups received ten of the thirty contested seats in Parliament, but candidates had to compete for votes among all races since all voters were required to cast ballots for candidates of each race. Leaders of the organization directing the struggle for independence, the TANU, were divided over whether to participate in Legislative Council (LEGCO) elections based on a tripartite voting formula of "racial parity." The issue was heatedly debated at TANU's January 1958 Annual Delegates Conference at Tabora. For TANU, observes Judith Listowel (1965:303), this conference represented "a crossroads: it could either participate in the first general elections and follow the path of constitutional development; or it could boycott the elections, stage a general strike, and drift into violence."

Prior to 1958, TANU leaders had strongly opposed participation in any election based on a tripartite formula. "We reject the principle of equal racial representation," wrote Julius Nyerere (1967:26) in 1952 "on the same ground on which we condemned that of European domination. It is a principle which in spite of its deceptive name assumes the principle of racial superiority." As late as April 1957, Nyerere advocated nonparticipation in racially based elections. But he changed his mind by January 1958, sensing that TANU could win an election even under conditions of restricted suffrage and racial parity and that a nonelectoral route to independence would probably be violent. In a critical strategic move, Nyerere
in a boiling hot conference hall. The first delegate to speak in favor of participation, Abdulla Rashidi, was shouted down, jeered, and nearly chased out of the hall (Listowel 1965:305). Nyerere used his oratorical skills to persuade his fellow nationalist leaders that failure to participate in the election would put a conservative United Tanganyika Party (UTP) in office and provoke violence that would delay independence (Iliffe 1979:557). Outside the convention, in a public speech at the Police Grounds of Tabora, Nyerere defended his position in an emotionally charged anticolonial speech denouncing foreign rule. “At the height of his speech,” writes M.H.Y. Kaniki (1979:360), “he wept, igniting mass hysteria among the crowd who joined him in shedding tears.” In a passionate concluding forty-five minute speech at the convention, Nyerere denounced political domination by foreigners and proclaimed: “We want that house in which [British Governor] Twining is now living. In order to get into it, we must dirty our feet by walking through the mud of an unfair election. What would you rather do? Keep your feet clean and not get the Twining house, or dirty your feet and get the Twining house?” (Listowel 1965:306) A majority of delegates (thirty seven out of sixty) then voted in favor of participation in the election.

The Tabora decision clearly shaped the trajectory of the nationalist movement, paving the way for a TANU electoral victory in the 1958–59 election and a subsequent shift in colonial policy, with the British backing away from their earlier insistence on racial parity to demand only that a postcolonial government guarantee the rights and security of the European and Asian minority communities. Tanganyika became the first country in British-ruled East Africa to achieve national independence, on December 9, 1961. The British decided to grant Tanganyika independence at an earlier date than anyone had initially anticipated in large part because of a desire to keep the racially moderate forces represented by Nyerere in control of the nationalist movement (Stephens 1968:145).

A second important turning point in the history of the Tanganyikan nationalist movement was the trial and conviction of Julius Nyerere in July of 1958, on charges of criminal libel against colonial district officials. The presiding magistrate sentenced Nyerere to either six months in prison or a fine of 150 pounds. Radical voices within the nationalist movement hoped that Nyerere, like many other African nationalist leaders, would go to prison and become a political martyr. His imprisonment would spark popular outrage and violent resistance to colonial rule. Some activists planned a procession to the prison, where they would break in and free

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Nyerere. “Had he chosen to go to prison . . .,” writes Judith Listowel (1965:332–33), “there would have been a campaign of passive resistance (kugoma) . . . the military and the police would have had to be called out and from then on resistance would no longer have been passive.” After receiving assurances from the new colonial governor, Sir Richard Turnbull, that the government was willing to work with TANU to prepare Tanganyika for self-government if law and order were maintained, Nyerere decided to pay the fine (Stephens 1968:144–45). He thereby defused the situation and channeled the nationalist movement along a nonviolent path.

