

# Dynamic Opponents: Dissident Group Adaptation and Organizational Change Theories

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# Abstract

CHRISTINE ANN CARPINO: Dynamic Opponents: Dissident Group Adaptation  
and Organizational Change Theories.

(Under the direction of Mark J.C. Crescenzi)

The ability of dissident groups to adapt to changing conditions is vital to their survival and ability to operate. Yet, few scholars examine the process of adaptation itself, independent of expected policy outcomes. How do dissident groups adapt? What factors facilitate or constrain the adaptive process? Why do groups fail to adapt when expected or in anticipated ways? This dissertation addresses these questions by examining dissident group adaptation through the framework of three organizational change theories: population ecology, punctuated equilibrium, and strategic choice. Each theory emphasizes different mechanisms for organizational change and highlights different variables of interest. Population ecology argues that organizational inertia reduces the likelihood of adaptation and anticipates that the majority of change will occur at the population level. Punctuated equilibrium posits that adaptation will occur in short, rapid bursts during which the organizations primary functions and elements will change. Finally, strategic choice emphasizes the role of the dominant coalition in determining the need and scope of adaptation. I then use each theory as a framework for examining the adaptive process of the Palestinian Islamic organization, Hamas. Applying population ecology, punctuated equilibrium and strategic choice to a single case helps illustrate which theory, or which aspects of each theory, provide the greatest leverage in explaining dissident group adaptation. This dissertation finds that strategic choice offers the most comprehensive framework for analyzing change by addressing who decides to adapt, how adaptation occurs and why adaptation occurs.

For my parents, Peter and Mary Ellen Carpino. Thank you for everything.

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# List of Abbreviations

ANM	Movement of Arab Nationalists
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna
PA	Palestinian Authority
PIJ	Palestinian Islamic Jihad
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PSR	Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research
Real IRA	Real Irish Republican Army
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
RIRA	Real Irish Republican Army
RUF	Revolutionary United Front

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This dissertation examines the adaptive process of dissident groups, in particular how groups adapt or fail to adapt when faced with changing environmental conditions. Although adaptation is vital to understanding dissident group survival and the transformation of violent movements to non-violent political parties, few scholars examine the process of adaptation itself, independent of expected consequences. How do dissident groups adapt? What factors facilitate or constrain the adaptive process? Why do groups fail to adapt when expected or in anticipated ways? I address these questions by examining adaptation through the framework of three organizational change theories: population ecology, punctuated equilibrium, and strategic choice. Each theory emphasizes different mechanisms for organizational change and highlights different variables of interest. Systematically applying each framework to a single case helps illustrate which theory, or which aspects of each theory, provide the most leverage for explaining the adaptive process within dissident organizations. Once scholars have a better understanding of how groups adapt, they can then determine how effective externally-generated policies will be in inducing adaptation.

Adaptation plays a key role in dissident group behavior. Groups need to adapt to conditions in their environment in order to survive (Kurz, 2005; McCormick, 2003). In

this sense, adaptation refers to changes (in strategy, structure or identity) that are intended to maintain or improve “fitness” between an organization and its environment. Adaptation of strategy refers to shifts in the general tenor a group adopts in its interaction with an opponent, primarily conciliatory (non-violent) or confrontational (violent) approaches. Structure refers to the type of organizational form a group adopts, generally ranging from hierarchy to networks. It also encompasses the location of power and the direction of communication and commands within the organizations. Identity refers a group’s own self-understanding. I also expand identity to include branding; that is, how the group markets itself to an external audience.

Developing a better understanding of dissident group behavior contributes to both conflict theory and policy creation. The activity of non-state groups has increased significantly since the end of the Cold War, influencing the nature of conflict and conflict resolution. Indeed, much of the theoretical research and corresponding policy work focuses on reducing the threat posed by violent dissident organizations, namely through shifting levels of repression or the degree of openness in the political system (Crenshaw, 1981; della Porta, 2008; Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). To promote adaptation, particularly from violent to non-violent strategies, governments create opportunities or produce incentives to shift strategies. Yet, not all dissident group react in anticipated ways. The experience of Hezbollah serves as a useful illustration.

Hezbollah, the Shi’a Muslim organization based in Lebanon, was founded as an armed dissident organization in the early 1980s to combat occupying Israeli forces, growing to one of the strongest actors in the country and region. In the early 1990s, the organization adapted to form a political party and participate in Parliamentary elections and has since participated in the 1996, 2000, 2005, and 2009 elections. The group is viewed as a legitimate political party within Lebanon and has performed well in elections. (Wiegand, 2009). Yet, political participation and general electoral success has

not induced Hezbollah to undergo a linear adaptation from violent resistance movement to non-violent political party. Even the perceived victory of armed struggle resulting from Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000 did not incentivize the organization to abandon violent tactics. Hezbollah has maintained a heavily armed militia and continues to use violence against Israeli forces (most notably during the 2006 summer conflict, sparked by Hezbollah's killing and capture of Israeli soldiers) and domestic competitors (specifically when the group took over Beirut in 2008, resulting in 65 deaths). Current conflict literature provides only a limited understanding of the factors that contribute to an adaptive trajectory similar to Hezbollah's, generating the need to search for answers in other schools of thought. Organizational theory provides additional theoretical in-roads for examining organizational adaptation.

Organizational theory provides multiple advantages to examining adaptation. Questions of organizational change have been explored for over 50 years and distinct paradigms of adaptation have been developed. This literature is more comprehensive than research on adaptation within conflict literature, which focuses primarily on government-initiated policies as a catalyst for linear group change from violent to non-violent strategies. Additionally, organizational theory generally does not include underlying policy implications concerning the normative aspects of adaptation; that is, whether adaptation benefits or disadvantages the group or other parties (such as the opposition government). Organizational theory provides insight into the adaptive process without overt consequences for policy. Finally, by examining dissident group adaptation through frameworks applied to more "traditional" organizations such as firms, commonalities in the types of constraints that affect performance emerge. If dissident groups are subject to similar internal and external pressures as other types of organizations, additional theoretical tools can inform our understanding of group behavior and group adaptation.

In the following chapters, I outline three distinct theoretical frameworks for examining adaptation. Population ecology argues that organizational inertia reduces the likelihood that individual organizations will adapt to a changing environment. Organizations develop sunk costs, vested interests and an identity that encourages the maintenance of the status quo. Proponents of this theory posit that individual organizations are unable to adapt fast enough to keep pace with a changing environment. Organizations that do not match or fit with changing conditions are likely to fail and be selected out. Those organizations that still align with the environment will survive and new organizations, mimicking the qualities of the survivors will emerge. The decline and emergence of organizations as a result of changing environments places adaptation at the population level; groups of similar organizations may thrive in one environment and be selected out once that environment changes.

Punctuated equilibrium constitutes the second organizational change theory examined. Proponents of this theory argue that organizations adapt through periods of convergence, in which the organization reinforces its alignment with environmental conditions, and reorientation, periods of dramatic change to fundamental aspects of the organization, including strategy, structure, and mission. Although punctuated equilibrium also highlights the role of inertia, it incorporates individual organizational change. In order to overcome the resistance caused by inertia, organizations transform their core qualities in a short period of time. The theory also points to probable catalysts of adaptation including low performance, the introduction of new technology, or new leadership. Unlike population ecology, punctuated equilibrium outlines mechanisms for individual organizational adaptation and some level of agency, exercised by leaders brought in from outside the organization.

The third framework used for examining adaptation is strategic choice. Proponents of this theory highlight the role of leaders, or the “dominant coalition,” (Child, 1972)

in making decisions concerning organizational change. Unlike population ecology and punctuated equilibrium, which both emphasize the ability (or inability) of organizations to react to external changes, strategic choice argues that organizational leaders can both adapt to the environment as well as manipulate external conditions to better fit the organization. The dominant coalition exercises choice concerning the organization's actions within the constraints of their own biases as well as the boundaries that exist in their operating environment, such as government regulations or resource availability.

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, each theory provides a different explanation for how and why adaptation occurs. Additionally, each theory highlights different factors that affect the adaptive process. Depending on the theory used in examining organizational change, analysts will give primacy, or greater weight, to distinct variables. For instance, the role of agency exercised within each organization differs among the three frameworks. Population ecology assumes little to no agency on the part of individual organizations (or organizational leaders). This framework emerged in response to previous theories that imagined organizations as able to rationally and seamlessly react to environmental changes. Proponents of population ecology emphasized that organizations develop routines and structures which generate resistance to change. Even if individual leaders recognized the need to undergo organizational change, the challenges inherent in adapting were often too high to overcome to keep pace with shifting external conditions.

Punctuated equilibrium introduces a degree of agency into the theory of adaptation. Proponents of the theory argue that executives, or organizational leaders, brought in from outside the organization are more likely to initiate a reorientation. New leaders are not wedded to the organization's standard operating procedures and are more likely to break through inertia. Although punctuated equilibrium provides room for individual leaders to act, the focus on leadership turnover and reactive responses places



some constraints on the scope of agency. Leaders can exercise some choice but environmental conditions (and changes to those conditions) remains paramount for explaining adaptation.

Finally, strategic choice offers the most comprehensive view of agency. Rather than focusing exclusively on executives, strategic choice emphasizes the role of the dominant coalition, influential decision-makers, in affecting adaptation. These decision-makers operate within a set of boundaries defined by the environment, but the theory predicts that they can proactively adapt as well as react to environmental changes. Additionally, the theory argues that organizational decision-makers have the ability to influence the organization's operational context, that is, manipulate the environment to be more conducive to the organization. In these ways, strategic choice offers individual organizational leaders the greatest maneuverability in determining how and when to adapt.

Agency serves as one of many factors that vary in influence depending on the organizational change theory employed. The decision to examine adaptation from one framework versus another invariably focuses the analysts' attention on particular factors, levels of analysis and causal mechanisms more than others. As a result, examining the adaptive process through each framework can illuminate the multiple variables that influence organizational change.

In order to highlight these influential factors, I apply each theory to the adaptive process of the Palestinian Islamic organization, *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, more commonly known as Hamas. Emulating Graham Allison's (1971) *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, examining Hamas' development from three distinct perspectives will highlight unique variables and causal mechanisms that affect adaptation and enhance our understanding of dissident group behavior.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Allison also wrote a second edition of *Essence of Decision* with Philip Zelikow in 1999.

Hamas serves as a useful case for multiple reasons. First, Hamas is a dissident organization with a significant lifespan. Incorporating the group's earliest incarnation, the *al-Mujamma' al-islami* or Islamic Center, Hamas has existed in some form since the early 1970s. Hamas operates in a region that receives significant levels of media and scholarly attention. A broad range of primary and secondary resources are available for assessing the group's behavior. This access is important as determining the utility of certain organizational change theories requires information on the internal decision-making process of dissident groups, particularly the role of leaders and how they view the environment in which the group operates.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, understanding the factors that influence Hamas' adaptation specifically can also positively affect policy in the Middle East. Hamas acts as both an armed resistance movement as well as a legitimate political party. It remains a primary adversary to Israel and is classified as a terrorist organization by the United States, Canada, Japan and the European Union. Yet, the organization was elected in 2006, in free and fair elections, to head the Palestinian Legislative Council. In 2007, the organization wrested control of the Gaza Strip from Fatah, establishing a pseudo-state within a pseudo-state. Hamas' various incarnations makes it a useful case, in its own right, through which to examine the utility of organizational change theories in explaining dissident group adaptation.

Current conflict literature provides only a limited understanding of adaptation among dissident groups. This work focuses primarily on external catalysts of change, such as different government interventions, and the consequences of adaptation, namely linear transitions away from violence. Few researchers explore the adaptive process itself or the factors inherent in the group that could facilitate or constrain adaptation.

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<sup>2</sup>While Hamas serves as a illuminating case, the focus on a single group serves as a probability probe for assessing the utility of organizational change theories, rather than a empirical test. The findings are limited.

Organizational theory possesses a long intellectual history addressing such concerns. Utilizing cross-disciplinary research provides a means of developing new theoretical tools for examining adaptation within dissident groups.

The following chapters address organizational theory and its application to dissident group adaptation and Hamas specifically in greater detail. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the current literature examining dissident group adaptation. It demonstrates that the meaning of “adaptation” changes depending on the type of group under examination: terror groups, rebel movements or more general dissident organizations. The chapter also demonstrates that a significant portion of the literature focuses on the outcomes of adaptation rather than the process of adaptation itself.

Chapter 3 presents the first of three organizational theories examined. As outlined above, population ecology is a prominent organizational change theory that emphasizes the strength of inertial pressures, notably sunk costs, vested interests and identity and brand, as limiting the speed and ability to adapt. This chapter then applies the core tenets of population ecology to dissident group adaptation and concludes with an in-depth examination of Hamas through the lens of population ecology.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of punctuated equilibrium, an organizational change theory that emphasizes cycles of convergence and reorientation. This theory argues that adaptation occurs in short bursts, which are necessary to overcome inertial forces and highlights catalysts predicted to induce change. The chapter then adapts punctuated equilibrium to dissident groups and re-examines Hamas’ evolution through the framework of this theory.

Chapter 5 presents strategic choice, the final organizational change theory examined. Strategic choice emphasizes the role of the dominant coalition in both recognizing and initiating necessary change. Parallels to work in organizational learning are also

explored. Strategic choice is applied to dissident group adaptation and Hamas' development is reviewed a third time through this new lens.

The final chapter reviews the findings of this dissertation and determines that strategic choice offers the most comprehensive framework for examining adaptation. Although this theory does not address every facet of adaptation, and can benefit from insight on inertial factors provided by population ecology and punctuated equilibrium, strategic choice addresses the who, how and why of adaptation. The chapter concludes with suggested applications to policy and discusses extensions for future research.

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the literature addressing dissident group adaptation. Research on adaptation explores different aspects of organizational change depending on the type of group examined and the theoretical lens utilized. Much of the existing research focuses primarily on a linear transition of violent movements to non-violent political parties. While the focus on reducing the threat posed by violent groups generates useful policy solutions, it also concentrates solely on the consequences of adaptation rather than the process of adaptation itself. Additionally, the attention given to a linear transformation from a violent group to a non-violent party neglects the many instances in which dissident groups adapt between violent and non-violent strategies. Finally, the tendency to attribute group behavior to a cost calculation highlights the facilitation of change rather than conditions that constrain change.

Although not an exhaustive review of research on adaptation, this chapter highlights the important theoretical work that affects our understanding of how dissident organizations change. It also highlights some of the cross-disciplinary influences on contemporary conflict literature. I argue that a deeper examination into other fields

addressing adaptation, particularly organizational theory, can enhance the ability to explain dissident group adaptation. Three main organizational change theories are addressed in the following chapters.

## **2.2 Adaptation Through Multiple Frameworks**

“Adaptation” is a broad term that covers a range of dissident group behaviors. Depending on the framework used, adaptation can describe tactical and strategic changes, structural changes or more comprehensive identity shifts. Research addressing social movements, rebel groups, and terror organizations provides a foundation for thinking about organizational change and also indicates areas of necessary improvement.

### **2.2.1 Adaptation and Terror Groups**

The concept of adaptation in reference to terror organizations focuses primarily on the means by which groups maintain a strategy of violence through avoiding government counterattacks. One of the main variables of interest is the role of group structure in supporting a violent strategy. Many conflict scholars argue that networks are more “adaptable” than hierarchies, namely those in the “new terrorism” school.<sup>1</sup> The rigidity, centralized power and vertical structure that characterizes hierarchies also makes them prone to disruption by government actions. Attacking the leader(s) places the entire organization at risk. Cronin (2006) cites the capture or killing of group leaders as fundamental to the breakdown of Sendero Luminoso and the Kurdistan Workers Party. In contrast, networks are more flexible than traditional hierarchies. Networks’ flatter structure, often organized into cells or self-contained units, reduces the threat of

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<sup>1</sup>Crenshaw (2000) and Tucker (2001) question the validity of “new terrorism”, noting similarities between early and contemporary uses of terrorism and the lack of empirical evidence supporting a new category of terrorism.

disruption should members, particularly leaders, be captured. In decentralized organizations, members can act autonomously, a quality that contributes to quicker responses to external changes. These qualities have led some to argue that networks are more adaptable than hierarchies (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001; Metz, 2007; Tucker, 2001).<sup>2</sup>

This view of structure highlights one aspect of “adaptation”: the maneuverability necessary to avoid counterattacks or detection. Highlighting this aspect of adaptation may result from the focus on “terrorists,” which carries an underlying bias that certain organizations use violence as the primary (and often only) means of interacting with the opposition government.<sup>3</sup> Thus, scholars concentrate on the means by which groups maintain this strategy; the ability for groups to adapt strategies is downplayed. Yet, the focus on maintaining a violent strategy constricts our understanding of the range of organizational change that occurs. Anecdotal evidence reveals that many groups coined “terrorists” do not use violence as their only strategy ( Hamas, Hezbollah) and some have adapted in order to transition away from violence, rather than maintain it (the African National Congress and Sinn Fein/PIRA stand as stark examples). The view of adaptation as solely one of flexibility, as presented in research focused on terror groups, limits our understanding of how groups can and do change.

## 2.2.2 Adaptation and Rebel Movements

Research addressing rebel movements, particularly in post-conflict settings, does address strategic and identity change, generally in terms of shifting groups from violent

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<sup>2</sup>Not all terrorism research divides groups into a strict dichotomy between networks and hierarchies and some scholars encourage greater nuance within these broad categories. For instance, Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2001) disaggregate networks based on the manner in which information flows within the group and the prominence of particular cells. Johnston (2008) examines differences within types of hierarchies. Kahler (2009) notes that many organizations adopt characteristics of both hierarchies and networks to form hybrid structures.

<sup>3</sup>Additionally, the term “terrorist” has also expanded significantly since 2001, reducing its explanatory leverage.

movements to non-violent political parties. Much of the work utilizes case study analysis to identify common trends or variables in successful and unsuccessful transitions (de Zeeuw, 2008; Söderberg, 2004; van Engeland and Rudolph, 2008). These scholars highlight the importance of political will, ideology, recognition of the group and corresponding legitimacy for the cause, and government policies as influencing the level of success in transforming dissident groups into political parties.

Group membership and the will of leaders is also contributes to the likelihood of adaptation. Manning (2004) found that elite participation in adaptation was necessary for organizational change. Coupled with shifts in how groups attract mass-level support (“collective incentives”), Manning found that opportunities to participate politically which did not threaten elites’ power and authority were more likely to contribute to a change in strategy. Irvin (1999) argues that the composition of the entire group influences the likelihood of adaptation. Examining ETA and the PIRA, she finds that adaptation depends on the relative size and strength of an organization’s subgroups. She identifies three main groupings: ideologues (who pursue violence at all costs), radicals (who support violence or political participation depending on either strategy’s relative utility), and politicians (who prefer a non-violent, political strategy). When a particular subgroup reaches a critical mass, it is able to exert influence over the group’s strategic trajectory.

Government policies are cited as a primary catalyst for adaptation and cover a range of actions that aim to support the transition from violent to non-violent strategies or eliminate the threat posed by violent groups entirely. A significant body of research examines the relationship between political openness and violence. In particular, opportunities for political participation are often linked to adapting to non-violent strategies (Crenshaw, 1981; Irvin, 1999).<sup>4</sup> Given the chance to participate politically

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<sup>4</sup>Expanding political opportunities is one of many positive incentives governments can employ to



(whether through elections or other forms of legitimate protest), groups are expected to reduce and ultimately abandon, violent strategies, generally through the adoption of a political wing or transformation into a political party. Indeed, in their examination of 648 dissident groups operating between 1968-2006, Jones and Libicki (2008) found that 43% of the organizations in their sample “ended” by transitioning from terror organizations to non-violent political parties.

However, some scholars and policy-makers question this relationship. Gause (2005) argues that democratic participation is unlikely to stop violence. He posits that terror groups’ extreme views make it difficult for them to garner enough votes to affect change. Neumann (2005) also cautions that political participation does not equate to political power; running for elections may not be enough of an incentive to shift to non-violent strategies. Additionally, empirical findings of this relationship remain mixed. Some scholars found that democratic qualities, such as free association and increased civil liberties encouraged the use of violence (Eubank and Weinberg, 1994). Li (2005) disaggregates democratic qualities and finds that participation reduces the likelihood of terrorist incidents while government constraints increase the likelihood of terrorist incidents. Additionally, case study analysis also reflects the inconsistent relationship between violence and democracy. Sendero Luminoso and ETA both increased the use of violence despite expanding political opportunities (Irvin, 1999; Llera, Mata and Irvin, 1993; Ron, 2001).

The research on dissident group transition from violent to non-violent strategies addresses many of the organizational and environmental factors that influence adaptation. However, much of this work is focused on positive policy solutions for reducing or eliminating the threat posed by violent groups rather than the adaptive process itself.