The preceding account suggests that forceful leadership shaped the strategic choices that determined the trajectory of the nationalist movement. Contention over nonracial nationalism persisted during the postindependence period, but subsequent struggles among nationalists, including the 1961 conflict over whether to define citizenship in terms of race or residence, were profoundly influenced by the outcome of these earlier disputes. The structural legacy of a racialized colonial order ensured that the effort to create a new nation would also be a struggle over race, but whether a racialized or nonracial nationalist vision would prevail and become institutionalized was a contingent outcome, dependent on conflicts that were decisively shaped by the capacities and purposive efforts of dynamic leaders. This does not mean that we need to revive “great person” theories of history by limiting our attention to individualist accounts of the personal traits of influential leaders. It does suggest, however, that we need to recognize that in the fluid and often ambiguously defined situations facing activists, dynamic leaders can, at key conjunctures, determine the trajectory of a movement.

Indeed, whether a revolutionary struggle gives birth to democracy or dictatorship is decided not only by the class composition of the movement (as Barrington Moore demonstrated so eloquently), but also by the character and interactions among its leaders. We turn finally to the relationship between revolutionary leadership and regime result.

Revolutionary Leadership in the Americas: George Washington, Fidel Castro, Maurice Bishop, and Daniel Ortega

Washington, Castro, Bishop, and Ortega span a range of revolutionary types, and the movements in which they participated show a variety of outcomes. Examining their actions in the American, Cuban, Grenadan, and
Nicaraguan Revolutions displays the pivotal role of revolutionary leaders, and of variation in their abilities and character.

Washington had fabulous personal charisma, but no great conceptual or oratorial skills. As a general, his main talent was in holding his army together and inspiring loyalty. The vision that guided the American Revolution, and the populist rallying cries that mobilized the people, were articulated by Paine, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Jay, and Henry. Yet Washington was an extraordinary bridge builder, political tactician, and institution builder. He was able to gather, and control, the talents of violently opposed men such as Hamilton, Jefferson, Burr, the Adams brothers, and the other Founding Fathers. His feat is clear in that although these men formed opposing political parties, and even feuded to the death in one case, he was able to keep them united during the critical early years of the revolution and republic. As a political tactician, he carefully calculated his withdrawals and returns from public life to emphasize that he was not seeking personal political power. And in presiding over the Constitutional Convention, and as president over the early republic, he helped design and solidify the most successful and longest-lasting revolutionary institutions yet known. It is almost universally agreed by the early leaders of the United States, and their historians, that if not for Washington’s leadership, the United States would neither have won its independence, nor been able to launch itself on a stable republican path after the revolution.

Fidel Castro too had fabulous personal charisma. But where Washington’s appeal came from his incredible restraint and devotion to duty, Castro’s came from fiery rhetoric and dashing, even reckless, bravery mixed with bravado. In his dedication to create a truly independent, self-sufficient Cuba, he repeatedly lived up to his slogan, “patria o muerte” (my country or death). In defying the dictator Batista, whom Castro saw as an oppressor in league with foreign powers, Castro first led a daring raid on the Monacado barracks, then after his release from jail, led a nearly suicidal marine landing on Cuba from Mexico, on the ship Granma. Of the aspiring liberators on the Granma over 80 percent were killed by Cuban troops, and it is something of a miracle that the survivors included Fidel and Raul Castro, and Che Guevara, who escaped to the hills.

Castro’s daring won him a nucleus of supporters, and Batista’s overbearing response to Castro’s raids lost Batista support first at home, and then from the United States, which cut off Batista’s supply of weapons. When Castro and his small band managed to intimidate the garrison at Santiago, and gain control of that city in eastern Cuba, Batista fled. But unlike Washington, Castro showed neither great institution-building ability, nor great restraint. Fidel and Raul Castro seized control of Cuba, and shortly thereafter – with the help of the Soviet Union – developed an ideologically closed Communist Party system and socialist economy. Raul was enough of an institution builder to develop a political system that kept the Castros in unquestioned supremacy. But the Castros were not great bridge builders and coalition makers. Castro alienated Cuba’s bourgeoisie, most of whom fled the country, and the Catholic church.

While no one can question Castro’s patriotism or inspirational abilities, the political and economic system he developed seems unlikely to outlast his own lifetime, in contrast to say, the institutions developed by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. In this respect, Fidel Castro’s strengths and weaknesses are similar to those of Mao Zedong, who also was unable to build a system that seems likely to long outlast his personal rule, and quite different from Washington, and even Lenin and Stalin, who managed to create powerful economic and political systems that lasted from one-half to two centuries beyond their deaths.