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induce a shift away from violent strategies. Other scholars also examine the affect of opportunities to negotiate (Cronin, 2006) or offers of amnesty (Jones and Libicki, 2008; Wiegand, 2010) on the likelihood of adaptation.

The focus on a linear transition from violent group to non-violent political party provides a truncated analysis of dissident group behavior. Many groups do not transition linearly from one strategy to another but rather vacillate between strategies.

### **2.2.3 Adaptation and Social Movements**

Underlying much of the work on linear transitions from violent to non-violent strategies is the assumption that dissident groups can easily recognize opportunities to adapt and seamlessly shift strategies as needed. These arguments are based on an assumption that groups are rational; they (as a unitary actor or as directed by leaders) assess the costs and benefits of pursuing a particular strategy and adapt as necessary. Such arguments feature heavily in social movement theory, which incorporates shifts between and among strategies, generally in response to externally-generated events. In particular, social movement theorists see strategic choice and change as influenced by political opportunity structures, “exogenous factors that enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilization, for particular sorts of claims to be advanced rather than others, for particular strategies of influence to be exercised, and for movements to affect mainstream institutional politics and policy,” (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004, 1457-8). Movements or groups adapt or change their tactics based on the available opportunities and existing constraints they face (della Porta, 1995; Hafez, 2004; Kitschelt, 1986; Meyer and Minkoff, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2004).

One of the main constraints on action is the the degree and nature of sanctioning behavior (Lichbach, 1987; Moore, 1998). While dissent is consistently linked to government repression, the effect of repression on political violence is less definitive (Davenport, 2007). Lichbach (1987) and Moore (1998) posit that groups’ decision to utilize violent or non-violent strategies is contingent on the government’s response to protest activities. Lichbach argued that opposition groups use violent and non-violent

strategies interchangeably and will shift between strategies depending on which maximizes the group’s utility. However, scholars continue to debate whether government repression deters violence or leads to radicalization. Contemporary research attempts to disaggregate types of repression and various responses to better examine this relationship. For instance, Hafez (2003) provides a nuanced description of repression in his analysis of armed Islamist rebellions. He disaggregates government actions into two forms: political exclusion and repression. He further breaks down repression into reactive or proactive and indiscriminate or targeted. He concludes that movements are likely to employ violence in the face of political exclusion and reactive, indiscriminate repression.

Social movement research provides insight into factors that affect strategic choice and incentives to adapt. However, della Porta acknowledges that the social movement framework is traditionally applied to hierarchical movements, that have a distinct political ideology and operate in democracies. This literature is often not applied to networked, religiously-based organizations in non-democracies (2008).<sup>5</sup>

## 2.3 Adaptation and Rational Choice

Paralleling the work in social movement theory, some conflict theorists have also examined group behavior through a rational choice lens. Weinberg et al. (2009) argue that the choice of strategy depends “upon the prevailing conditions and incentives to behave in one way or the other,” (113). Although they do not formally use rational choice terminology, their argument links the utility of pursuing a particular strategy to what is most beneficial given the “prevailing conditions.”

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<sup>5</sup>Hafez’s (2004) *Why Muslims Rebel* and Wiktorowicz’s (2004) *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* serve as exceptions.

Martin et al. (2008) build on the work by Weinberg et al. to explore the strategic shifts of political groups. The authors also do not explicitly use a cost-benefit analysis, but rather focus on the “attractiveness” or “unattractiveness” of violent or non-violent strategies. They write, “Political groups utilize strategies that they deem to be attractive alternatives for achieving organizational goals,” and shifts in perceived attractiveness create incentives for strategic change (5). The authors present various factors that influence the degree of strategic attractiveness, notably the perceived effectiveness of a given strategy and availability of pursuing one strategy over another. In particular, they highlight the existence and openness of the party system, the stability of the regime and the group’s internal dynamics. Although Martin et al. provide additional support for examining shifts both to and from violent strategies in their analysis of adaptation, their argument is tautological, using attractiveness to explain strategic shifts, but then using observed strategic changes as evidence of attractiveness.<sup>6</sup>

Recent work by Wiegand (2010) also adopts a rational choice perspective for examining strategic choices. She focuses on the rationality of dual status groups, those organizations utilizing violence while also engaging in the political system as legitimate parties. She argues that “as long as the combined use of violence and party politics is more effective than one or other means, then dual status groups have the incentive to continue their combined means,” (73). Wiegand highlights both endogenous elements, such as the recognition that violence is no longer viable or the achievement of goals, and exogenous factors, such as government initiatives and changes in the political system, as key components in increasing the likelihood dissident groups will adopt non-violent strategies. She supports her arguments through case studies of Hamas and Hezbollah. Her works emphasizes that the effectiveness of a given strategy depends on the context

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<sup>6</sup>For a more comprehensive review of this argument, see Martin’s (2011) dissertation “From Parliamentarianism to Terrorism and Back Again.”

in which a group operates.

While work by Martin et al. (2008), Weinberg et al. (2009) and Wiegand (2010) expand our understanding of dissident group behavior by incorporating shifts among violent and non-violent strategies into their analysis, their work falls short of providing a comprehensive explanation for group adaptation. First, much of this research contains an underlying assumption that groups can easily and seamlessly adapt strategies; factors that could constrain adaptation are often downplayed. Additionally, the work fails to incorporate group recognition of the need to change strategies. Taking advantage of shifting opportunity structures requires an awareness that change has occurred, yet the authors imply that groups will automatically adapt as needed. Finally, this research does little to examine the process of adaptation itself, focusing instead on outcomes of change.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The research on adaptation shifts in focus depending on the type of group being examined. The ability or likelihood of adapting structure, strategy, or identity varies depending on the types of behavior different groups are expected to display. Yet, as the divisions among “terrorists,” “rebels,” and “dissidents” continues to blur, the boundaries defining the actions of different group types breaks down. As evidenced above, conflict theorists are drawing on research from different theoretical schools to enhance our understanding of dissident group behavior. In particular, the recent work by Martin et al. (2008) and Wiegand (2010) combines streams of research on terrorism, political party formation and social movements to explain group action.

However, while this research has enhanced our understanding of dissident groups, I argue that it does not offer a complete examination of the adaptive process. Rather, the risk posed by violent groups impels many researchers to focus on solutions for

reducing the threat, rather than investigating the nature of group behavior. As della Porta (2008) notes, "...some of the research has been considered to be more oriented toward developing antiterrorist policies than to a social science understanding of the phenomenon," (220). Much of the literature on dissident groups contains overt policy implications focused on inducing the transition of violent groups to non-violent political parties (or completely eliminating the group). Few works address the how groups adapt strategies irrespective of the consequences for opposition governments.

This dissertation draws on organizational theory to examine the adaptive process of organizations generally and then dissident groups more specifically. Although many of the tenets highlighted by organizational theorists are reflected in current conflict literature, few conflict scholars explicitly utilize organizational change theories. I argue that examining dissident group behavior through the lens of organizational theory can provide additional insight in the factors that influence adaptation and further enhance our understanding of group behavior. In the following chapters, I examine three distinct organizational change theories, population ecology, punctuated equilibrium, and strategic choice. After applying these theories to adaptation among dissident groups, I then examine the development of the Palestinian Islamic organization Hamas through each framework. In this way, I am able to detect which theory best explains the group's adaptive process.

# Chapter 3

## Population Ecology and the Adaptation of Dissident Groups

### 3.1 Population Ecology

Population ecology emerged as a force within organizational theory as an explanation for adaptation. In 1977, organizational theorists, Hannan and Freeman, produced a seminal piece in which they outline a theory of adaptation that drew on the concept of natural selection. Like previous adaptation theorists, Hannan and Freeman emphasized the role of environmental conditions in shaping the type of organizations that evolve and the rate at which organizations adapt. However, previous adaptation theories conceived of organizations as rational, unitary and consistently reactive; organizations easily adapted strategy and structure to changing environmental conditions (Hannan and Freeman, 1977). In contrast, Hannan and Freeman argued that organizations are intrinsically inert and are unlikely to adapt to exogenous shifts.

Organizational inertia serves as a fundamental aspect of population ecology. Developing any organization generates an inherent resistance to future change that needs to be taken into account when examining the likelihood of adaptation. Hannan and

Freeman (1977; 1984) emphasize internal and external characteristics that contribute to inertia, including sunk costs, routines, and barriers to entering or existing particular markets.

Investments in equipment and personnel training constitute a key source of inertia. Organizations (and organizational leaders) develop specific infrastructure to support a given activity. Particular machinery is purchased and employees are trained with the purpose of producing a product or service. Those resources cannot be recouped in their entirety should the company adapt its operations. For instance, a firm loses some of its initial investment when it upgrades technology or shifts production focus; new machines need to be purchased and employees needed to be retrained (or new employees need to be hired). Changes to strategy or structure are costly and constitute a barrier to adaptation.

Political constraints or vested interests in the status quo also serve to increase inertia. All organizations contain positions of authority that come with tangible and intangible benefits, such as salary or prestige. When environmental conditions shift, bases of authority, and the associated perks, may shift as well. For instance, a start-up company will place greater authority with individuals who can develop nascent organizations and build capacity. Once that organization is established, leaders need to have the skills to expand operations. The same person (or group of people) rarely fit both roles. However, the risk of losing these benefits as a result of adaptation can generate resistance to change. As Hannan and Freeman (1977) write, “As long as the pool of resources is fixed...change almost always involves redistribution of resources across subunits. Such redistribution upsets the prevailing system of exchange among subunits (or subunit leaders). So at least, some subunits are likely to resist any proposed reorganization,” (931). Individuals, particularly those in positions of authority, are likely to resist any change that threatens that authority.



Hannan and Freeman (1977) also point to path dependence as a source of inertia. Although routines create efficient means of production, by standardizing operations, routines or courses of action reduce subsequent flexibility. Once these norms and standard operating procedures are in place, they become difficult to change. The influence of history or path dependence on adaptation is echoed in Miller and Friesen's (1980) work on momentum. They argue that momentum is a key feature of organizational development. They note that strategy and structure are interconnected (what they term 'gestalts') and reinforce each other. These organizational elements create pressure to continue along the same path. As Miller and Friesen (1980) argue, "most organizations are always changing. But they appear to be biased in the direction of their evolution so that they generally extrapolate past trends," (592).

The external environment also contains entry and exit barriers that facilitate or inhibit the ability to adapt (Hannan and Freeman, 1977, 1984).<sup>1</sup> Certain markets may be difficult to access, due to high start-up costs or regulations. Additionally, exiting a particular market entails costs to shutting down a product line and potentially losing customers. The costs associated with entering or leaving a particular market can be high enough as to limit adaptability.

Sunk costs, vested interests, path dependence, and barriers to market entry or exit generate inertia in the face of environmental changes. Organizations are thus limited in their ability to respond to external shifts depending on the nature of change that is necessary. As Hannan and Freeman note (1984), adaptability is relative; "... organizations have high inertia when the speed of reorganization is much lower than the rate at which environmental conditions change," (151). That is, adaptability is contingent on the organization's type, its resources at a given time and the type of external change it

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<sup>1</sup>Hannan and Freeman (1977; 1984) discuss barriers to individual organizations of entering new markets or exiting current markets.

encounters. Despite the relative nature of adaptation, on the whole, proponents of population ecology assume that most organizations are subject to inertial constraints, reducing the likelihood of adaptation in the face of external threats or opportunities.

Due to the assumed high levels of inertia, population ecologists posit that most individual organizations are unlikely to adapt. Rather, organizations that possess the necessary characteristics to align with a given environment will thrive, while those that do not fit will decline, in a type of natural selection process.<sup>2</sup> New organizations will emerge, mirroring the successful characteristics of the survivors. In this way, adaptation occurs at the population-level rather than at the organization or firm level. Changes occur over time as adaptations among organizations are selected, retained and mimicked.<sup>3</sup> As Astley (1983) summarizes, “Some organizations fail and are selected out, while others survive. At the same time, new organizations are created and enter the population. As these units replace their predecessors, the population as a whole gradually changes composition,” (225).

A consequence of the cycle of selection, retention and mimicry is that organizations within a given population may have similar characteristics, what Hannan and Freeman (1977) term “isomorphism.” Organizations faced with the same environmental pressures are likely to adopt similar forms to optimally align with a particular context. In this sense, the concept of population can become very narrow, as national and sub-regional constraints create different environments to which dissident groups must align. Thus, population ecologists expect organizations within a given population to

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<sup>2</sup>At an extreme, alignment in the environment equates to organizational survival, and misalignment contributes to organizational failure.

<sup>3</sup>Hannan and Freeman (1977) define a population as “...all the organizations within a particular boundary that have a common form,” (936). Opponents of population ecology (Betton and Dess, 1985; Young, 1988; Singh and Lumsden, 1990) critique the lack of a firm definition of population or a means for determining the boundaries of a population. In later work, Hannan and Freeman argue that populations are relative, and change depending on the nature of the research question.

have very similar qualities.<sup>4</sup>

According to population ecology, the emphasis on external pressures combined with organizational inertia results in a high level of environmental determinism. At an extreme, organizations (or organizational leaders) have little to no control over adaptation. Organizations either possess or do not possess the characteristics that align to a given environment and, as a result, thrive or decline as the environment changes. The external context determines the type of organizations that evolve or develop over time.

## 3.2 Population Ecology among Dissident Organizations

Population ecology has been featured prominently in organizational literature to explain the growth and distribution of firms and was co-opted by political science to explain the population density of interest groups (Lowery and Gray, 1995). However it has been rarely applied to the adaptive process of dissident organizations. Unlike most current theories of organizational change within conflict literature, population ecology emphasizes the importance of inertial factors in influencing the adaptive process. Yet, dissident groups are subject to the same constraints and considerations as organizations traditionally addressed by population ecology. The constricting factors of sunk costs, vested interests and path dependence also affect dissident group behavior and therefore population ecology can contribute to current conflict literature.

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<sup>4</sup>Isomorphic organizations within the same environment will often compete with each other for resources, support and influence. Indeed, Crenshaw (1987) notes that the majority of groups face competitors who hold “similar political purposes,” (22). She cites as examples the competition between the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (and later, competition between the PIRA, Continuity IRA and the Real IRA), between the Red Brigades and Prima Linea in Italy and as will be discussed in the case illustration, among Palestinian groups including Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Organizations operating in similar contexts are likely to resemble as well as compete with each other.

Although not a direct application of population ecology, Rapoport's (2004) work on waves of terrorist activity serves as a parallel to population ecology's focus on adaptation at the population level. Rapoport argued that terrorism occurred in "cycle[s] of activity in a given time period... A crucial feature is its international character; similar activities occur in several countries, driven by a common predominant energy that shapes the participating groups' characteristics and mutual relationships," (47). Waves are composed of organizations that use similar strategies against similar target types; each distinct wave lasts for approximately 40 years.<sup>5</sup>

Each wave contains isomorphic organizations, akin to the expected similarity among firms within a given population. These organizations thrive within supporting environments and decline when the environment changes, leading to the emergence of a new group type.<sup>6</sup> He notes that as organizations die off, successors appear to take their place. Rasler and Thompson (2011) find support for Rapoport's waves hypothesis. They also find that organizations emerge and disappear in a given wave, comparing them to economic sectors that emerge or die off due to market conditions (26).

Rapoport's work demonstrates the possibility of adaptation at the population level.<sup>7</sup> Environmental factors and global events condition the type of groups that develop in each wave. Although he does not explicitly discuss the emergence and decline of organizations within each wave as contributing to the introduction of new waves, it requires little imagination to argue that the new organizations contribute to wave development. Organizations are continuously emerging and declining and the distinction of a "wave"

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<sup>5</sup>Rapoport argues that there have been four waves: the anarchist wave (1870s to the early 20th century), the nationalist wave (1920s - 1960s), new left/Marxism (1960s - 1990s) and the current religious wave (1970s - expected end in the mid 21st century).

<sup>6</sup>Rapoport notes that some organizations, such as the IRA and the PLO, have survived beyond their initial wave, but these prove to be exceptions rather than the rule.

<sup>7</sup>Again, the concept of population may vary depending on the nature of the research question. Rapoport's work on systemic-level influences on the evolution of terrorism places the population at the global level.

points to a critical mass of similar organizations. Before that point however, organizations with new characteristics (those that will compose a distinct wave in the future) must emerge in order to generate the momentum that will build into the wave. For instance, the overlap between the New Left wave (1960s - 1990s) and the religious wave (1970s - expected end in the 2020s) indicates that two distinct types of organizations co-existed at the same time; the growth and reproduction of religious wave groups successfully competed against and may have contributed to the decline of the New Left wave groups.

Despite the evidence that global trends contribute to the structure and strategy of dissident organizations over time, the majority of conflict literature does not adopt a system- or population-level of analysis (Sedgwick, 2007). Thus, these theories remain underdeveloped. In particular, Rapoport does not examine why most dissident groups decline within a given wave or the qualities that contribute to certain groups transcending multiple waves (for example, the PLO and the IRA). Hannan and Freeman's focus on inertia provides a unique explanation for these patterns.

Although inertia plays a key role in population ecology's causal process, Hannan and Freeman (1977; 1984) do not explore the sources of inertia in any depth. Within conflict literature, the concept of inertia is often ignored completely. Many scholars assume that individual groups can easily adapt their structure and strategy, including major shifts in form and function. For instance, in her comparison between terror groups and political parties, Krista Wiegand (2010) argues that, "...parties and terrorist groups can *easily shift* from one role to another, beginning as one or the other, giving up or adopting violence, then reversing their means at a different point in time," (81, emphasis added). Wiegand anticipates little difficulty in shifting between roles. She downplays that parties and terror groups develop very different structures in order to pursue very different strategies. These organizational forms are often ill-suited to

support fundamentally new behaviors (Sinno and Khanani, 2009).<sup>8</sup> Wiegand is not alone in her view; similar assumptions concerning the ease of adaptation also feature strongly in research by Weinberg (1991), Weinberg et al. (2009) and Martin et al. (2008). Yet, inertia does exist within dissident groups and influences the ability of individual groups to adapt. In particular, group structure, identity and constituent preferences can all act to inhibit the adaptive process.

Like all organizations, dissident group leaders establish particular structural forms to support a given strategy. Groups pursuing a strategy of violence need to develop the means to acquire or build weapons, train recruits to fight, and develop an infrastructure that maintains the group's security. Groups pursuing political participation or non-violent social service provision need to establish a form that supports engagement with the community. The physical form adopted for these various activities will be quite different. The idea that structure supports strategy is fairly straightforward. Organizational theorist, Alfred Chandler, is credited with coining the phrase "structure follows strategy" (Hall and Sais, 1980; Peters, 1984) to emphasize that structural design comes second to strategic direction. His examination of hundreds of firms supported the idea that organizations create structures to conform to a given strategy (Chandler, 1969).

Yet, the relationship between structure and strategy becomes symbiotic over time; as strategy influences structural design, structure also limits future strategic choices. As a result, several scholars have amended Chandler's axiom, noting that once established, structure constrains the adaptive process or that "strategy follows structure." The

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<sup>8</sup>Wiegand briefly acknowledges potential difficulties in shifting between strategies. She writes, "...it is likely that formerly violent groups have little or no experience as parties and therefore they must start from scratch and learn the means by which political groups organize as parties. This often involves a steep learning curve for formerly violent groups..." (62). However, she does not examine how this "learning curve" can affect strategic adaptation, most notably ways in which it can inhibit change.

resources and investments used in creating a particular structure cannot be recouped in their entirety should a dissident group adapt its strategy. In the same way that a firm loses its investment when it adapts its operations, so too do dissident groups lose the resources put into developing specific infrastructure when they shift strategy. Additionally, creating or developing the proper infrastructure to support a new strategy may take too long or be too costly to be effective. As Hannan and Freeman noted, inertia exists when adaptation occurs at a much slower rate than the changes within the environment (1984).

Referring again to Wiegand, she assumes that political parties and terror groups are similar organizations. Yet, the structure needed to support a violent strategy, such as maintaining security and procuring weapons, is very different than the structure needed to support a non-violent political strategy, which requires candidate development and governing. Shifting away from one strategy (and its corresponding structure) risks losing sunk costs, while adopting another strategy (and structure) requires investing in new infrastructure. Changing strategy, and subsequently shifting structure, is costly; these costs contribute to inertia.

Hannan and Freeman (1977; 1984) also acknowledge the sunk costs associated with training and recruiting employees with specialized skill sets. Adaptation that requires new training can be very costly and may serve as an impediment to adapting in the first place. For instance, Sinno and Khanani (2009) argue that Islamist groups committed to a violent strategy do not have the necessary skill sets to transition successfully to a political party. Although many groups may campaign on a record of military successes, the skills that contributed to such victories do not necessarily translate into an ability to govern. Retraining or recruiting members with the necessary skill sets is often too costly to undertake. Söderberg (2004) supports this assertion. She found that international financial assistance was a key to supporting a successful transition

from armed movement to political party. Her case study of RENAMO indicates that the group used third party funding to support the internal promotion and training of group members as well as to recruit new members who could serve as political leaders. In contrast, the RUF did not have a consistent source of financial support and was unable to effectively train or recruit members who had the requisite skills to establish a party.

In addition to the sunk costs of a given structure, organizations also face inertia from vested interests that encourage maintaining the status quo. In every organization, particular roles and positions of authority may be threatened under adaptation. Within firms, these threats can stem from the elimination or creation of new product lines, mergers, or layoffs. Within dissident groups, threats to authority can result from shifts in strategy that rearrange internal power relationships. The positions that had the most influence under one strategy may no longer be as important or powerful under a new strategic direction. For instance, military leaders may no longer have authority should the group emphasize political participation. Rather, individuals with an ability to negotiate and bargain will have greater control. The potential loss of authority, and its associated benefits, generates resistance to change.<sup>9</sup>

Although not addressed explicitly by Hannan and Freeman, an organization's identity and brand can also contribute to inertia. A particular identity is central to an organization's operations; it incorporates the mission and goals of the group and it affects the types of members and constituents a group attracts. The support base is vital to the group's performance and survival because it provides recruits, financial

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<sup>9</sup>Benefits of power can be thought of broadly. Intangible benefits can include prestige and influence while tangible benefits can include goods accumulated as a result of one's position. Referring to the resistance posed by long-time Serbian Democratic Party and Croatian Democratic Union members, Manning (2004) writes they were "loath to give up what they have gained during the war, whether that means acquisition of state assets, a monopoly on legal or illicit commercial activities, or ethnically cleansed territory," (61).



and material support, safe havens, and legitimacy.<sup>10</sup> The need to attract and maintain constituent support also involves the organization's brand.<sup>11</sup> One can imagine a firm that is unable or unwilling to shift away from products for which it is well known; the risk inherent in entering a new market serves as a significant barrier to adaptation. Similarly, a dissident group also projects a particular brand to external audiences. Whether a group markets itself as an armed resistance movement or a more moderate compromiser, movement away from that identity risks losing the support of current constituents, and possibly risking performance.

In many cases, a group's identity is intimately linked to the group's strategic choices. For instance, the 1968 Palestinian National Charter emphasizes the primacy of armed struggle. The organization's goal of liberating historic Palestine was connected to the use of violence. Similarly, the Provisional Irish Republican Army linked its goal of "Brits out" with armed struggle. According to Brendan O'Brien, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) "took on the whole mantle of physical force Irish republicanism, dating back two hundred years. They kept to the faith that armed force was the only answer to the British presence," (1999, 21). Due to the connection between identity and strategy, constituent support for a particular group often translates into support for a given strategy. Dissident groups need to act in certain ways in order to maintain their brand and retain their support base. Adapting strategy can challenge a group's brand and cause some supporters to defect, claiming that the group has "sold out" and abandoned the cause. In the case of the PLO, several participating groups rejected negotiations with Israel and actively worked against them. The PIRA itself

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<sup>10</sup>I define constituency broadly, as a segment of the population, either domestically or internationally, on whom a dissident group relies for support and looks to for legitimacy. This segment includes active members, tacit supporters, and potential supporters or members.

<sup>11</sup>Identity characterizes a group's own understanding of its role and goals. Brand refers to the way an organization markets itself to others (its reputation). These concepts are often interrelated.

was the result of splintering over strategy and faced similar fractionalization when it attempted to adapt three decades later. Adaptation may prove too risky to groups that are dependent on the material support and legitimacy it receives from constituents.

### 3.3 Expectations

Population ecology provides distinct expectations concerning the adaptive process of organizations, and dissident groups in particular. The theory predicts that organizations face significant inertial pressures, including sunk costs, vested interests, identity and branding. These factors generate resistance to change and reduce the likelihood that individual groups will adapt, or adapt at a necessary rate, when the environmental context changes. As a result, organizations will be selected out of the environment when they no longer fit or match external conditions. Inertia serves as a fundamental explanation for a selection model of change rather than an organizational adaptation model. That is, organizational change and variation is more likely to occur through the decline and emergence of organizations rather than change on an individual level. This leads to the following propositions:

*Proposition 1: Organizations are subject to inertia as a result of sunk costs, vested interests and identity which reduces the likelihood of adaptation.*

*Proposition 2: Adaptation occurs through a process of organizational decline and emergence rather than through organizational-level change.*

In examining the development of dissident groups we should observe inertia in the form of sunk costs resulting from structural and personnel decisions, vested interests in maintaining the status quo and specific identity and branding processes. Additionally,

there should be evidence that these factors contributed to resistance toward adaptation and eventual organizational decline. Finally, since adaptation is predicted to occur through the cycling in and out of organizations as the environment changes, change will be evident at the population level.

Additionally, population ecology posits that the environmental context conditions group behavior and form. Dissident groups within the same population are likely to resemble each other in target, form and identity. When the environment shifts, emerging groups will emulate the qualities of the surviving organizations.

*Proposition 3: Groups operating in the same population are more likely to emulate each other than organizations outside a given population.*

The following section examines the growth and evolution of the Palestinian Islamic group Hamas through the framework of population ecology. The case illustration highlights the role of Palestinian national movements that preceded Hamas, population level-influences and inertial pressures in influencing Hamas' emergence and adaptive trajectory.

### **3.4 Population Ecology and Palestinian Nationalist Movements**

One of the primary tasks in population ecology is determining the population under study. Hannan and Freeman (1977) define a population broadly, as the “organizations within a particular boundary that have a common form” and later argue that a given population depends on the nature of the research question. I will focus on the development and evolution of nationalist movements within the Palestinian Territories.

The concept of Palestinian nationalism emerged in 1948, in direct reaction to the establishment of Israel (often referred to as *al-nakba* or the catastrophe). Initially, Palestinian concerns were encompassed under a broader push for pan-Arabism; indeed, Baumgarten (2005) and Sayigh (1991) both argue that Arab unity was viewed as a precursor to Palestinian gains. As a result, proponents of Palestinian nationalism, such as the Arab Nationalists Movement (ANM; also called Movement of Arab Nationalists), encouraged other Arab states and leaders to champion the Palestinian cause on their behalf. Egypt's Nasser emerged as the leader of the pan-Arab campaign as a result of the Egyptian victory during the Suez crisis and Palestinian nationalists strongly supported him. According to Sayigh (1991), the victory "persuaded the ANM to shape its policy and strategy according to his," (610).

The commitment to Nasser led the ANM to adopt socialism, resulting in an ideological shift that threatened the group's unity. Sayigh (1991) argues that "loyalty to Nasir [sic] demanded the continued postponement of both issues [Palestinian liberation and the struggle against Israel] while the construction of socialism and Arab unity was underway," (616). The Palestinian cause was increasingly undermined by the interests of neighboring Arab states. Despite the ANM's relationship with Egypt, Nasser viewed the ANM as peripheral to his own goals and the interests of the region (Baumgarten, 2005). Due in part to this view, Nasser and other Arab leaders established the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, to further Palestinian nationalism.<sup>12</sup>

The ANM developed in an environment that emphasized Arab unity; Palestinian nationalism was secondary to broader regional goals. Although the ANM pushed for Palestinian liberation, the group also shunned a military strategy, relying instead on neighboring Arab states and leaders to advocate for the Palestinian cause. Since the prospect of Arab unity was so fundamental to the ANM's strategy, setbacks in that

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<sup>12</sup>The PLO is an umbrella entity encompassing a variety of secular Palestinian nationalist groups.

primary goal adversely affected the ANM's evolution. In the two decades following Israel's founding, the Arab states engaged in cycles of cooperation and conflict, rather than the single-minded pursuit of unity. Perhaps the most telling signal of the failing pan-Arab movement was the short-lived United Arab Republic, the union between Egypt and Syria that ended after 4 years. If Arab unity was a necessary precursor to liberation, the goals of the Palestinians were unlikely to be met.

At the same time that the ANM struggled to survive and remain relevant in the region, other Palestinian nationalist movements were emerging. In particular, Yasir Arafat was developing Fatah as an alternative organization for achieving Palestinian liberation. According to Mishal and Sela (2000) Fatah did not disregard the concept of pan-Arabism and did rely on the support of neighboring Arab countries (38). However, unlike the ANM, Fatah pushed for a Palestinian response to the Palestinian issue. Baumgarten (2005) writes, "Against outworn Arab nationalism, with its stress on liberation through united Arab action, the new movement proposed a *Palestinian* nationalist ideology in which Palestine would be liberated by *Palestinian* action..." (32). Fatah focused primarily on the experiences of Palestinian refugees who remained displaced from their homes and livelihoods with decreasing likelihood of returning. Additionally, and in contrast to the ANM, Fatah incorporated armed struggle into its goals and strategy. The Palestinian people were to fight to regain Mandatory Palestine (the pre-1948 borders). The focus on armed struggle emulated other global nationalist movements of the time. Referring again to Baumgarten (2005), she writes that, "Fatah emerged and developed at a time when third worldism and the romance of guerrilla action and 'people's wars' were at their height internationally," (33). International trends influenced the nature of Fatah's organizational development.

For the first five to ten years of its existence, Fatah remained relatively peripheral to the Palestinian cause. The focus in the late 1950s and into the 1960s remained on

the actions of Arab states rather than sub-state organizations. As the 1960s progressed however, pan-Arabism became less legitimate and nationalist movements around the world helped build the momentum for distinct Palestinian nationalist groups. The death-knoll for the pan-Arab movement came with the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War. Any hopes of a triumphant pan-Arab movement were dashed, and with it, the role of ANM as a significant Palestinian organization. Rather, Fatah which had developed outside the banner of pan-Arabism, emerged unscathed. The next year Fatah joined the PLO, became its dominant member and propelled the organization to the forefront of the fight for Palestinian liberation.<sup>13</sup>

During Fatah's rise to power, similar organizations were also emerging. These groups include the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Palestine Liberation Front. Like Fatah, these groups were also secular and shared the goal of liberating Mandatory Palestine. Additionally, they all adopted a similar strategy, namely armed struggle against occupying Israeli forces. By the late 1960s and into the 1970s, these groups had all joined the PLO to streamline operations and attempt to speak with one voice in support of Palestinian nationalism.

The PLO's Charter, finalized in 1968, exemplifies these groups' shared goals. In Article 2, the Charter declares the borders of Palestine includes all of Mandatory Palestine. Article 9 states, "Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. This it is [sic] the overall strategy, not merely a tactical phase," (*Palestinian National Charter: Resolutions to the Palestinian National Council*, 1968). Article 19 declares the establishment of Israel to be illegal and in violation of international law. Article 21 states, "The Arab Palestinian people...reject all solutions which are substitutes for

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<sup>13</sup>Due to Fatah's dominance of the organization since that time, I use PLO and Fatah interchangeably.

the total liberation of Palestine and reject all proposals aiming at the liquidation of the Palestinian problem, or its internationalization,” (*Palestinian National Charter: Resolutions to the Palestinian National Council*, 1968). The PLO’s Charter clearly emphasizes armed struggle as the primary means of achieving liberation and places the responsibility for that goal with the Palestinian people. The rejection of proposals which “liquidate” or “internationalize” Palestinian goals is a clear separation from the ANM’s subservience to pan-Arabism. Thus, Fatah characterized a new organizational template, in which Palestinians fought for Palestinian goals, separate from the interests of other Arab states.

Although Fatah rejected pan-Arabism, it still depended on the support of neighboring states for financial backing as well as a base of operations. However, during the 1970s and into the 1980s, the ties between the PLO and Arab countries deteriorated. The 1978 Camp David Accords, negotiated between Israel and Egypt, introduced the first major change in the region’s relations with Israel and the disintegration of a united anti-Israeli position. During the same period, Fatah’s relationship with Lebanon also soured. Fatah used Lebanon as its primary base to launch cross-border attacks against Israel. The attacks culminated in Israel’s invasion of South Lebanon in 1982 and the PLO’s expulsion. The loss of a territorial base proved to be a significant blow to the PLO.

Complicating Fatah’s role in the Palestinian Territories were domestic and international events that served to change the environment in which Fatah operated. Domestically, the Palestinian economy experienced a significant and prolonged downturn. The Territories were characterized by rising unemployment, barriers to trade and development and expanding Israeli settlements (Gunning, 2007, 34). Although the PLO had established some public goods, the majority of social services were provided by other organizations, namely the Muslim Brotherhood and its Palestinian branch, the

*al-Mujamma‘ al-islami*, or Islamic Center.

The increasing prominence of the Islamic Center as the center of Islamic social and education activity in the Territories coincided with the emergence and success of Islamist movements in the region, most notably the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the growing popularity of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a militant Islamic organization that promoted the Islamization of society through the control of the state. The growth of militant Islam stood in contrast to the secularism promoted by the PLO.

The outbreak of the 1987 Intifada served as a catalyst of environmental change. The declining power of the PLO and the growing strength of Islamism introduced environmental changes that led to the creation of new dissident organizations, most notably Hamas. Hamas, the acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (meaning Islamic Resistance Movement), developed as a militant branch of the Islamic Center. The division between armed struggle and social services was intended to maintain the Muslim Brotherhood's adherence to non-violence and buffer the organization's non-violent activities should the Intifada fail.

Hamas emerged as a product of the times. The group's Charter, released in 1988, clearly highlights the organization's dual influences: Palestinian nationalism as championed by the PLO, and Islam, an emerging political force in the region. For instance, Article 12 of the Charter states, "Nothing is loftier or deeper in nationalism than [wag-ing] a holy war (jihad) against the enemy and confronting him when he sets foot on the land of the Muslims. This becomes an individual obligation (fard 'ayn) of every Muslim man and woman..." (Mishal and Sela, 2000, 182). The Charter refers to Palestine as *waqf*, land endowed to all Muslims, such that no one has the right to surrender any part of it (Article 11). In reference to negotiations, Article 13 states, "The initiative, proposals, and international conferences are but a waste of time and sheer futility," (Mishal and Sela, 2000, 183). Article 8 declares the group's motto as "Allah is its goal,



the Prophet is its model, the Qur'an is its constitution, Jihad is its path, and death for the sake of Allah is its most coveted desire," (Mishal and Sela, 2000, 181). Paralleling the PLO's Charter, Hamas' founding document also lays out the goal of liberating Mandatory Palestine through armed resistance. The PIJ's Charter also displays similar themes. It states, "...It upholds the sacred jihad as the only solution for the liberation of Palestine and the destruction of heretical regimes," (Hatina, 2001, 161). Under 'Basic Themes', the charter states, "Rejecting the political solution to the Palestinian problem and sanctifying jihad and martyrdom as the only means for liberating the land," (Hatina, 2001, 162). It continues that political participation is "rejected and deviates from rightful Islamic teachings. It constitutes a kind of truce with the infidel (Arab) regimes and grants legitimation to their existence," (Hatina, 2001, 167). By linking nationalism with religious duty, both Hamas and the PIJ implied that political compromise undermined faith. This hardline stance contributed to the groups' growing appeal among Palestinians frustrated by the lack of progress.

Additionally, and more importantly from the perspective of population ecology, the Charters mirror the goals and language of the PLO. Both groups were clearly influenced by the PLO and its success in championing Palestinian nationalism, yet cast their nationalist objectives within an Islamic framework. As Mishal and Sela (2000) write, "Thus, in its religious vision, political goals, and communal concerns, Hamas challenged the PLO's claim to be the exclusive political center of the Palestinian people," (15). The emphasis on Islam reflects both the changing times as well as the perceived failures of secular nationalism, indicating the emergence of new organizations.

In addition to emulating the language and goals of the PLO, Hamas and the PIJ also shared the PLO's emphasis on armed struggle. Conflict was seen as the only way to eliminate Israel. However, Hamas and the PIJ pushed the nature of armed resistance further by introducing a new tactic: the suicide bomb. The first attack, in 1994, was

used in retaliation for the death of Palestinian worshippers at a mosque in Hebron by an Israeli settler. In 1996, Hamas, in conjunction with the PIJ, employed a series of suicide attacks in response to the assassination of key leaders in both organizations. In all instances, Hamas framed its attacks as justified retaliation against Israeli aggression (Hroub, 2006; International Crisis Group, 2004; Mishal and Sela, 2000). .

Hamas also developed a similar organizational structure to the PLO. In 1989, after Hamas' leader Sheikh Yasin was arrested, the group was reorganized and bases of authority were established outside the Territories as a security measure. As Mishal and Sela write, "Hamas thus became structurally similar to the PLO, with political representation and supportive groups based in various Muslim and Western countries. The external apparatus played the principal role in the movement's political decision-making, control of propaganda and publications, and activation of the military units," (59). Hamas' increasing prominence required it to adopt a more formalized structure. However, unlike the PLO and Arafat's tight control, Hamas maintained a culture that encouraged grassroots support and collaboration.

As Hamas consolidated its position as a leading militant organization in the Territories, the external environment shifted again, signaled by signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993. The Accords officially ended the Intifada, created the Palestinian Authority (PA) to act as an administrative body within the Territories and set the stage for elections to the newly established Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Indigenous Palestinian governing bodies were taking shape, supporting an environment in which non-violent interactions between Israelis and Palestinians and well as among Palestinians were both possible and encouraged.

True to its identity, Hamas rejected the Oslo Accords. It argued that the agreement was premised on a recognition of Israel, which clearly violated the group's Charter.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>In 1993, Arafat notified Rabin that sections of the PLO's Charter renouncing Israel's right to

Hamas also argued that the Accords failed to address final status issues, such as the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for refugees and Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The group also refused to participate in moves toward self-rule, specifically elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council set to take place in 1996.

The Accords signaled a shift in the external environment, to which Hamas was ill-suited to adapt. Despite conditions that privileged bargaining and negotiations, Hamas continued to utilize a violent strategy, increasing attack severity through the use of suicide bombing campaigns. A case can be made that Hamas was unable to adapt to the changing environment due to inertial pressures of sunk costs, vested interests and identity.

Sunk costs refer the investments made in infrastructure and training. At the time of the Oslo Accords, Hamas still had not gained mass appeal and had not developed the structural form necessary to take part in the newly formed Palestinian Authority. Hamas was constructed to engage in clandestine, armed attacks. Since 1989, its primary leadership, and thus its most identifiable members, were either based abroad or in prison, limiting the recognition of domestic political participants. Further, Hamas was not established with an eye toward political participation and it had no political wing. Hamas' leaders would need to devote resources to develop the infrastructure necessary to support a political apparatus. Even the extensive social network developed through the Islamic Center could not substitute for a political party. The Center was publicly apolitical; it focused on the provision of public goods, education and religious training, not preparing members to participate in government.

Resistance to adaptation may also have resulted from Hamas' structure of leadership. Although the organization as a whole rejected the Oslo Accords, the group's

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existence were null and void.

leaders disagreed over the best strategy for negotiating a post-Oslo environment characterized by strong support for peace, a powerfully positioned PLO and a general end to the Intifada. The differences stemmed from preferences developed in proximity to the conflict zone and the authority that afforded. The internal leadership faced the day-to-day challenges posed by the new Palestinian Authority (PA) and greater security barriers resulting from increased arrests and crackdowns. Repression directly affected the internal leadership and efforts to avoid these consequences led to call for accommodation and collaboration with the Palestinian Authority (Kristianasen, 1999; Mishal and Sela, 2000). In contrast, the externally-based leadership was distanced from the daily realities of the Territories and was not subject to the counterterrorism policies imposed by the PA and Israel. As such, these leaders faced only indirect pressure to adapt. As Kristianasen (1999) notes, “The outside leadership...lacking a political and social base (since Hamas operates only inside Palestine), was not affected by the same constraints and was not under pressure to make concessions in its ideology...” (27-8). The external leadership maintained a hard line, strictly following the goals and strategies outlined in the Charter.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout this period, the external leadership rejected attempts by the internal leadership to compromise with the PA or limit the number and type of attacks, (Mishal and Sela, 2000, 74,105). External leaders’ opposition to adaptation stemmed from a vested interest in maintaining their authority. Any move by the internal leadership to negotiate with the PA risked marginalizing the external leadership. If the collaboration with the PA succeeded, the credit would be given to the internally-based leaders, leaving little room or need for the external leadership. To protect their position, as well as the

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<sup>15</sup>Some scholars (Hroub, 2006; International Crisis Group, 2007) dispute the claims that there is a division between internal and external leadership. Rather they argue that while differences among leaders may exist, they do not necessarily divide along geographical boundaries. These scholars emphasize Hamas’ continued cohesiveness and consensus-based decision-making as more vital to the group’s evolution and strategic choices.

perceived purity of the organization, external leaders were linked with an increase in violence that helped undermine negotiations between the internal leadership and the PA, namely the suicide attacks in 1996 (Mishal and Sela, 2000, 75-6). The divided power structure and the resulting vested interests in maintaining the status quo generated inertia that inhibited Hamas' ability to adapt to a changed environment.