Maurice Bishop, after ten years of organizing and preparation, led a movement (the New Jewel Movement) that took power in the Caribbean island of Grenada through a revolutionary coup in 1979. However, Bishop is an example of a fairly complete failure as a revolutionary leader. Unable to even maintain loyalty and unity among his own supporters, he was murdered in 1983 by a breakaway faction of the New Jewel Movement. The chaos that followed his murder was so great that it provoked foreign intervention from the United States and neighboring Caribbean states, who in effect restored the old regime led by one of the older parliamentary parties. Bishop had sufficient tactical sense to take advantage of an opportunity to seize power, but he (and his lieutenants) lacked the skills to build a broad coalition or to create stable new institutions. As a result, his revolutionary movement remained narrow, and his achievement of power soon ended. Yet there was nothing structural, in the economy or institutions of Grenada, that could have foretold his failure to remain in power, as compared to Castro’s success.

A striking contrast to both Castro and Bishop is Daniel Ortega, one of the key leaders of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in 1979. The Sandanistas were a diverse lot, with several factions divided over how best to campaign against the dictator Anastasio Somoza. One group, or tendency, wished to slowly build power in the countryside, following the model of Castro in Cuba. A second group aimed to slowly build political
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Nomic policies were often questionable, they never resorted either to full party dictatorship or to complete socialization of the economy.

In fact, the commitment of the Sandinista leaders to democracy was so great that in 1984, while still in full power, they agreed to hold internationally supervised elections, in which Daniel Ortega was elected president. The turnout of these elections was some 75 percent of the potential voters, and they were judged fair by the international observers. More like Washington than like Castro, and like such other revolutionary leaders committed to democracy as Cory Aquino in the Philippines or Nelson Mandela in South Africa, Daniel Ortega (and his brother, the minister of defense and military commander Humberto Ortega) did not take advantage of either their military leadership during victory, or their leadership of the postrevolutionary junta, nor of Daniel Ortega’s term as president, to permanently institutionalize their personal power. Instead, in the 1990 elections, the Sandanistas again stood in fair elections, and this time lost, with power passing to a member of the old bourgeois families, Violetta Chamorro. The Ortegas had not only won a revolution, they had managed to institutionalize a postrevolutionary democratic regime, that at this point, twenty years later, still appears vigorous and stable, and independent of the personal power of its founders.

The success of a protest or revolutionary movement, even given suitable structural conditions, thus depends on revolutionary leaders carrying out a complex array of tasks, calling for different abilities. If the revolution’s main leader lacks some of these abilities, and cannot (or will not) find and support their exercise among his or her co-leaders, then the revolution is likely to fail in some way. Moreover, the path of postrevolutionary regimes is never wholly determined by structural conditions. Maurice Bishop’s New Jewel Movement, despite great hopes and considerable popular support, self-destructed in internal ideological and factional battles. The Sandinistas, starting with far less favorable conditions, including poverty, inequality, no recent history of democracy, and a violent counterrevolutionary war, nonetheless were able to institutionalize a democratic regime in Nicaragua, a sharply divergent outcome from that in Castro’s Cuba. In all these cases, the choices, character, goals, and abilities of leaders are highly determining factors in their movements’ success and outcomes.

In sum, leadership can fail. It can also determine the choice of dictatorship or democracy, and of communism or capitalism, in postrevolutionary
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We thus argue that while structural factors may create greater or lesser opportunities for the emergence and success of social and revolutionary movements, and while cultural contexts and the incentives for action are important tools for mobilization, the detailed course and final outcomes of contention are not fully determined by such factors. Even if conditions are conducive to mobilization, a commitment of potential protestors to a movement must be forged, and this task requires people-oriented leadership at a variety of levels, from framing issues in a way that resonates with people (Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982; Snow and Benford 1988; 1992), to building the bridges of community that tie individual protestors to the leadership and the movement (Robnett 1997). Often, the grassroots elements of this mobilization are undertaken by women, or leaders in existing community organizations, rather than formal national leadership (Kaplan 1997; Robnett 1996). But the task is no less important; the movement leader who fails in marshalling popular support will likely meet the fate of Che Guevara, isolated and easily liquidated by the authorities.