In addition to separating internal and external leaders, Hamas was organized to isolate the Qassam Brigades, the group's military wing established in the early 1990s (Hroub, 2006). The Qassam Brigades were separated from the other aspects of the organization as a security measure, yet the isolation produced a inward perspective that favored armed attacks above all else (McCormick (2003) discusses the potential for violent escalation due to isolation). This branch of Hamas derived its power and authority from the ability to carry out attacks. Any attempt to curb that violence threatened the branch's identity and subsequent survival. If internal leaders negotiated with the PA to reduce the levels of violence, the Qassam Brigades would no longer have a purpose. Thus, similar to the actions of the externally based leadership, the Qassam Brigades also opposed any agreement or dialogue that threatened its power.

Hamas' identity and brand also contributed to inertia. Hamas established itself as both a religious and a nationalist organization and these dual roles created friction within a changing environment. The majority of Hamas' supporters were drawn to the group's uncompromising brand. Increasingly militant, these constituents remained fully committed to the armed liberation of Palestinian. Hamas relied heavily on these supporters, as the group had not gained widespread appeal. Any adaptation that would result in a shift away from the goals and strategies outlined in the group's Charter would be perceived as betraying the group's founding mission. Yet, as a nationalist movement, Hamas needed to appeal to the broader Palestinian population who strongly supported peace. The potential for political compromise introduced by the Accords

created a distinct dilemma for Hamas' brand. Mishal and Sela (2000) aptly summarize the tension Hamas faced:

Conformity to Hamas's stated religious doctrine would certainly signal consistency and adherence to the 'great tradition' of Islam and thereby strengthen the organization's credibility among its followers and adversaries alike. But conformity to the doctrine might undermine the support and sympathy of many Palestinians, particularly those in the Gaza Strip, who hope that the peace process will end their social and economic hardships, (47).

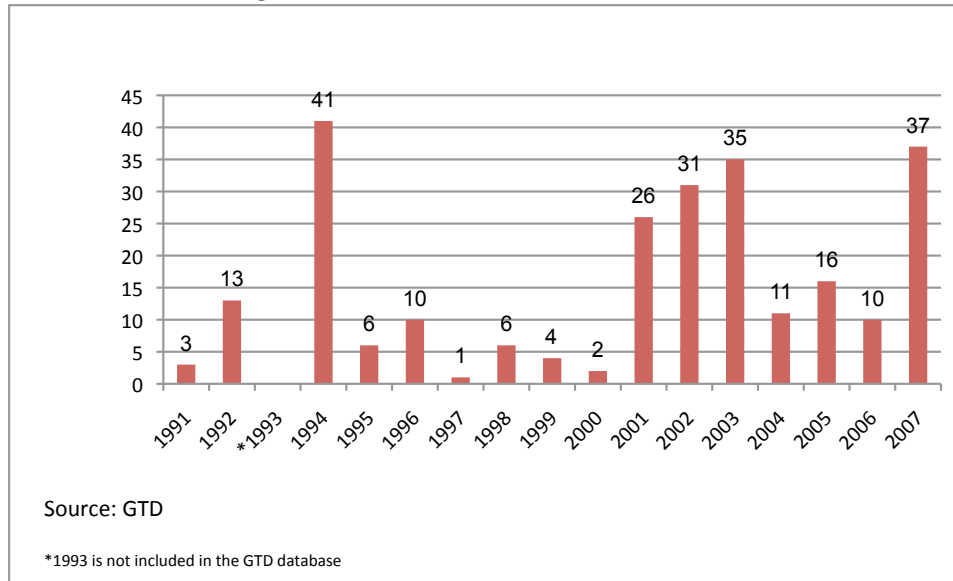
Hamas' dual identities generated contrasting objectives that adversely affected its ability to act.

Structural form, vested interests, and identity generated inertial pressures that prevented Hamas from adapting its strategy in time with a changing environment. When the Oslo Accords introduced new environmental conditions, Hamas continued to pursue attacks and even increased the stakes by utilizing suicide bombs. The lack of adaptation resulted in severe consequences for the organization. Despite the fact attacks against Israel and against the Accords were in line with Hamas' goals, within the new environmental conditions, armed attacks were viewed as spoiler behavior rather than a fight for liberation (Kydd and Walter, 2002; Stedman, 1997).

Hamas' inertia also affected its performance. As a militant group, Hamas marked its level of influence and success by the number of attacks it committed; these constituted a public signal that Hamas continued to fight for Palestinian rights and served as a viable alternative to the PLO/Palestinian Authority. Although Hamas' use of suicide attacks aided its visibility in the wider Palestinian context, the decrease in the number of armed attacks indicates that Hamas' capacity to carry out attacks was constrained. According to this measure, Hamas was not performing as well as it had been (Figure 3.1).

The inability to adapt in response to a changing environment also had broader

Figure 3.1: Number of Hamas Attacks



implications for Palestinians as a whole. According to B'tselem (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, a highly respected human rights organization), the number of detained Palestinians rose steadily between 1993 and 1997.<sup>16</sup> Although B'tselem does not provide a breakdown of group affiliation for detainees, supporting qualitative research indicates that hundreds of Hamas members and supporters were arrested and detained by both Israeli forces and Palestinian police (Kristianasen, 1999; Mishal and Sela, 2000; Tamimi, 2007).

In conjunction with targeting the opposition, Israel also utilized collective punishment against the Territories as a whole, particularly in response to suicide bombings. These policies had a significantly adverse effect on the Palestinian economy. Poverty and unemployment increased exponentially (B'tselem, 2010; Lein, 2001, Roy, 1999). Trade was restricted into and out of the Territories, reducing economic development; GDP dropped by 20% between 1992 and 1997 (B'tselem 2010). In 1994, poll results

<sup>16</sup>Administrative detention refers to arrests and detentions without trial. B'tselem statistics indicate that 125 people were detained in 1993, 163 in 1994, 224 in 1995, 267 in 1996 and 354 in 1997. (B'tselem, N.d.)

from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) indicate that 40% of respondents believed that their economic situation was worse a year after signing the Oslo Accords and in 1996, 66% of respondents stated that the peace process negatively affected the Palestinian economy.<sup>17</sup> Hamas' attacks, particularly suicide operations, were directly related to Israeli economic and punitive policies against the Territories. 30% of Palestinians blamed Hamas and the PIJ for Israel's actions.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, PSR polling results indicate that support for Hamas never exceeded 20% and declined slightly over this period. The stagnation in the level of support stands in stark contrast to Fatah; support for Hamas' main competitor never dropped below 34% during this period (see Figure 3.2). Even among core constituents, Hamas' failure to achieve its stated goals through armed struggle tested their resolve. Although numbers of defections or levels of dissatisfaction among Hamas members are not available, Sara Roy (2000; 2003) notes that, "the defection of younger Hamas cadres, disillusioned by the failure of their leadership to achieve any meaningful political change, further contributed to Hamas's decline..." (14). Among members of Hamas' more militant core, the failure to undermine the peace process or force additional concessions was perceived as ineffective performance.

The changing environment and negative performance as a result of the failure to adapt should have signaled Hamas' decline and the emergence of new organizations that were capable of capitalizing on the emerging political opportunities. However, not only did Hamas recover its position, it later adopted a political platform and successfully participated in municipal and legislative elections. Additionally, Fatah also adapted throughout this period, first by shifting from a dissident group committed

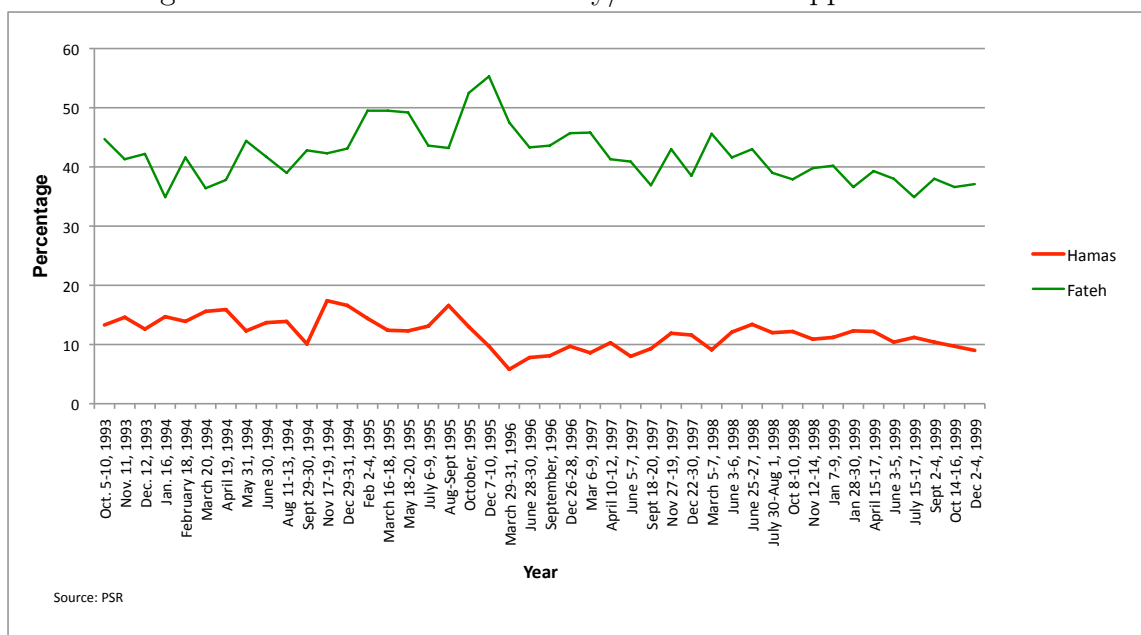
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<sup>17</sup>Prior to 2000, the PSR was called the Center for Palestinian Survey and Research (CPRS). For continuity, I will refer to polls conducted before and after 2000 as a product of the PSR.

<sup>18</sup>It should be noted that 50% of respondents placed the blame with Israel.



Figure 3.2: Level of Political Party/Movement Support 1993-1999



to violence to a political party negotiating with Israel, to the leading governing body in the Territories. Population ecology cannot explain this adaptive process.

### 3.5 Evaluation

Population ecology lays out very distinct expectations for organizational adaptation. As noted above the theory posits that inertial pressures reduce the likelihood groups will adapt. As a result, organizational change results from the decline and emergence of organizations rather than the organizational-level adaptation. As expected, the dissident groups examined were subject to inertial pressures (Proposition 1). Specifically, Hamas' structure, the rhetoric of its public statements and Charter, and the various power centers that derived authority from continued violence all contributed to maintaining a strategy of violence, despite an unsupportive population and a hostile external environment. As a result of these inertial pressures, Hamas' performance declined. The ability to launch attacks decreased, members were arrested and detained, the Territories

as a whole experienced crackdowns and repression, and the group lost public support.

The theory anticipates that resistance to adaptation reduces the likelihood of organization-level adaptation. Rather organizations will decline and emerge as the environment shifts (Proposition 2). Thus, we should expect that inertial pressures would eventually contribute to Hamas' marginalization and eventual failure. However, a broad overview of the group's trajectory reveals this was not the case. Beginning in the late 1990s, the environment shifted once again to privilege violent strategies. The lack of real progress on the peace process and Israel's decision to unilaterally withdraw from Southern Lebanon (which it had occupied since 1982) in 2000 and the Gaza Strip in 2005 contributed to the view that non-violence was not producing desired results for the Palestinian people (Bennet, 2001). Heightened tensions on both sides of the conflict led to the Al-Aqsa Intifada from which Hamas emerged as the leading and most credible faction. The return to violence vindicated Hamas' hardline stance in the intervening years.

One explanation for why Hamas' decline in the 1990s did not lead to its failure can be found in the brief time period between the signing of the Oslo Accords and the return to violence. Yet, population ecology also fails to account for Hamas' adaptation in 2004 toward formal political participation.<sup>19</sup> At this time, Hamas formed a political party, under the name Change and Reform, and ran successfully in municipal elections held in 2004 and 2005. Hamas then parlayed its good showing in municipal elections and ran, and won, the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council. Rather than experience organizational decline resulting from internal constraints, Hamas adapted its form and identity to regain and maintain its role as a leading Palestinian nationalist movement. Proposition 2 fails to be satisfied.

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<sup>19</sup>Since its founding, Hamas participated in, and won, student and union elections. These elections indicated the organization's popularity, but did not consist of any governing responsibilities.

Similarly, population ecology also fails to account for Fatah's transition from an armed guerrilla movement to the primary political organization within the Palestinian Territories. Although the examination above focuses exclusively on the inertial pressures present in Hamas, similar constraints most likely affected Fatah's trajectory as well. Sunk costs, vested interests and identity were also a concern within Fatah. Both organizations were able to overcome internal constraints and adapt to a changing environment, allowing them to survive long past the expectations laid out by population ecology.

However, population ecology does provide a useful framework for examining the population-level influences that contributed to the emergence of new organizations and the shape these organizations adopted. Initial Palestinian nationalist movements, exemplified by ANM, emerged during a period of pan-Arabism; the push for Palestinian rights was encompassed under this broader goal. When the environment shifted, making Arab unity unlikely, the ANM lost its influence; the organization was too entwined with the conditions of a specific environment. As the ANM declined, Fatah and the PLO emerged as the primary groups promoting Palestinian nationalism. While the PLO built on the support of surrounding states (indeed, Arab states initially created the PLO), it pursued Palestinian liberation as a primarily Palestinian issue. Additionally, Fatah and the other members of the PLO at this time pursued the same goal through the same identity: secular Palestinian nationalism. However, these groups were challenged in the late 1970s and into the 1980s by the emergence of political and militant Islamism. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas both emerged during this time, combining the nationalism of their predecessors with the new religious fervor sweeping the region. In each phase, the population of organizations resembled each other (Proposition 3).

In each stage, the Palestinian nationalist movement was shaped by environmental factors. Pan-Arabism gave way to secular Palestinian nationalism which has in turn made room for religious-nationalist groups. However, as the environment shifted, these organizations, particularly Fatah and Hamas, were not ‘selected out’ as predicted by population ecology. Although inertia did play a role in explaining organizational behavior, it did not prevent adaptation at the organizational level.

# Chapter 4

## Punctuated Equilibrium and the Adaptation of Dissident Groups

### 4.1 Punctuated Equilibrium

The previous chapter examined adaptation through the lens of population ecology, which posits that organizational inertia reduces the likelihood of adapting (or adapting at an adequate rate) to environmental changes. Rather, the theory argues that the environment effectively ‘selects’ organizations; those with the necessary characteristics to compete in a given environment are likely to survive while those without will decline and fail. New organizations emulating the qualities of the survivors will emerge. The cycling in and out of organizations in response to a changing environment places adaptation at the population level.

Punctuated equilibrium provides an alternative means of examining the adaptive process of organizations. While the theory highlights the role of inertia in generating resistance to adaptation, it argues that organizations can adapt through a concentrated process of reorientation. During these short bursts of change, the organization’s primary functions and qualities shift to better align with the changed environment.

Punctuated equilibrium combines inertia, gradual change and radical transformation to produce a theory of organizational adaptation. Proponents of the theory, namely Tushman and Romanelli (1985) and Gersick (1991), posit that organizations adapt through periods of stasis, in which an organization’s core activities (strategy, structure, and identity) are reinforced, and reorientations, in which the core domains change dramatically. This process of adaptation occurs in concentrated temporal spans at the organizational level.<sup>1</sup>

The strategy, structure and identity established when an organization is founded influences future choices (Gersick, 1991). These core domains or deep structure (Gersick, 1991) are fundamental to the organization’s functioning and contribute to inertia. As Gersick (1991) notes, “As long as the deep structure is intact, it generates a strong inertia, first to prevent the system from generating alternatives outside its own boundaries, then to pull any deviations that do occur back in line” (19). Similar to population ecology, the concepts of core domains and deep structure highlight the inertial properties inherent in an organization’s strategy, structure and identity.

Punctuated equilibrium also highlights the interdependent nature of organizational elements as contributing to inertia. Proponents of the theory argue that organizations are composed of various elements that both reinforce and are reinforced by others; these components work in tandem to maximize performance (Miller and Friesen, 1980). A shift in a single element, such as strategy, without a corresponding adjustment in supporting elements, such as structure, would generate misalignment and reduce performance. The need to adapt multiple components in order to retain alignment with the external environment is costly and difficult, thus increasing resistance to adaptation.

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<sup>1</sup>Similar mechanisms for organizational change did not originate with punctuated equilibrium. In early 20th century, Kurt Lewin developed the concept of planned change and the process of “freezing,” “moving,” and “refreezing” states of equilibrium.(Barnes, 2004; Hoogendoorn et al., 2007). Future research may benefit from linking the development of these early influences to other applicable fields.

Expanding the concept of interdependence, Tushman and Romanelli also emphasize that an organization's network of relationships contributes to inertia. These networks "legally and normatively constrain organizations to an ongoing commitment to established activities and relationships," (Romanelli and Tushman, 1994, 1144). Any adaptation by one organization affects the other organizations to which it is connected, including clients, suppliers and other constituents. The threat of disrupting such a network generates resistance to change.

Inertia characterizes periods of stasis (also called convergence or equilibrium). As Tushman et al. (1986) note, these periods of relative stability can both benefit and disadvantage an organization's performance. On the one hand, periods of stasis allow for the development of "social and technical consistencies which are the key sources of success," but these same qualities "may also be the seeds of failure if environments change," (36). That is, repeated processes contribute to efficiency and build expertise, but these same procedures can hurt an organization's performance if they are no longer effective in a new environment. During stasis, the organization (and organizational leaders) engages in incremental changes to maintain alignment among its organizational elements as well as with its environment. These adjustments include refining policies and procedures, training personnel, and emphasizing the organization's mission and identity (Tushman, Newman and Romanelli, 1986). While these incremental changes maximize an organization's performance in a given environment by reinforcing set routines, they do not contribute to radical change that is often required in the face of a crisis or major external change.

Despite strong inertial pressures, punctuated equilibrium posits that adaptation still occurs. Proponents argue that significant changes occur in short, discontinuous jolts, which are necessary to overcome inertia. During reorientations most, if not all, the

organization's core elements shift, including strategy, structure, and identity. Reorientations do not occur in set stages or patterns (Lant and Mezias, 1992; Tushman and Romanelli, 1985) and the outcomes of reorientations are not always beneficial (Gersick, 1991, 20). However, as Tushman et al. (1986) note, "inaction in the face of performance crisis and/or environmental shifts is a certain recipe for failure," (39). Once a reorientation has been completed, it then introduces a new period of stasis.

Proponents of punctuated equilibrium cite multiple catalysts for reorientations. Tushman and Romanelli (1985) point to sustained declines in performance and significant changes in the environment, such as new legal regulations or the introduction of new technology. They also point to changes in the internal metrics of performance. That is, the organization may choose a new standard by which to measure performance that may affect strategy, structure or values. For instance, corporate social responsibility advocates push for the inclusion of a 'triple bottom line' into the decision-making behaviors of firms. Rather than simply seek to maximize profit, the triple bottom line encourages corporations to evaluate how their operations influence people and the environment. Companies that have incorporated the triple bottom line into their production have a new metric against which to compare performance. Balancing profit against the effect on broader populations and the planet may induce the company to adapt its strategy, structure and values to better achieve all three goals.

Gersick (1991) argues that organizational growth also can prompt adaptation. The core competencies that supported an organization during its emergence may no longer be suited to a stage of operational maturity. The organization needs to adapt in order to account for its growth and expansion. Finally, Miller (1982) places the incentive to change on a cost calculation. He argues that adaptation from one gestalt to another is costly. As a result, organizational leaders need to weigh the costs of being partially misaligned to that of investing in new core domains. When the costs of being misaligned



become greater than the cost to adapt, reorientations occur.

Punctuated equilibrium also highlights the role of leaders in initiating and guiding adaptation (Tushman and Romanelli, 1985; Tushman, Newman and Romanelli, 1986). In particular, theorists emphasize that new leaders, from outside the organization, are better able to recognize the need to adapt as well as guide the organization through the adaptive process. Tushman et al. (1986) argues that “the executive team must direct the content of frame-breaking change *and* provide the energy, vision, and resources to support, and be role models for, the new order,” (41, emphasis in the original). Leaders hired from outside the organization are not steeped in the organization’s culture and are therefore better positioned to break through inertia and introduce (necessary) discontinuous changes. Thus, punctuated equilibrium incorporates agency into the adaptive process; organizations (or organizational leaders) are able to recognize the need to adapt and can initiate significant changes to break through organizational inertia and align core domains to a new operational context.

## **4.2 Punctuated Equilibrium and Dissident Group Adaptation**

Punctuated equilibrium can also provide an alternative framework for examining the adaptive process of dissident organizations. Although this theory incorporates inertia as fundamental to a group’s development, it also provides the means by which an organization can adapt in response to environmental changes and performance pressures.

Punctuated equilibrium predicts that groups become “locked in” to patterns of behavior due to inertia, generating a period of stasis. As outlined in greater detail above, sunk costs, vested interests, group identity, and relationships with constituents encourage dissident groups to maintain the status quo. Additionally, dissident groups

develop interconnected organizational elements that operate in tandem to maximize performance, much like a gestalt. Sinno (2008) connects particular structural forms to environmental contingencies and Sinno and Khanani (2009) examine how particular strategy-structure pairings affect organization behavior and influence the likelihood of adaptation.<sup>2</sup> In both works, the authors emphasize the connections, and optimal groupings, of certain organizational elements that make some patterns of behavior more likely than others. The assumption underlying these findings is that in order to adopt new behaviors or strategies, an organization will have to develop new pairings between strategy, structure and other organizational elements. In other words, the group needs to adapt to a new gestalt.

Thus, in contrast to population ecology, punctuated equilibrium posits that inertial pressures can be overcome in order for adaptation to occur. Indeed, many conflict scholars examine mechanisms by which to transform violent dissident groups to non-violent political parties, an adaptation that would require significant changes in structure, strategy and identity (de Zeeuw, 2008; Manning, 2004; Söderberg, 2004; van Engeland and Rudolph, 2008). These scholars emphasize changing the environment in order to induce adaptation or increasing the costs of utilizing violent strategies by enhancing defenses or retaliating. This view is articulated by Sandler and Enders (2004) who write, “Success in raising the price of all modes of terrorist attacks would induce terrorists to shift into legal protests and other non-violent actions to air grievances,” (312-13). The underlying assumption of these conflict resolution strategies is to create environmental pressures strong enough to overcome inertia and initiate adaptation.

Punctuated equilibrium anticipates that short, radical changes are needed to break through inertia. A similar anticipation over the rate of change does not appear readily

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<sup>2</sup>Sinno (2008) builds on contingency theory, research in organizational theory that examines optimal pairings between structure and environments (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967)

in most conflict literature on dissident groups. Rather, when the literature does discuss adaptation in depth, it emphasizes the relative nature of rates of change. Organizations need to adapt at pace with a changing environment to prevent being marginalized or missing opportunities (McCormick, 2003, 499). Referring specifically to radical changes, Jackson et al. (2005a; 2005b) discuss discontinuous adaptation in the context of organizational learning and change. The authors define discontinuous change as “learning aimed at entirely new activities making large shifts in the way the group plans and acts... As a general rule, discontinuous learning tends to happen very quickly,” (Jackson et al., 2005a, 15-16). However the authors do not provide much guidance as to what constitutes “large shifts” or what time frame would justify “quickly.” Still, the authors echo aspects of Tushman and Romanelli’s (1985) concept of reorientation: radical changes that occur over a short period of time.

Related causes of reorientations identified by organizational theorists also have been cited as sources of adaptation within conflict literature. That is, significant disruptions are necessary to induce or provide incentives for engaging in major organizational change. Environmental changes, such as increased repression or expanded democratization, can generate pressures on a group to adapt. For instance, the majority of research on dissident group adaption emphasizes the group’s interaction with its external environment. Irvin (1999) aptly summarizes this trend when she writes, “These shifts or innovations in strategies by the movement are viewed primarily as responses to government actions, that is, as being exogenously rather than endogenously generated. Indeed, variations in strategies are explained almost entirely in terms of external constraints...” (12).

Environmental changes also affect group performance, another trigger of reorientations (Tushman and Romanelli, 1985). Organizations perform best when they fit or are aligned with the environment in which they compete. Research examining alignment

finds a positive relationship between fit and performance: the better the fit between an organization and its operational context, the better its performance (Jennings and Seaman, 1994; Miles and Snow, 1978). Conversely an organization that does not match its environment risks decreased performance. Misalignment means the organization is not maximizing its utility; the strategy employed is ineffective or not competitive given the group's operational context. Thus, decreased performance indicates the need to undergo adaptation.

Performance pressures can also come from the preferences or norms of a group's support base. Dissident groups rely on their supporters for resources and legitimacy and therefore adopt strategies that align with constituent preferences in order to maintain that support. Constituents are unlikely to back a group that consistently deviates from preferences or violates norms of acceptable behavior. Supporters will punish the group by withdrawing support, defecting to a rival dissident group (should one be available) or go so far as to abandon the cause and collude with the opposition government. Additionally, the pressure on performance increases as constituents' preferences change; groups need to adapt strategies to maintain alignment and support. Groups that fail to match changing constituent preferences risk losing support and experiencing depressed performance.

For example, the PIRA's short-lived experiment with human bombs demonstrates the risk to performance by violating norms. Human bombs consisted of kidnapping non-IRA members and forcing them to drive explosive-laden vehicles into various targets. Used only a few times, this tactic was met with extreme public backlash. Bloom and Horgan (2008) note that PIRA supporters and non-supporters alike denounced the attacks as cowardly and stood in firm opposition to their continued use. Although the group quickly abandoned the campaign, it permanently damaged the organization's credibility and its armed campaign overall. They write:

The consensus at the time was that the IRA Army Council had seriously misjudged the mood and tolerance of even its own supporters. What Reginald Maulding [former Home Secretary in the 1970s] once famously described as Northern Ireland's 'acceptable level of violence' had been fundamentally breached. A psychological barrier had been crossed and the IRA was going to pay for it (602).

The human bomb campaign violated the norms of the PIRA's constituents and cost the group both tacit and active support.

Similarly, ETA also miscalculated its constituents' level of acceptable violence and faced a backlash that adversely affected the group's support among all but its most fervent supporters. In 1997, ETA kidnapped a young local politician, Miguel Angel Blanco. The kidnappers demanded ETA prisoners be released in exchange. When those demands were not met, Blanco was killed. His death sparked nation-wide protests against the group. Elizabeth Nash of *The Independent* (a United Kingdom based newspaper) reported that two million protestors flooded the streets of Madrid and Barcelona and protestors in the Basque region retaliated against ETA's political wing, throwing eggs and rocks at the Herri Batsuna headquarters (1997). As a result of the miscalculation and backlash, ETA adapted its strategy; the group negotiated a short-term ceasefire the following year and never regained its former strength. In both cases, the PIRA and ETA faced decreased levels of support due to strategies and actions that violated constituent preferences and norms.

Pressure to adapt also results from changes to the group's own internal metric for measuring performance. Often connected to changes in the external environment, such as shifts in government policies or other significant events, the group may recast the standards by which it determines success. These changes may require the group to adapt in order to compete more successfully within a new, self-imposed, environment. For instance, a military stalemate between a violent dissident group and the opposition government may generate pressure on leaders to calculate performance differently and

shift the fight to a political battlefield (should that option be available). That is, failure to perform well through violent means may induce group leadership to shift its focus to how it can achieve the same goal through other strategies, such as influencing policy through political contestation. Measuring performance by political gains requires that the organization adapts its strategy and supporting structure.

Gersick (1991) also highlights general growth and maturity as creating pressure to adapt. Although a life-cycle framework to examining dissident group adaptation is less common, some scholars do utilize this approach. In particular, Thomas and Casebeer (2004) argue that dissident groups proceed through distinct stages of gestation, growth, maturity and then transformation. They argue that as the organization develops it also becomes increasingly formalized in its structure. However, the authors do not assume adaptation occurs across multiple core domains.

Proponents of punctuated equilibrium also highlight the role of leadership in initiating and guiding reorientation. Leaders in dissident organizations often play a significant role in defining an organization's goals and strategies. Several scholars argue that strong leadership and elite intervention are necessary to adaptation (van Engeland and Rudolph, 2008; Manning, 2004). For instance, charismatic leaders can provide legitimacy to strategic adaptations that would otherwise deviate from an organization's stated goals. One of the clearest illustrations of this is the role Gerry Adams played in pushing the PIRA to abandon abstentionism, participate in elections and finally to abandon a violent strategy completely. Although extremist members broke away from the group to form the militant Real IRA, the majority of the PIRA's members and supporters followed Adams in adapting to increased politicization.

While group leaders can guide adaptation, it is unlikely that dissident groups will experience adaptation as the result of introducing leaders from outside the organization. Most dissident groups are too isolated to allow individuals to assume leadership roles

without having risen through the organization. Security concerns and the need to indoctrinate members in the group's culture and identity mean leaders must prove their credibility as a group member and their loyalty to the organization. Rather, those leaders who can aid adaptation are generally policy entrepreneurs who recognize changes in the environment, shifts in constituent preferences or declining performance.

### 4.3 Expectations

Punctuated equilibrium provides an alternative mechanism for examining and predicting organizational change. Similar to population ecology, punctuated equilibrium also incorporates the concept of inertia in explaining adaptation. The theory posits that inertia defines periods of stasis. Examining the development of dissident groups, we expect to observe periods of stasis, in which a group's current strategy, structure and identity are reinforced. Stasis is interrupted by reorientations, periods of dramatic change in the group's core domains. Thus,

*Proposition 1: Adaptation occurs through periods of stasis followed by dramatic changes to an organization's core domains.*

Reorientations will feature active adaptation of structure and strategy. Structural changes include the creation or elimination of divisions devoted to a specific task. Strategic changes include statements or activities that deviate from the group's originally stated goals.<sup>3</sup> Evidence of strategic changes also include the type of members leaders attempt to recruit. New members with different skill sets indicate that group

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<sup>3</sup>Reliance on statements by dissident groups is an imperfect measure of strategic change, as groups have an incentive to bluff about their intentions. However, lack of access to the decision-makers within a group inhibit the ability to achieve full information concerning strategic choices. Statements and actions prove the best available indicators of strategic change.

leaders are cultivating individuals who are better suited to carry out a new strategy. Additionally, actions that deviate from a group's charter or proactive changes to a group's mission or identity indicate that core values have shifted. Finally, due to the interdependence of these organizational variables, we should expect core domains to change concurrently with one another.

Punctuated equilibrium also anticipates that reorientations will be rapid, as short bursts are necessary to overcome inertia. Although determining what temporal period constitutes "rapid" is inherently arbitrary, I argue that reorientations should occur within a year of the first domain change. That is, other organizational variables should change within a year of the first change detected. Maintaining alignment with the external environment, and among organizational variables, is vital to a group's performance. Among dissident groups, the pressure to remain aligned is heightened, as misalignment can affect a group's survival in a hostile environment. As McCormick (2003) notes, "Any failure to adapt in the face of an increasingly permissive environment will result in a loss of opportunity. A similar failure in an increasingly restrictive environment can force it out of business," (499). Unlike firms, whose inability to adapt may result in profit loss, the inability to adequately adapt can mark the decline and death of a dissident group. Finally, the organization should return to stasis, a period of equilibrium in which inertia locks in the new strategy, structure and identity created during reorientation.

*Proposition 2: Adaptation will occur over short temporal periods.*

Reorientation begins as the result of triggers that are strong enough to upset a group's current strategic and structural choices. As discussed at length above, these triggers can include major environmental changes (increased government repression or



expanding opportunities to engage in the political process), sustained low or declining performance (the inability to engage in attacks or crackdowns on the group), or decreasing support from the group's constituency. In particular, for dissident groups that rely heavily on their support base, a sustained withdrawal or active backlash by supporters will adversely affect a group's performance and indicate a need to adapt. We should expect to see similar performance pressures lead to a significant adaptation within the organization.

*Proposition 3: Significant environmental changes, low performance or shifts in constituent preferences will increase the likelihood dissident groups will adapt their core domains.*

The following section outlines the evolution of Hamas through the framework of punctuated equilibrium.

## **4.4 Punctuated Equilibrium and the Development of Hamas**

Hamas originated in the Islamic Center, founded by the Muslim Brotherhood in 1973 and headed by Sheikh Ahmed Yasin.<sup>4</sup> The Center became the locus of Islamic social, cultural and educational activities in the Palestinian Territories as well as the source of a significant social service network, providing necessary goods to an impoverished population. The Center established itself as non-political and non-violent; posing no threat to the Israeli leadership, the organization was allowed to continue its activities

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<sup>4</sup>Following Abu-Amr (1993) and Robinson (2004), I also consider the Islamic Center Hamas' initial incarnation.

without external interference.

The unexpected outbreak of the Intifada in 1987 generated significant environmental change and created pressure on the Islamic Center to adapt. The organization's identity and brand as a non-violent social service provider generated resistance to engaging in the uprising. Yet the organization risked being marginalized if it failed to adapt to the emerging norm of armed resistance. This risk came from two fronts: the Center's own members and competition from other nationalist groups.

Despite the Center's stated non-partisan position, it attracted constituents who were increasingly political. Gunning (2007) argues that the new generation of the Center's membership "...had lesser stakes in the *status quo* and thus were more open to the increasingly radical tactics proposed by the nationalist factions..." (35). Additionally, many of the new constituents actively protested and some served time in prison. Although the Center did not actively recruit a particular type of member, its members were increasingly young militants whose personal experiences biased them toward active participation in protests (violent or otherwise) against Israel. When the Intifada began, many of the Center's supporters were drawn to the conflict, which placed pressure on the Center's commitment to non-violence. Gunning (2007) writes, "The shift from prioritising Islamic revival to privileging armed struggle, was made both imperative and possible by the fact that it resonated with the life experiences of the Brotherhood's changing constituency," (38). If the Center remained uninvolved, it would lose its relevancy among its constituents.

Additionally, the Center faced pressure from its competitors, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PIJ shared the Center's roots in the Muslim Brotherhood and as such, appealed to a similar base of supporters. The PIJ distinguished itself from the Center through its rejection of the Brotherhood's pacifism; indeed the PIJ's hardline stance against Israel and its use

of low-scale, armed operations earned it credibility among university students, a key constituency for the Center (Tamimi, 2007, 48). The PIJ was primed to take advantage of the Intifada and increasingly attracted the Center's members. The PLO also used the Intifada to regain its prominence in the region. Having lost legitimacy and support due to its ejection from Lebanon in the early 1980s, the PLO could regain its lost status by leading the masses. In either case, the Intifada benefitted the Center's rivals, leading to pressure to adapt in order to compete.

The environmental change caused by the Intifada, the changing preferences of constituents and the pressure from competitors threatened the Center's performance and induced the need to adapt. To counter these risks, the Center's leaders, including Sheikh Yasin, formed a separate armed branch, Hamas, to participate in the uprising.<sup>5</sup> Hamas' Charter emphasized the religious and nationalist nature of the new wing as well as the primacy of violence (*jihad*).<sup>6</sup> The Center's creation of a distinct branch with an entirely new goal and identity indicates that the organization engaged in a reorientation. Additionally, Hamas was established in the course of a year, from the outbreak of the Intifada to the release of the group's Charter in 1988.

In the years following its establishment, Hamas leaders reinforced its activities and identity. It developed the infrastructure to support armed attacks, acquired weapons and trained members. The organization also took steps to improve its security against government crackdowns. When senior leaders of the movement were arrested and detained, the organization established an externally-based leadership and instituted greater bureaucracy. The increasing formalization of the institution created norms and standard operating procedures that were not dependent on the day-to-day input and

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<sup>5</sup>Several scholars (Mishal and Sela, 2000; Tamimi, 2007) argue that the Center's leaders had anticipated a turn to violence and had been training members and stocking weapons since the mid-1980s. However, the Center had not engaged in any overt structural or strategic changes prior to the Intifada.

<sup>6</sup>For additional detail concerning Hamas' Charter, see the previous chapter.

control from leaders. Such actions contributed to the group's stability and increased its resistance to change. It could be argued that the organization settled into a period of stasis, in which its subsequent actions reinforced its strategy, structure, and identity as a violent religious-nationalist group.

The organization faced another significant environmental change with the 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel. In addition to ending the Intifada and establishing the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestinian Legislative Council, the Accords also ushered in a new norm for Palestinian-Israeli interactions, placing Hamas, which had garnered its strength and popularity from its stringent rejection of negotiations and a commitment to armed struggle, at a distinct disadvantage. The negotiated agreement with Israel, coupled with the creation of the PLC, indicated that the environment was shifting toward one that supported non-violent interactions. Violent strategies, at which Hamas excelled and had used to become a leading organization in the Territories, no longer produced the same level of success as before.

Additionally, the broader Palestinian population strongly supported the Accords. A poll conducted by PSR in September 1993 found that close to 65% of respondents agreed with the proposed Gaza - Jericho First agreement (the first component of the Accords in which Israel would withdraw from Gaza and areas in the West Bank). A majority of respondents also felt that the opposition to the agreement did not present a better alternative and over 80% felt that the opposition should use democratic dialogue to express their views. The broader public was consistently supportive not only of the Accords but also of a shift in the environment that encouraged and supported negotiation and dialogue. In subsequent surveys from January 1994-August/September 1994 (4 surveys total), no less than 60% of respondents indicated their support for negotiations to continue. These preferences influenced Hamas' performance. As a nationalist movement, Hamas claimed to represent all Palestinians and deviating from

the public's preference for non-violence adversely affected the group's broader appeal.

The signing of the Oslo Accords and the high level of support among Palestinians indicated a major external change; the environment no longer privileged violent strategies. Hamas risked becoming irrelevant. Punctuated equilibrium predicts that such external shifts would trigger a reorientation; in this case, Hamas might develop a political party and moderate its positions. Instead, Hamas relied more heavily on its original core domains (strategy, structure and identity) and ratcheted up its use of violent tactics. According to Mishal and Sela (2000), "Its [Hamas'] conclusion was to continue the strategy of *jihad*, still perceived as the ultimate source of legitimacy and as a shield against any attempt by the PA to restrict the movement's activities or eliminate them altogether," (67). Additionally, Kydd and Walter (Kydd and Walter, 2002) argue that continued violence was intended to disrupt the peace process by undermining trust between the negotiating sides. According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), Hamas committed 41 separate attacks in 1994 alone (see Figure 3.1).

Most notably, Hamas introduced the use of suicide bombing attacks during this period. As noted in the previous chapter, the first attack, used in 1994, was in response to the killing of Palestinians at a mosque in Hebron. A series of attacks two years later, with support from the PIJ, were used in retaliation for the assassination of group leaders. Hamas framed its attacks as retribution for the deaths of Palestinians. The pointed justification for each attack can be viewed as an attempt to mollify the Palestinian population who may have felt that unrestrained or irrational violence undermined the peace process. Additionally, the justification served as an attempt to limit backlash from the PA and as way to maintain credibility among its own members by demonstrating the organization would still pursue armed attacks to protect Palestinians.

Yet, Hamas' attempts to undermine the peace process while also justifying its attacks failed to sway the public's support. According to PSR surveys conducted between September 1996 and February 2000 (18 surveys in total), support for the peace process ranged between 60% and 75%; the majority of Palestinians remained optimistic about the prospect of peace (see Figure 4.1). In surveys conducted between February 1995 and March 1997, a minority of respondents supported armed attacks against general Israeli targets. Regarding specific targets, only 18% of respondents supported armed attacks against civilians. A majority supported attacks against Israeli military and settlers (68% and 69% respectively). The distinctions made between target types indicate that Palestinians viewed the conflict as having clear boundaries; norms or thresholds existed concerning the acceptability of targets.<sup>7</sup> Violations of this norm produced backlash against the offending actor; in May 1996 and September 1997, poll results indicate that a majority of respondents opposed suicide attacks against civilians (approximately 70% and 56% respectively).