Once protestors have been mobilized for action, a plan of action must be chosen that maximizes the strength of the opposition, and identifies and targets the weaknesses of the status quo regime. The task-oriented choices of leadership here are crucial, not only in determining failure or success, but also in determining the future character of the movement and its outcome – will the strategy be violent or peaceful, inclusive or exclusive, moderate or radical, in its aims and tactics? Will the leadership unite or fall into conflict over these issues? The leadership skills called for here are those of the skilled politician or military commander planning a campaign: an ability to size up opponents, seize opportunities, force mistakes by enemies, and manipulate media. In some cases, the revolutionary campaigns are military, and military and guerrilla leaders such as Cromwell, Washington, Trotsky, Castro, Mao, Sandino, and Zapata, naturally rise to the fore. In other cases, the campaigns are more political, such as that of Robespierre and the Jacobins in the French National Assembly, or of Madero in Mexico, or of Julius Nyerere in Tanganyika.

Finally, once a victory over the status quo has been won, the new social order must be successfully institutionalized. How this is done, and how successfully, depends on how motivation and organization are carried beyond the revolutionary struggle, and how leaders orient themselves to the postrevolutionary institutions. In the American Revolution, talented but largely self-effacing organizational leaders, including Washington, Hamilton, Madison, and Jefferson, shared this role. In the French
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Revolution, Napoleon combined the talents of military general and builder of a new centralized French bureaucratic system, but in a self-aggrandizing way that laid no building blocks for democracy. In Russia, Stalin’s terror and restructuring of the countryside created an economic/institutional regime that lasted for two generations, but involved a cult of personality that eventuated in an authoritarian party-state. And in China, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, and Deng Xiaoping took on the task of institutionalizing the revolution, often in the teeth of opposition from Chairman Mao. But not all major revolutions find such skills; in the English Puritan Revolution of the seventeenth century, although Cromwell’s skills as a military leader produced a victory of Parliament, neither Cromwell nor any other leadership figure in Parliament could institutionalize the Commonwealth, which deteriorated into a detested military rule, and led to the old regime monarch being welcomed back into power by the British people and elites after Cromwell’s death.

Because the study of revolution and social protest has tended to focus exclusively on successful movements, there has been a tendency to confound the role of structural conduciveness and effective leadership. Since successful revolutionary leaders are precisely those individuals who plan strategies that maximize the weaknesses of the status quo, and seize upon the opportunities presented by structural conditions, one will indeed generally be able to find structural reasons for a successful leader’s accomplishment. But that does not mean that the quality and choices of movement leadership are not crucial to that success, or that outcomes would have been the same regardless of the ability or character of movement leadership. Such a determination can only be made by looking at the process of contention, and seeing how movements that develop in similar structural conditions can give rise to different outcomes due to different tactical choices or character in revolutionary leaders. In this chapter, we have made a first attempt at exploring just such processes and outcomes.

6

The Sacred, Religious, and Secular in Contentious Politics: Blurring Boundaries

Ron Aminzade and Elizabeth J. Perry

Introduction: Religion and Politics

Theories of social movements have been built, for the most part, from studies of western democracies in which the differentiation of secular and religious institutions and norms is unusually pronounced. The result of focusing on such secularized societies has been a tendency to see religions as furnishing social movements with organizational (and occasionally ideological) resources – but little more. Thus scholars have often emphasized ways in which churches serve as mobilizing networks, and have sometimes also noted the importance of religious beliefs and symbols as a source of collective action framing. Less frequently, however, have they ventured beyond a purely instrumentalist perspective to explore the expressive dimensions of religious conviction in processes of contention.

In this chapter our focus is on cases drawn from Chinese and African societies that have diverged from the secularized path of change in the West. China (in both its communist and precommunist incarnations) has not institutionalized the sort of church-state separation and attendant freedoms of religion that are taken as hallmarks of liberal democratic politics. In Africa, even where institutional differentiation and religious freedom are evident, popular beliefs about other-worldly entities and sacred legitimations of secular authority continue to inform routine and nonroutine politics. The reasons for these distinctive patterns of church-state relations and belief systems need not concern us here, but one result is that the intersection of religion and politics assumes quite different – and in some respects more transparent – consequences in our cases than may be evident in many western democracies. We highlight a variety of ways in which religious and sacred elements figure centrally in social movements and other