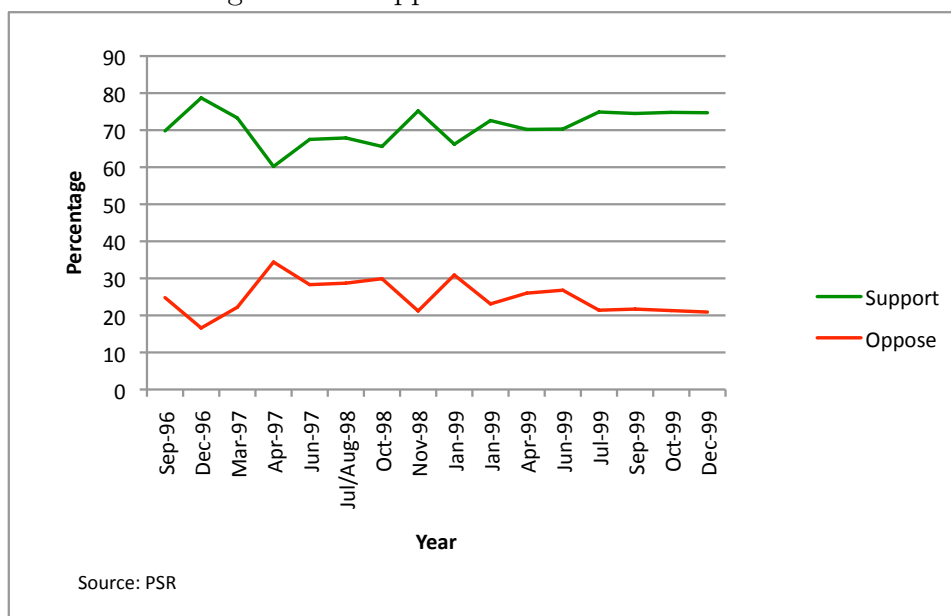
The continued attacks also prompted crackdowns against all opponents of the peace process by the PA and Israel. Hundreds of Palestinians were arrested under an Israeli policy of administrative detention. As noted in the previous chapter, B'tselem reported that the number of administrative detentions increased from 125 people in 1993 to 354 people in 1997 (B'tselem, N.d.). Additionally, Israel also pressured the PA to crack down on Hamas members. The provisions of the 1998 Wye River Memorandum mandated that the PA specifically target the armed opposition and dismantle Hamas' organizational infrastructure (Aruri, 1999).

Further, Israel utilized collective punishment against the Territories, notably closures, restricted travel, checkpoints, and home demolitions. These policies had severe

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<sup>7</sup>The high level of support for attacks against settlers was, in part, an artifact of the 1994 mass killing of Palestinians civilians by an Israeli settler in Hebron.

Figure 4.1: Support for the Peace Process



repercussions for the Palestinian economy; GDP declined, unemployment increased, and the poverty rate more than doubled (Eisenstadt, 2007; Social and Economic Development Group, 2006). Poll results indicate that Palestinians believed Hamas was responsible for the punitive measures Israel used.

The arrests and crackdowns, coupled with the lack of support by the broader Palestinian public, affected Hamas' influence and success. As a militant organization, Hamas charted its performance in the number of attacks it committed; these constituted a public signal of Hamas' strength and viability. Although suicide bombs heightened the group's visibility, the decrease in the number of attacks overall indicates that the group's capacity to carry out armed operations was constrained. According to this metric, Hamas was not performing as well as it had been (Figure 3.1). Additionally, the stalemate generated dissatisfaction and later defections from among Hamas' core supporters (Roy, 2003).

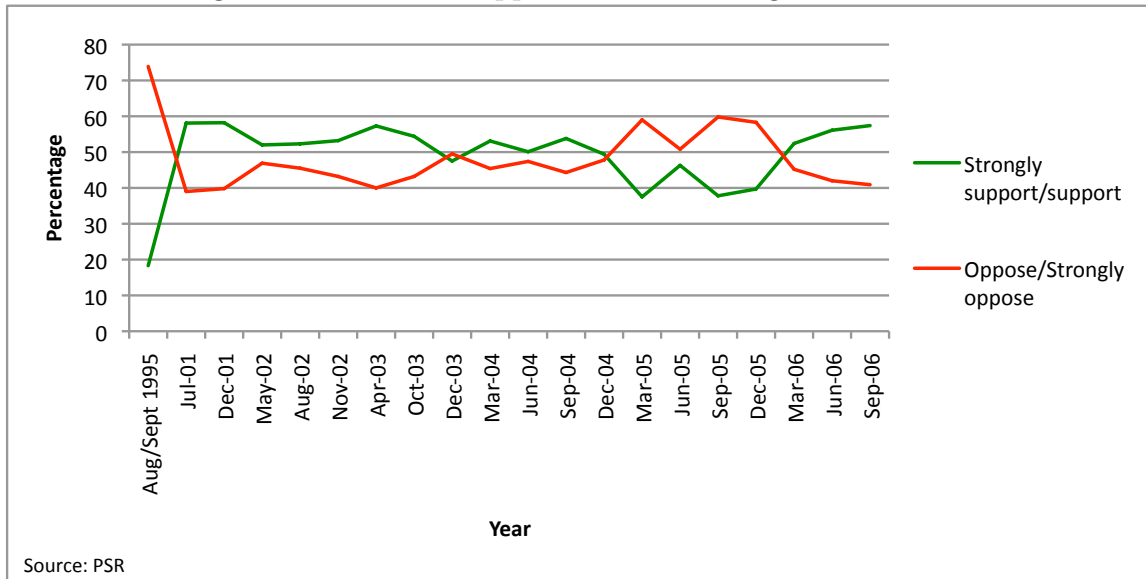
The 1993 Oslo Accords introduced a significant environmental change that created inconsistencies between Hamas' core domains and the external environment. Hamas

continued to use violence and it linked its identity and brand to the pursuit of *jihad* while the environment encouraged negotiation. Despite the external jolt (although Hamas anticipated self-rule was pending in the early 1990s, the actual signing of the Oslo Accords was a surprise), Hamas did not adapt to its changing circumstances. Instead, it dug in harder, initially increasing the number and severity of its attacks. As a result, the group's performance suffered. Tushman and Romanelli (1985) predicted performance decline resulting from an extended period of stasis. They write, "Prolonged attention to incremental adaptation of an inappropriate strategic orientation will lead to increased intraorganizational turbulence, further crises, and either failure or a reorientation," (204). Negative public perception, crackdowns on leaders and supporters, and wide-scale repression indicate that Hamas had maintained stasis longer than was beneficial.

Sustained low performance leads to organizational decline and potential death, and it is likely that Hamas would have suffered a similar fate if the environment maintained its trajectory. However, in 2000, a second mass uprising, the Al-Aqsa Intifada, erupted, shifting the environment again, this time toward increased support for violent strategies. The population's support for violence increased, specifically against Israeli civilians (Figure 4.2). Bloom's (2005) findings using polling data from the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre shows comparable results. The Palestinian public was strongly supportive of violence against civilians, including suicide attacks. Hamas, which had employed suicide attacks in the previous period, was posed to capitalize on the upwelling of support. Additionally, a majority of Palestinians saw armed struggle as achieving rights in ways negotiations could not. Asked on several PSR polls between July 2001 and March 2005, on average, 65% of respondents thought that armed confrontations achieved more rights than negotiations, as opposed to an average of 31% of respondents who did not (see Figure 4.3).



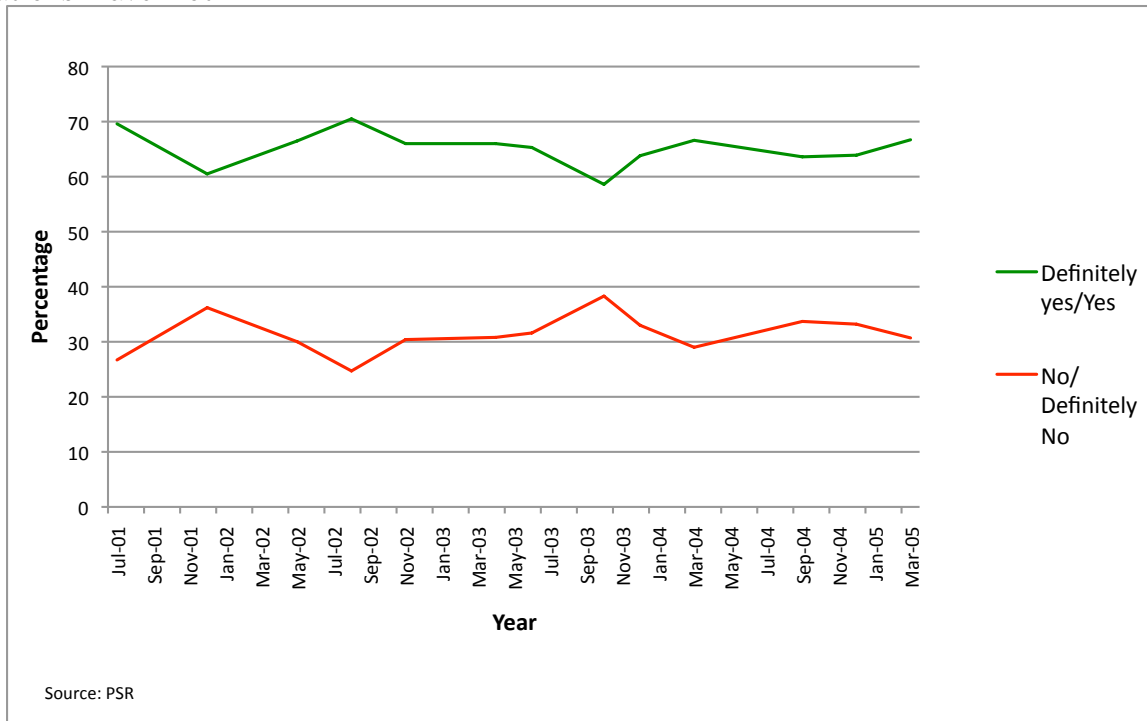
Figure 4.2: Level of Support for Attacks Against Civilians



Contributing to the support for violence was Israel’s decision in 2003 to unilaterally withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon argued the move was intended to reduce “the day-to-day friction and its victims on both sides,” (Sharon, 2005). However the decision was also seen as vindicating violent resistance. PSR polls conducted in the interim between Sharon’s announcement and the final withdrawal in 2005, indicate that, on average, 75% of respondents saw the move as a “victory of armed struggle,” (see Figure 4.4). Hamas’ attacks were seen as responsible for Israel’s withdrawal and Hamas benefitted from the perceived victory. Hamas increased the number of attacks it initiated during this time, signaling a high level of performance (see Figure 3.1). The group’s level of support also steadily increased (see Figure 4.5). The Al-Aqsa Intifada reinforced Hamas’ core domains; the declining level of performance it experienced in the post-Oslo period reversed and Hamas once again assumed its role as a leading organization in the Territories.

Hamas faced another environmental shift when the PA announced a series of municipal elections would take place between 2004 and 2005. Perhaps bolstered by its

Figure 4.3: Armed Confrontations Have Achieved Palestinian Rights in Ways Negotiations Have Not



successful performance during the Intifada and its increased level of public support, Hamas decided to participate. This decision constituted a significant change in the group's strategy, supporting structure and identity. In order to compete politically, the group needed to shift from its focus on *jihad* to domestic governing concerns. It also needed to adopt a political strategy, develop a political party and market itself as a viable political contender.

Hamas formed a political wing to stand in the elections and chose candidates who appealed to a broader audience, such as independents, some Christians and those without overt religious backgrounds (Gunning, 2007). Choosing these individuals indicates that Hamas was loosening its identity and brand as a extreme Islamist organization and focusing on electoral strategies that had a higher likelihood of success. As a result, Hamas performed much better than anticipated (see Table 4.1)

Figure 4.4: Perception of Israel's Withdrawal from Gaza



Table 4.1: Municipal Elections Results (popular vote in percentages)

Party	First Round	Second Round	Third Round	Fourth Round
Fatah	30	39	45	35
Hamas	31	32	31	44
Other	39	28	20	18

Source: Shikaki 2006a; percentages based on the author's calculations.

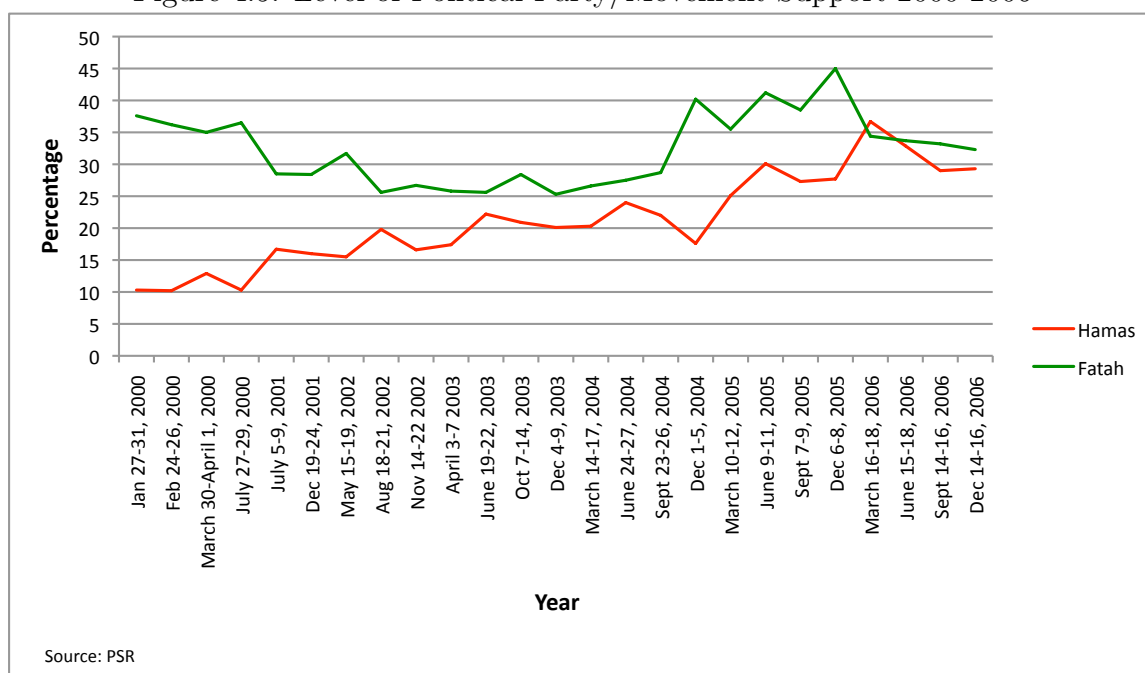
Local and foreign observers evaluated Hamas' governing of municipalities as generally positive, pointing to infrastructure improvements and increased tax revenue (Gunning, 2007; International Crisis Group, 2006).<sup>8</sup> Building on the momentum of its municipal election victories and taking advantage of the support for political contestation, Hamas decided to participate in the 2006 elections for the PLC, the legislative branch of the PA.

For the PLC elections, Hamas crystalized its political wing into a distinct party,

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<sup>8</sup>The 2006 International Crisis Group report also notes that Hamas has faced some accusations of mismanagement and a failure to increase employment. Overall, however, the reviews of Hamas' performance have been favorable.

Figure 4.5: Level of Political Party/Movement Support 2000-2006



Change and Reform, and ran on issues that were most pressing to the Palestinian public, including administrative reform, reducing corruption and reforming the judiciary, rather than the issues that defined Hamas according to its Charter (Gunning 2007, 154; for a complete translation of the Change and Reform platform, see Tamimi 2007, 292-316). The decision to focus on practical issues in the election demonstrates Hamas had adapted its identity and brand. By incorporating a viable political wing into its organization, Hamas expanded how it marketed itself to constituents. Hamas exceeded expectations in the 2006 elections, winning the majority (see Table 4.2).<sup>9</sup>

The electoral victory created a new equilibrium for Hamas, one characterized by governing and active political participation rather than solely militarized opposition to Israel and the PA. However, this new period is marked with fragility. While Hamas had

<sup>9</sup>The election consisted of two parts. Half of the seats were determined based on proportional representation (seats determined by Lists) and the other half was determined by majority vote for individual candidates in 16 districts (District).

Table 4.2: Palestinian Legislative Council Results

<b>Party</b>	<b>List (seats)</b>	<b>District (seats)</b>	<b>Total Seats</b>
Change and Reform	29	45	74
Fatah	28	17	45
Other Parties*	9	4	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>132</b>

\*Other parties consist of Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa, The Third Way, The Alternative, Independent Palestine and Independents.

Source: The Central Elections Commission Palestine 2006.

indicated its willingness to engage politically, it has remained a resistance movement. Leading the PLC requires Hamas to interact with Israel at a very high level. Israel controls a significant portion of the PA's funding, through customs and fees it collects and transfers to the PA. Israel influences the flow of imports and exports and controls key roads through the West Bank as well as movement into and out of Israel. In some cases, Israel also controls major utilities within the Territories. The day-to-day functioning of the Territories required close collaboration with Israel which generates tension with the group's continued goal of resistance.

Further, Hamas' ability to succeed in a new equilibrium requires the support of external actors who grant the group legitimacy in its new role. Western countries have refused to recognize Hamas as a credible political actor. The United States led an effort to isolate the organization by suspending aid and making its resumption contingent on the group's official recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence and acceptance of previously negotiated agreements. Such demands would require Hamas to disavow its history and abandon its cause.<sup>10</sup> Israel withheld customs and fees amounting to over \$500 million/month (International Crisis Group, 2007). The United States and Israel worked to prevent any money from reaching the Territories (Tamimi, 2007) and funds that did get in were channeled through Fatah's leader, President Abbas. These actions

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<sup>10</sup>Although Hamas adapted its identity in the 2004, and especially 2006, to include political participation in elections it previously rejected, the group had not given up its mission of resistance.

sparked a significant economic crisis within the Territories. PSR polls show that a year after the election, only 33% of Palestinians were satisfied with the Hamas government and over 90% thought conditions for Palestinians were bad or very bad.

The pressure on Hamas in the short period during which it exercised political control may have contributed to a shift back to violence. In June 2006, after a 16 month ceasefire, Hamas resumed its strategy of violence against Israel and in 2007 fought Fatah for control of Gaza. It also continued to engage in cross-border attacks that led to an Israeli incursion into Gaza in 2008. Whether or not Hamas will revert completely to armed resistance and forego governing remains to be seen. However, attempts to engage Hamas in a power-sharing government with Fatah, as well as make incremental progress on peace with Israel, continue.

## 4.5 Evaluation

As a framework for examining dissident group adaptation, punctuated equilibrium proves initially fruitful. It incorporates the qualities of inertia previously identified as shaping group strategic choices, such as sunk costs, vested interests and group identity. Yet, it also includes means by which groups can overcome these pressures. Adaptation is anticipated to occur rapidly and result in changes to an organization's structure, strategy and identity. Multiple historical precedents indicate that dissident groups can and do adapt - sometimes dramatically - in response to external changes. Indeed, much of the conflict resolution literature is based on the assumption that policy-makers can induce significant adaptation within groups to shift from violent opposition to non-violent political participation.

As punctuated equilibrium anticipated, Hamas did experience stasis and periods of significant reorientation to the group's core domains (Proposition 1). External events and environmental changes, such as the Intifada in 1987 and the call for elections in

2004 did prompt significant shifts in the organization (Proposition 3). In both cases, the group formed a new wing ( Hamas as a wing of the Islamic Center and Change and Reform, respectively) and expanded its current mission. In 1987, the Islamic Center leaders “effectively adopted *jihad* as a means of achieving national and religious redemption, recognizing the primacy of armed struggle to mobilize the masses, and taking the initiative in guiding the popular uprising,” (Mishal and Sela, 2000, 36). In 2004, Hamas officially adopted a viable political platform, which it formalized in 2006 under the banner Change and Reform. The political party also stood distinct from the group’s founding mission. Rather than serving as another mouthpiece for the group’s militant views, the party ran on a platform that emphasized domestic concerns, such as fighting corruption and initiating reform.

As predicted by Proposition 2, adaptation occurred relatively quickly. As expected, structural, strategic and identity changes took place within a year of implementation. The 1987 Intifada was unexpected, prompting the rapid development of an armed wing that was solidified by the release of the group’s Charter in 1988. Similarly, the group needed to adopt a broad-reaching political party shortly after municipal elections were called.<sup>11</sup>

However, Hamas failed to adapt in 1993, when the the PLO and Israel signed the Oslo Accords, ushering in a new period of engagement. Nor did the organization respond to continuously high levels of support for peace among the broader population. One could argue that Hamas needed to experience significant performance decline resulting from the refusal (or inability) to adapt in order to prompt a reorientation. However, in the seven years between the agreement and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa

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<sup>11</sup>Although Hamas had experience with low-level elections, it did not have a political apparatus to run multiple campaigns or to run a national campaign as required in 2006.

Intifada, Hamas did not engage in reorientation. Punctuated equilibrium provides little insight into how long or to what threshold an organization must experience decline before it is prompted to adapt. The anticipated catalysts of change did not always induce a reorientation; Proposition 3 was not fully satisfied.

Punctuated equilibrium improves upon population ecology by providing organizations agency to overcome inertia and adapt. However, the theory remains too vaguely defined to serve as a wholly useful means of evaluating and explaining dissident group adaptation. The anticipated triggers of change did not always generate a reorientation. Future research could examine whether particular catalysts prove more influential to decisions to adapt at different points in time or to different groups. Further, while it is often easy to track changes in firms' core domains, observing strategic, structural and identity changes within clandestine dissident groups poses significantly greater difficulty. The case of Hamas benefits from the extensive literature on the group's evolution as well as the length of the group's existence. Charting cycles of stasis and reorientation requires access to detailed group information over a long period of time. Thus, punctuated equilibrium does not fully explain dissident group adaptation.



# Chapter 5

## Strategic Choice and the Adaptation of Dissident Groups

### 5.1 Strategic Choice

A third means of examining adaptation is strategic choice, which emphasizes the interaction between an organization's leaders and the environment as well as the ability of leaders to guide and initiate adaptation. Child (1972) argued that an organization's decision-makers exercise choice over how and where to operate as well as how to respond to anticipated or unanticipated external changes. In this way, strategic choice is a "process whereby power-holders within organizations decide upon courses of strategic action," (Child, 1997, 45). Adaptation results from a process of continuous evaluation and learning by decision-makers concerning the organization's needs with respect to environmental conditions.

Prior to Child's 1972 piece introducing strategic choice, scholars viewed organizations' external environments as the fundamental variable influencing strategy and structure. Theorists argued that organizations needed to "fit" their environment in

order to perform successfully.<sup>1</sup> The relationship between the environment and the organization was not without consequence. Research examining alignment finds a positive relationship between fit and performance; the better the fit between an organization and its operational context, the better its performance (Jennings and Seaman, 1994; Miles and Snow, 1978). Performance is generally measured in profits, although Fiol and Lyles (1985) note that many organizational theorists “have argued that the ultimate criterion of any organizational performance is long term survival and growth. To achieve this, organizations align with their environments to remain competitive and innovative,” (803-4). Thus, alignment and fit are vital to an organization’s survival.

As noted above, an organization that does not match its operational context risks decreased performance (McCormick, 2003). The negative consequences of misalignment also serve as a common theme in organizational theory. Child (1972) argued that “if organizational structure is not adapted to its context, then opportunities are lost, costs rise, and the maintenance of the organization is threatened,” (9). Zajac et al. (2000) also found empirical support for decreased performance among organizational “misfits” (see also Jennings and Seaman 1994). Firms that did not align with their environment performed worse than firms that achieved fit.

Although alignment to the environment benefits performance, strategic choice theorists argued that the emphasis on environment-organizational “fit” became overly deterministic. Variation in the environment was directly linked to structural and strategic differences in organizations (Bourgeois III, 1984). Any internal constraint, such as the inertial forces highlighted by population ecology, or any independent agency exercised

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<sup>1</sup>Early research in contingency theory focused on structure-environment alignment (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967). Later work examined the multi-dimensional nature of “fit,” concentrating on the interdependence among strategy, structure, and the environment (Miles and Snow, 1978; Miller, 1981).

by an organization's leaders, were seen as less influential than the environment in determining an organization's strategy, structure, and subsequent adaptation.

Strategic choice emphasizes the role of the organization's decision-makers, whom Child (1972) called the dominant coalition, in influencing the organization's operational and adaptive trajectory. Leaders initially determine where and how the organization will operate, choosing a specific strategy and structure. Leaders maintain this discretion in responding to environmental conditions throughout the course of the organization's development. Strategic choice theorists argue that the dominant coalition exercises enough power to influence the nature of the environment; they are able to "manipulate the environment itself in order to bring it into conformity with what the organization is already doing," (Miles and Snow, 1978, 20). For instance, one can imagine corporate leaders who lobby a government to enact regulations in support of their company's current operations or, likewise, lobby against legislation that would infringe on the company's operations. By exerting influence on government policies, firm leaders attempt to alter the operational context to one that is more favorable to the company.

Yet, leaders' responses are also influenced by their own biases, independent of environmental constraints. In particular, the members of the dominant coalition are subject to bounded rationality, limitations on their ability to acquire full information and make decisions. Scholars recognize that individuals have cognitive limitations on the amount of information they can absorb and evaluate at any one time. Individuals are incapable of accurately weighing the costs and benefits of every available alternative. Further, information acquisition is costly; individuals rarely have complete information from which to make choices. Leaders simplify the decision-making process, basing their choices on routines and estimates (Simon, 1991). Members of the dominant coalition do not operate with full information and their decisions reflect these limitations.

Additionally, individuals in the dominant coalition are influenced by personal beliefs and norms; these characteristics color the way leaders view the environment as well as determine which aspects of the environment are deemed most important to the organization's operations. For instance, risk averse leaders may focus on reducing external uncertainty and reinforcing the company's standard operating procedures in a given market. Risk taking leaders may pursue new opportunities in the environment and seek out new markets or products. Strategic choice emphasizes the ability of the dominant coalition to affect an organization's activities, though these choices are themselves influenced by the dominant coalition's biases. As Miles and Snow (1978) note, "the strategic choice approach essentially argues that the effectiveness of organizational adaptation hinges on the dominant coalition's perceptions of environmental conditions and the decisions it makes concerning how the organization will cope with these conditions," (20).

Despite the strong emphasis on the dominant coalition's agency, strategic choice theorists do not deny that environmental constraints continue to influence organizational evolution. Rather, they posit that the relationship between the environment and the organization is interactive; the dominant coalition both reacts to environmental conditions as well as attempts to influence the environment to further the organization's goals. Constraints in the external environment, such as government regulation, available resources and competitive pressures, generate threats and opportunities which make some actions or behaviors more feasible than others. That is, environmental conditions affect the range of available options an organization can pursue in its operations.

The focus on the interaction between the dominant coalition and the environment extends to adaptation as well. While changes within the environment may induce the need to adapt, organizational leaders have discretion over how to adapt, when to adapt and by what degree to adapt. Additionally, strategic choice theorists emphasize that

this interaction occurs on a continuous basis; adaptation, whether it is incremental or more radical, can occur at any time deemed appropriate by the dominant coalition.

Leaders recognize the need to adapt through a process of learning. Child (1997) outlines the cycle through which adaptation occurs in the following way: “*information* → *evaluation* → *learning* → *choice* → *action* → *outcome* → *feedback*” (70). He notes that the cycle has no official beginning or end and the continuous feedback loop allows the dominant coalition to adapt proactively to anticipated changes or reactively in response to shifts in the environment. Members of the dominant coalition acquire information about the organization’s context and operations, evaluate performance and alignment, determine what actions need to be taken (if any), make the choice to act, determine the outcome, and then evaluate that information for future improvements.

Thus, organizational learning models can also inform the process of adaptation under the strategic choice framework. Indeed, Fiol and Lyles (1985) note that in much of the literature, learning and adaptation are used interchangeably. Many organizational theorists argue that adaptation, which is often associated with observable organizational changes, is taken as a sign that learning has occurred.<sup>2</sup> Since learning and adaptation are closely related, it is important to note that many of the issues that affect the quality of learning can also influence the likelihood and quality of adaptation. As mentioned above, bounded rationality, cognitive limitations, and an inability to acquire complete information affect the capacity of the dominant coalition to learn and as well as transmit that knowledge to other parts of the organization.

Levinthal and March (1993) also note that organizations need to establish the capabilities to learn (96). A learning organization devotes resources to information acquisition, such as training programs and evaluation mechanisms, develops the infrastructure

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<sup>2</sup>Fiol and Lyles (1985) argue that adaptation and learning are often unrelated; that is, the group can adapt without having expanded its knowledge base, but can also learn without undergoing any observable changes.

to support learning, such as departments committed to customer feedback, and fosters a culture that encourages learning and improvement. However, the authors argue that the high levels of performance that result from learning can also lead organizations to become victims of their own success. Organizations that doing well are less likely to actively pursue ways to improve, which could eventually lead an organization to ignore a changing environment or emerging competitors and fail to adapt (the paradox of success). Child (1997) agreed, noting that organizations (and organizational leaders) often disregard information and feedback that deviates from held beliefs.

Strategic choice theorists equate adaptation to a continuous process of learning whereby organizational leaders initiate change based on environmental conditions and their own perceptions of the situation. These perceptions are influenced by personal biases, bounded rationality, incomplete information and underdeveloped organizational learning capacities. As such, adaptation may not occur in direct response to environmental changes or improve organizational performance. Strategic choice does not predict a specific adaptive trajectory for organizations nor does it offer specific catalysts for change. However, it can be assumed that similar causes highlighted in population ecology and punctuated equilibrium, such as external changes, low performance or negative feedback, can induce the need to adapt.

## **5.2 Strategic Choice and Dissident Group Adaptation**

Strategic choice theory corresponds to learning models used by some conflict scholars to explain dissident groups' adaptive processes (Forest, 2006; Jackson et al., 2005a,b; Trujillo and Jackson, 2006). These works view learning as a precondition to adaptation; groups evaluate their needs and change behaviors to match operational constraints and

opportunities. Groups maintain a process of continuous learning in order to keep pace with a changing environment and adapt as needed.

Jackson and his co-authors (Jackson et al., 2005a,b; Trujillo and Jackson, 2006) provide a well-developed model of learning in dissident groups. They argue that groups learn through a process of information acquisition, interpretation, distribution, and storage. This concept of learning parallels aspects of Child's (1997) strategic choice model, particularly the focus on information gathering, evaluation and learning. Although not explicitly stated, it also can be assumed that Jackson's model incorporates analyzing feedback from the group's own actions. The strategic choice model developed by Child (1997) is very similar to the learning model used by Jackson et al. (2005a; 2005b).

Conflict scholars utilizing a learning model to explain adaptation also acknowledge that dissident groups face constraints on the ability to learn and interpret information, which subsequently influences the quality of adaptation. One of the key limitations cited by both strategic choice theorists and conflict scholars is bounded rationality and constraints on the flow of information. Dissidents groups need to maintain a low profile, heightening the limitations on acquiring and interpreting information. Engaging in highly active and comprehensive learning activities would increase the group's vulnerability, making it easier for governments to infiltrate and attack the organization. Thus, many dissident groups have a lower likelihood of gathering enough information to make fully informed decisions.

Additionally, the often-insular nature of dissident groups reinforces pre-existing perceptions and frames. McCormick(2003) notes that isolation affects "every aspect of the organization's decision process...its view of the enemy, its view of itself, its perspectives on society, its ability to accurately identify and respond to changes in its operating environment, and its ability to calculate the costs and benefits of alternate courses of

action,” (487). Separation from external influences reduces the chance the group will update its working knowledge, particularly if new information contradicts or challenges existing beliefs and views. Further, isolated groups are often subject to groupthink, which limits the likelihood group members will seek out or suggest strategies that go against the consensus. The ability to learn, and subsequently adapt, is constrained by limitations on information acquisition and evaluation.

Jackson et al. (2005a) identify additional characteristics that can affect the ability and quality of learning and adaptation in dissident groups. They argue that group structure, intraorganizational communications networks, the ability to absorb information, the degree of member turnover, the stability of the external environment, access to sources of information, and group culture all influence how well a group can learn and how it perceives the need to adapt. For instance, whether a group structures itself as a network or a hierarchy influences how information flows through the organization and how decision-makers perceive information. While a decentralized network, with multiple nodes, may have more “ears to the ground” and have a greater awareness of environmental changes that generate the need to adapt, the group may lack the centralized authority to direct a full-scale adaptation or change may only occur in some nodes but not others. In contrast, in a hierarchy, command and control flow from the top down, making it easier to initiate adaptation. However, information often flows upward and may be lost or altered on its way to decision-makers, skewing perceptions of the environment. Group structure influences how the dominant coalition receives and responds to information about environmental changes.

Learning models applied to dissident groups focus less attention on the role of decision-makers (the dominant coalition). Although Jackson et al. (2005a) advise targeting the “learning leadership” (52) as a means of combatting dissident group threat,



they do not focus much attention on how these individuals influence the learning process. Despite evidence supporting the importance of these types of “learning leaders,” most learning models used in conflict scholarship focus on mechanisms by which the organization as a whole acquires information and how that knowledge is stored for future use. Further application of strategic choice theories to dissident group behavior indicates greater focus should be placed on this “learning leadership” and how their experiences influence group adaptation.

### 5.3 Expectations

Strategic choice is much more ambiguous concerning the specific causes of adaptation and the expected trajectory of the adaptive process than the other theories presented. However, its emphasis on the dominant coalition and continuous learning does provide some insight into the means by which dissident groups adapt to a changing environment.

Strategic choice highlights the key role of decision-makers in initiating and guiding adaptation. The dominant coalition bases its decisions on perceptions of the environment and the organization’s performance in a given context. We expect that dissident group leaders have a significant influence over the group’s strategic choices and decisions to adapt.

*Proposition 1: Adaptation is initiated by the dominant coalition.*

Further, strategic choice emphasizes the process of learning as a precursor to adaptation. The dominant coalition continuously interacts with the environment, gathers information and adjusts the organization’s strategy and structure as needed (or perceived to be needed).

*Proposition 2: Adaptation occurs as a result of learning.*

Learning, while necessary for adaptation, does not occur automatically. Rather, leaders base their decision to adapt on their own perceptions and biases given environmental constraints. That is, organizational leaders learn and exercise choice within the limitations of their environment, including available resources and the strength of the government or competitors. We should expect these factors to influence how groups learn and adapt.

Additionally, the ability to learn is affected by access to accurate information and the ability to act on that information. In addition to cognitive limitations such as the biases mentioned above, characteristics of the organization itself also influences the ability of the group to learn. Following research from Jackson et al. (2005a), this dissertation highlights two specific organizational qualities that influence learning: structure and culture. Structure affects how information flows within the organization and how members of the dominant coalition receive that information. Structure includes how the group organizes itself, including the degree of decentralization and the location of leaders in relation to group members and the conflict zone. We expect that groups that are more decentralized are better able to recognize changes in the environment but are less likely to adapt, whereas groups with a centralized leadership may be less likely to recognize small external changes but are more likely to engage in adaptation.

*Proposition 3: Hierarchical, centralized organizations are more likely to adapt than networked, decentralized groups.*

Group culture incorporates attitudes toward learning and risk-taking. We expect that groups which actively seek information through consultation and feedback from

members and supporters display a culture of learning and are more likely to adapt. In contrast, groups that do not seek input from members but rely primarily on leaders for information are unlikely to adapt when necessary.

*Proposition 4: Groups which actively seek feedback and information have a greater likelihood of adapting.*

The focus on learning and internal decision-making poses one of the key obstacles of applying this approach to dissident group adaptation. As several scholars note (Fiol and Lyles, 1985), not all learning results in tangible changes to an organization's form and function and not all changes are evidence of learning. Ideally, one would be able to track the decision-making process of the dissident organization. For instance, Miles and Snow (1978) utilize detailed questionnaires within targeted firms to determine the role of the dominant coalition and the nature of decision-making. Such methods are generally unavailable when examining dissident groups. As a result, observable indicators are often the only means of measuring that some degree of learning has occurred (Jackson et al., 2005a). For instance, group statements and intelligence from former members can indicate that group members have processed information. Evidence that leaders acted after dialogue and consideration of available options would indicate the dominant coalition learned rather than change occurring as a default reaction to external changes.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we should observe evidence of groups scanning the environment for information, processing that information through discussions or internal debates, and making observable tactical or strategic choices based on that knowledge.

In the following section, I examine Hamas' development through the lens of strategic

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<sup>3</sup>Although not a perfect gauge of learning, examining how a group considers new activities provides some initial evidence of learning and subsequent adaptation, compared with changes that are not related to shifts (or expected shifts) in the group's environment.

choice. Although one of the known difficulties of this method is the inability to get “inside” many dissident groups, Hamas has been extensively covered by scholars and the media. Its leaders have given multiple interviews and its relatively long life span provides enough data to examine the internal decision-making process. Thus, I argue that strategic choice may provide some leverage in examining the group’s adaptive process.

## 5.4 Strategic Choice and the Development of Hamas

Hamas emerged as the armed wing of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood during the 1987 Intifada. Although the outbreak of violence that fueled the group’s creation was spontaneous, many scholars argue that the group’s foundation had been set long before (Mishal and Sela, 2000; Tamimi, 2007). These scholars point specifically to the role of the Sheikh Ahmed Yasin in developing Hamas and shaping its trajectory.

Yasin founded and ran the Brotherhood’s headquarters in the Gaza Strip, the Islamic Center (*al-Mujamma’ al-islami*). As noted previously, the Center served as a hub of Islamic education and social activities in the Territories. It developed an extensive social service network and as a result, significant grassroots support. Yasin’s own personality contributed to the Center’s success. According to Mishal and Sela (2000), his “charisma, Islamic scholarship, and organizational mastery proved particularly influential among the youth of the refugee camps,” (19). Yasin established an intraorganizational culture that was built on “solidarity of participation, self identification as a collective unit, a common background, and a sharing of basic knowledge and values,” (Mishal and Sela, 2000, 153). The focus on collective identity made grassroots support fundamental to the group’s success.

From its inception, the Center faced competition from the PLO and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. These groups sought to represent the Palestinian people and vied for

the population's support. Mishal and Sela (2000) argue that the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon in 1982 created an opportunity for the Islamic Center. They write:

The perception that the PLO was militarily and politically bankrupt apparently induced the Mujamma' leadership to contemplate the possibility that it could become a political alternative. Such a radical transformation in the Mujamma' strategy necessitated conceptual and structural changes expressed particularly in action of a national nature, which meant, in practice, armed struggle against Israel, (33-4).

That is, the waning power and popularity of the PLO created additional space in which the Islamic Center could maneuver and operate. It had more available strategic options from which to choose. In 1983, Yasin purportedly met with other Muslim Brotherhood members in Jordan, where it was decided to support the Center in preparing for armed resistance (Tamimi, 2007, 45). Mishal and Sela also allege that Yasin ordered the collection and distribution of weapons among the Center's key members. Thus, when violence erupted in 1987, the Islamic Center was posed to take advantage of the new opportunity.

Yasin's leadership proved to be vital in the creation of Hamas. He developed a strong network of support that would continue to benefit Hamas throughout its various operations and adaptations (Gunning, 2007).<sup>4</sup> He also prepared the organization for an anticipated turn to violence. Further, Yasin recognized the disconnect between the Center's stated commitment to non-violence and the external pressure to adopt violence that developed in the late 1980s. In order to buffer the Center from any negative repercussions, he and other leaders decided to establish Hamas as a distinct wing. Hamas adopted a religious-nationalist mission and its Charter indicated the group's commitment to *jihad* and its goal of liberating Mandatory Palestine. Despite the separation between the Center and Hamas, the group's "Intifada activities were

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<sup>4</sup>Several scholars argue that Hamas' 2006 PLC victory was in part due to the support base it established through providing necessary social services (Gunning, 2007; Levitt, 2006).

conducted under the direct guidance and control of Ahmed Yasin...” (Mishal and Sela, 2000, 55). Yasin’s leadership was vital to the organization’s early operations. Therefore, Yasin’s arrest in 1989 proved to be a significant stumbling block for the group. Referring again to Mishal and Sela (2000), they argue that the arrest “effectively paralyzed Hamas and created a vacuum at the top level of leadership,” (58).

In response to Yasin’s arrest, externally-based members and supporters, namely Musa Mohammed Abu Marzuq, took control and instituted significant structural changes. Marzuq reorganized the group from a decentralized network to a more formal hierarchy, with authority based outside the Territories. The external leaders controlled militarized operations and established fundraising relationships for the group (Knudsen, 2005; Mishal and Sela, 2000). The shift was intended to increase the organization’s security from crackdowns and repression. Further, Marzuq “reinforced [the group with] a new generation of technicians and professionals better able to engage with the outside world in its own language and to reflect the movement’s enhanced status within the Palestinian arena,” (Kristianasen, 1999, 21). Marzuq’s reorganization prevented the leadership gap created by Yasin’s arrest from further destabilizing the group and helped promote Hamas as a key movement in the broader struggle.

In the early 1990s, the momentum of the Intifada began to wane and in 1991 representatives of the PLO, Israel and interested third parties met in Madrid. Although nothing concrete came of the meeting, it set the stage for the 1993 Declaration of Principles, the first component of the Oslo Accords. Hamas publicly objected to the conference and the PLO’s participation. However, evidence demonstrates Hamas’ leaders recognized the conference’s significance. It marked a changing environment and Hamas’ leaders used it as an opportunity to gather input from the organization’s members concerning the group’s future.

Hamas leaders circulated an unnamed document among members and supporters

asking them to provide feedback on the group's role in light of a potential political settlement. The document demonstrates that Hamas' leaders saw the degree to which it would participate in anticipated self-rule and elections as the, "most crucial and difficult in the history of our movement," (Mishal and Sela, 2000, 123). The document lays out four potential avenues of action: 1) participate in elections, 2) boycott elections and encourage others to do so as well, 3) boycott elections and use force to interrupt them, or 4) participate using another name. The document then describes the advantages and disadvantages of each option. In choosing a preferred path for the group, respondents were asked to consider Hamas' goals and long-term survival.

The document indicates that Hamas' leaders weighed the available options and expected repercussions of each course of action. Since Hamas relied heavily on grassroots support, maintaining that base was a top priority. One of key reasons for its popularity was the group's opposition to Israel and negotiated settlements. Boycotting anticipated elections would align with the group's Charter but risked alienating the wider population who widely supported a political solution. The authors warn that "[if we were] politically isolated and absent [from the political arena], we would be deprived of the masses and lose much of the popular support..." (as quoted in Mishal & Sela 2000, 129). Yet, the document's authors also recognize that Hamas was unlikely to win should it participate. The authors acknowledge that, "Most of the estimates show that we might not be able to win a majority if we participate in the elections, which [means that] we would lose them, and, at the same time, grant legitimacy to the negotiations," (as quoted in Mishal & Sela 2000, 129).

The document further demonstrates that Hamas' leaders recognized that they had limited options available to them given the changing environment. One key issue was the contrast between the group's ideological commitment to armed struggle and the broader support for a non-violent political solution. The authors write, "Objectively,

however, there is no doubt that it will be difficult for Hamas to bridge [the gap] between participation in the elections and what it requires in terms of altering our discourse and resisting the occupation and what it requires in terms of [adopting] a clear and unique discourse of *jihad*,” (as quoted in Mishal & Sela 2000, 127). Further, the group’s options were limited by the presence of competitors. Throughout the document, the authors emphasize the risk of provoking an armed conflict with the much stronger and more popular Fatah. The option of disrupting elections with violence is strongly discouraged due to this risk. The authors write, “... we would lose more [than Fatah would] because our real power is our popularity; Fatah’s power derives from a combination of both financial [resources] and control of the important institutions,” (as quoted in Mishal & Sela 2000, 128). The document illustrates that Hamas recognized that elections and self-rule would likely benefit its rival.

The document also lists the option of participating under a front organization. This course of action would prevent Hamas from being isolated and help it capitalize on the gains it made during the Intifada. However, the document notes that the use of a front could be confusing. Hamas had not gained enough of a foothold to be recognizable to the broader population, limiting the benefits the group could derive from using a front organization. In addition, the group would have to devote resources to advertising the link between the political front organization and the armed resistance movement.

The document clearly indicates that Hamas’ leaders weighed the costs and benefits of multiple courses of action and sought input from members and supporters. As Mishal and Sela (2000) note, “The prolonged debate over this issue shows unequivocally that Hamas’s paramount concern was to ensure its future as a social and political movement within the framework of a Palestinian self-governing authority,” (120). The group’s leaders based their resulting decision on the responses they received, stating that the group “would not object to nonpolitical representative elections and that it would take



part in such elections provided they were fair and just, were not conducted under Israeli occupation, were administered under appropriate international supervision, and were not conditioned on the candidates' commitment to support the peace process," (Mishal & Sela 2000, 121). That is, the group did not completely reject political participation, as doing so would isolate it from the population, but placed such severe restrictions on participation that the group's values and resulting legitimacy could remain in tact. By evaluating the preferences of its core supporters as well as assessing its own strength vis-à-vis competitors in a changing environment, Hamas' leaders were able to choose a strategic course from among limited options.

This course of action guided Hamas in its later reaction to the 1993 Oslo Accords and its abstention from the 1996 PLC elections. The group rejected the Accords due to its recognition of Israel and its failure to address key issues. Hamas continued armed attacks, including the use of suicide bombings, as a way to signal its opposition and undermine the agreement. However, support for peace and a political settlement remained high. Polls conducted by the PSR reveal that 75% of respondents thought Hamas and other opposition factions should participate in the Palestinian Authority. Additional poll results indicate that between 1996 and 1999, support for the peace process never fell below 60% (see Figure 4.1).

Hamas' continued use of violence sparked backlash among the broader population. A September 1994 PSR poll indicates that over 55% of respondents opposed the use of armed attacks against Israeli targets in Gaza and Jericho and poll results from February 1995 through March 1997 indicate that a majority of respondents also opposed armed attacks against Israeli targets more generally. Further, each attack contributed to crackdowns by Israeli security forces, including trade restrictions and closures. According to Sara Roy (1999), "In 1996, closure resulted in losses that amounted to 39.6 percent of Gaza's GNP and 18.2 percent of the West Bank's," (69). She continues,

“Following the total closure of March - April 1996, 66 percent of the Palestinian labor force was either unemployed or severely underemployed,” (69). The economic repercussions further eroded Palestinian support for Hamas; close to 60% of the population supported crackdowns on violence according to a March 1996 PSR poll. Cragin’s (2006) qualitative assessment supports these survey responses. She argues that Hamas’ continued use of violence “threatened the pool of potential recruits. . . undermined passive support for the group, and perhaps most importantly, it provided Arafat with enough public support so that he could systematically arrest key Hamas leaders in the WBGS [West Bank/Gaza Strip],” (198).

Hamas’ maintenance of a violent strategy despite the negative backlash indicates a lack of learning. The group failed to accurately evaluate the outcome of its actions and adjust accordingly. There are several explanations for this. Hamas had grown increasingly reliant on its core supporters as the Palestinian Authority’s power expanded and monopolized resources. The group’s core constituents were generally more extreme and hardline than the broader population. They supported Hamas and granted it legitimacy due to its commitment to *jihad*. Thus, Hamas needed to align its actions with these constituents’ preferences in order to maintain their support. The feedback it received was primarily from constituents who preferred violent, anti-Israeli actions. Thus, the majority of information Hamas received came from a non-representative subsection of the population. The information on which the group based strategic choices was limited by the nature of its support base. Yet, Hamas did have to concern itself with the preferences of the broader population. In casting itself as a nationalist movement and an alternative to the PLO, Hamas needed to appeal to all Palestinians and act in a way that would attract new followers. The limitations on learning adversely affected the group’s general popularity.

Hamas' structure also affected the flow of information into the group and, subsequently, the way leaders evaluated the environment and group performance. As noted, Marzuq established an externally-based leadership to improve the group's security after Yasin's 1989 arrest. These leaders were generally more hardline than internally-based leaders. As Mishal and Sela (2000) note, the external leaders "do not have to cope with the reality of the Israeli occupation, the PA's domination, and the daily hardships of the Palestinian community, which might explain why they can afford to adopt a harder line concerning the armed struggle and the Oslo process," (161). In contrast, internally based leaders had to deal with increased repression, a strengthening PA, and growing criticisms from the public. These realities led the internal leaders to attempt moderation and compromise with the PA (Kristianasen, 1999; Mishal and Sela, 2000). Yet, the external leaders held more authority and undermined the internal leaders' actions. The disconnect between the base of authority and the Territories reduced the flow of information and affected how the leaders viewed the conflict. Detached from the tangible repercussions of attacks, externally-based leaders could maintain a strict adherence to group's ideology. The inability, or refusal, to accurately assess the group's performance, relative to conditions on the ground, led the external leadership to continue calling for attacks despite the backlash.

After an uptick in attacks in 1996, including several high-profile suicide attacks, the number of Hamas' armed operations decreased (see Figure 3.1). The reduction in attacks may signal that the group's leaders finally recognized that violence did not generate policy leverage (Cragin 2006). However, the group did not demonstrate a corresponding adaptation to a more successful strategy; Hamas did not develop a viable political apparatus to influence policy and refused to join the PLO or participate politically in the PA.<sup>5</sup> Thus, without attacks as a means of reinforcing its identity and

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<sup>5</sup>Hamas opposed the PA as a product of the Oslo Accords but recognized that the body controlled

the inability or refusal to adapt a political strategy, Hamas's failure to learn threatened its relevancy in the Territories.

However, during the time of Hamas' waning influence, the external environment was slowly changing; shifting attitudes and events signaled increasing dissatisfaction with the peace process. An attempt to jump-start a political settlement in 1998 with the Wye River Memorandum failed.<sup>6</sup> Israel blamed the PA for not repressing violence and delayed implementation of the Memorandum's provisions. Opposition against armed attacks began to waver (see Figure 5.1); analysis conducted by the PSR survey team during the period determined that, "The consistent support for the peace process and the fluctuation in the support for violence point to the possible conclusion that many Palestinians view the latter as a means of moving the former forward and not as an alternative to it," (PSR Poll #40, April 1999). Polling results also indicate that trust of Israeli intentions eroded. Soon after Netanyahu's 1996 election as Israeli Prime Minister, PSR poll results show that 90% of respondents did not trust his government. In June 1999, 66% of respondents did not trust Ehud Barak's newly elected, and more liberal, government to reach a peace agreement and 63% did not trust the intentions of the Israeli public.

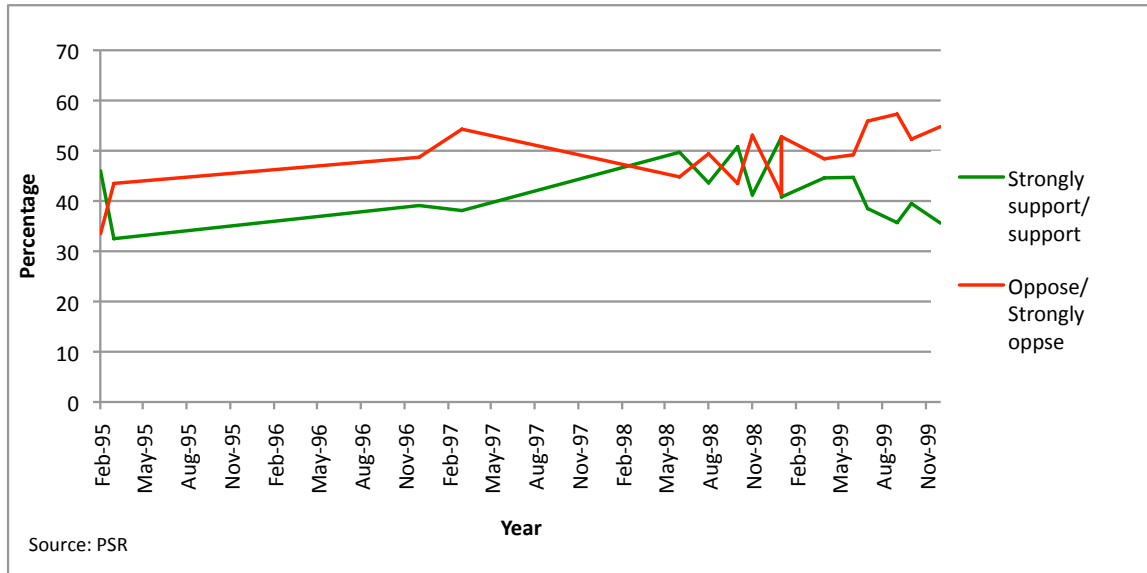
Hamas' operational context was further affected by Israel's decision to unilaterally withdraw from Southern Lebanon in May 2000, having occupied the area since 1982. Strategic choice and organizational learning models highlight the role of vicarious

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resources in the Territories. As Mishal and Sela note, "Hamas's wish to ensure its survival and continued growth necessitated its access to power and resources, based on coexistence with the PA. But Hamas also was eager to minimize the damage to its political stature as a result of collaborating with the PA... which might be interpreted as a deviation from its Islamic principles," (119). In order to balance this conflicting goals, Hamas' leaders distinguished between the Authority as a governing body (which it rejected) and an administrative body (which it accepted) (Mishal and Sela, 2000). Hamas members participated in the PA's service provision but opposed recognition of the PA as a governing authority.

<sup>6</sup>See Aruri (1999) for a critique of the Wye River Memorandum.

Figure 5.1: Level of Support for Armed Attacks Against Israeli Targets



learning in influencing strategic choices and decisions to adapt. Groups recognize the effectiveness of a given strategy employed by a similar organization and determine if parallel strategies would produce a comparable result.<sup>7</sup> Israel's withdrawal served as a prime learning opportunity for Hamas. Throughout Israel's occupation, it remained under constant attack from Hezbollah, a Muslim dissident organization that played a similar dual role as Hamas of armed resistance and social service provider.<sup>8</sup> Although the withdrawal was intended to aid a peace deal with regional neighbors, it was viewed less as a conciliatory gesture and more of a sign of Israel's weakness (Tamimi, 2007). The withdrawal occurred quickly and with no required reciprocity from Hezbollah. The

<sup>7</sup>For further work on vicarious learning among dissident groups see Jackson et al. (2005b). Crescenzi et al. (2010) also examine vicarious learning specifically among state and non-state actors in the Levant, including Hamas.

<sup>8</sup>It should be noted that Hezbollah bases itself on Shiite Muslim traditions and Hamas on Sunni Muslim traditions. However, that difference has not prevented collaboration in the past. In 1992 when over 400 hundred Palestinian dissident group members were exiled to Lebanon, Hamas and Hezbollah members interacted and learned from each other. Soon after the exile ended, Hamas began utilizing more sophisticated weapons and tactics. Mishal and Sela (2000) write that, "Hamas' escalated military activity was an indirect result of the presence of deportees for almost a year in south Lebanon, which provided the Palestinian Islamists an opportunity to learn about Hizbollah's experience in fighting the Israelis, the effect of suicide attacks, and the construction of car bombs," (66).

perceived significance of Israel's actions resonated with the Palestinians. A 2000 PSR poll found close to 65% of respondents agreed that Palestinians should copy Hezbollah and its methods. Even a year later, the alleged motivation for Israel's withdrawal continued to affect Palestinian perceptions. James Bennet (2001) of the *New York Times* wrote:

Palestinians have drawn a lesson from Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, after 22 years' [sic] occupation there. Israel presented that decision as common sense, but many Palestinians concluded that the war of attrition conducted by Hezbollah guerrillas had forced Israel to run. Militants from Hamas and other organizations - including Mr. Arafat's own Fatah, which is largely secular - argue that only that approach will push the Israelis out of the West Bank and Gaza.

Violence was viewed as accomplishing Palestinian objectives more effectively than continued negotiations.

Changing attitudes and mounting tensions came to a head in late 2000, with the outbreak of violence in the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Hamas regained its previous status leading armed operations. Indeed, its own success with suicide bombs became a model for other groups who emulated that attack style (Bloom, 2005; Gunning, 2007). As Gunning (2007) notes, "Unlike the 1990s, when Hamas had to carefully calibrate its suicide operations, and justify them with reference to Israeli intransigencies, suicide operations had become a measure of political influence, and factions began to compete with each other in carrying out operations," (50). At the same time, the public's attitude shifted significantly in support of violence, as evidenced by Figure 4.2. Hamas' success both encouraged public opinion and was bolstered by it.

Several years of intense fighting gave way to fatigue by all parties. The Intifada had exacted a significant toll on the Territories and the Palestinian people. In response to the uprising, Israel had utilized a policy of collective punishment. According to statistics compiled by B'tselem, between 2001 and 2005, comprehensive closure days, that

is days in which permits for work or trade are invalid and Palestinians are not allowed to move between Gaza and West Bank, measured in the hundreds.<sup>9</sup> Punitive house demolitions also measured in the hundreds, leaving thousands of Palestinians homeless (B'tselem, N.d.).<sup>10</sup> The restrictions on movement, border closures and withholding foreign aid, income taxes and customs all had a severe and negative impact on the Territories' economy. Unemployment rose from 17.5% in 1999 to 23.6% in 2002. The poverty rate increased from 20% in 1999 to 45% in 2002. The GDP growth rate went from 3% in 1999 to -8% in 2002 and the GDP per capita growth rate dropped even further from -1.6% in 1999 to -12% in 2002 (Eisenstadt, 2007, Social and Economic Development Group, 2006). Palestinians faced significant hardship and after four years of intense fighting were seeking a return to normalcy (International Crisis Group, 2006). Further, public opinion shifted away from support for armed attacks against Israeli civilians (see Figure 4.2). Against, this backdrop, the PA called for municipal elections, shifting the focus away from Israel and back to domestic politics. Hamas decided to participate.

Hamas' shift from rejecting political participation to embracing it indicates that the group learned from and adapted to changes in its environment. In comparison to previous elections, notably the 1996 PLC elections, Hamas had gained a much broader base of support. PSR polling results indicate that support for Hamas steadily increased during this time (see Figure 4.5).

As the size of Hamas' base increased, the range of its constituent preferences also expanded. Khalid Shikaki of PSR (2006b) finds that, "the views of Hamas supporters during 2003-2004 shows them divided on fundamental issues such as acceptance of the two-state solution (including negotiation of Israel as a Jewish state), the Road Map, the

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<sup>9</sup>B'tselem reports 73 closure days in 2000, 244 in 2001, at least 77 in 2002, 163 in 2004 and 132 in 2005 (B'tselem, N.d.).

<sup>10</sup>B'tselem reports that 10 houses were destroyed in 2001, 252 in 2002, 225 in 2003, and 177 in 2004. The policy was discontinued between 2005 and 2009 (B'tselem, N.d.).

Geneva initiative [a 2003 peace attempt], and reconciliation with the Israeli people,” (9). He continues, “In other words, once the level of Hamas supporters increased, the group was no longer homogenous, because many of the new converts maintained their moderate views on the peace process,” (9). Hamas could deviate from its strict rhetoric and maintain the support of new supporters, but also had to compromise on its most stringent positions in order to keep this new, more moderate support base.

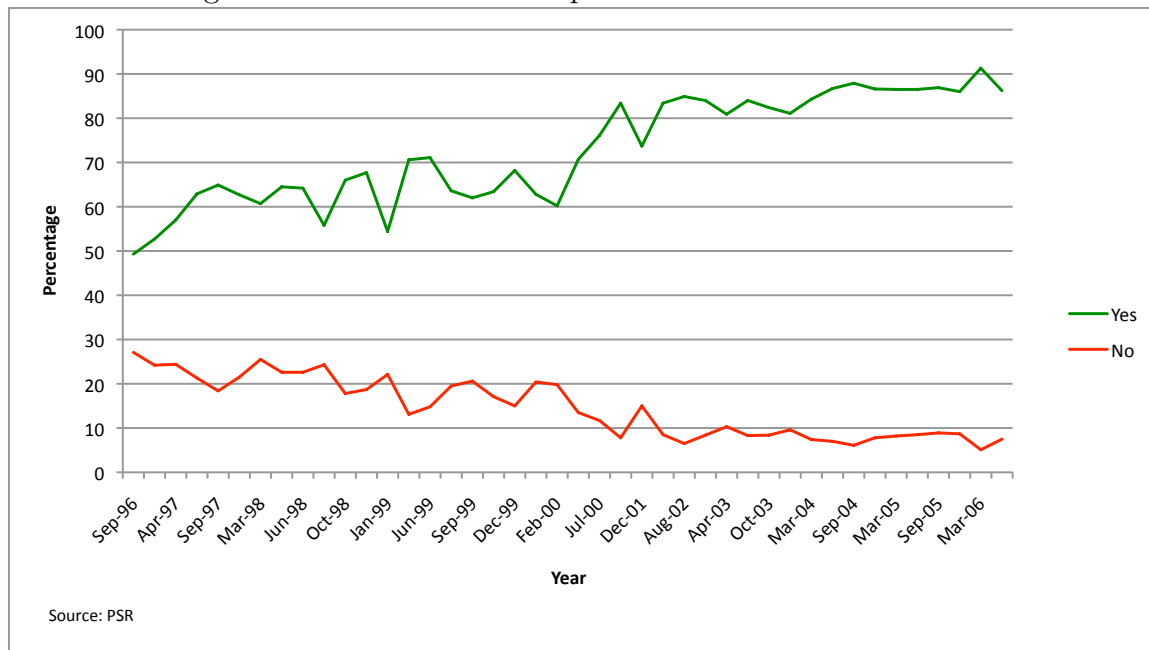
Further, Hamas was able to consider participation as a viable strategic choice due to Fatah’s weakening. Whereas in the 1990s when Fatah dominated the political landscape, after the Al-Aqsa Intifada, Fatah’s position had declined significantly, opening up a space for Hamas to participate. Israeli attacks during the Intifada crippled the PA’s social service provision and security apparatus.

The PA also lost a significant degree of legitimacy among the Palestinian people. In 2003, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had announced the decision to unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip (a move that was finally completed in 2005). That Israel did not negotiate with the PA indicates it no longer saw the PA as a credible partner in peace. The decision reinforced attitudes that violence succeeded where compromise failed. Additionally, Shikaki found that evaluations of democracy, the PA’s performance, and support for the President (Yasir Arafat and his successor Mahmoud Abbas) decreased during the Intifada (Shikaki, 2006b). Perception of corruption within PA institutions also increased at the same time respondents indicated the corruptibility of leaders was a primary concern (Shikaki, 2006a) (see Figure 5.2). Within the Territories, Fatah suffered a significant blow that created space for other groups to compete for the same market space.

Fatah’s dominance within the Territories was declining, producing more viable strategic options for Hamas’ leaders to consider adopting. After evaluating its own



Figure 5.2: Belief that Corruption Exists in PA Institutions



position as well as changes in the environment, Hamas made the decision to participate in the 2004/2005 municipal elections and performed much better than anticipated. Capitalizing on its performance, Hamas decided to participate in the 2006 elections for the PLC.

Participating in these elections posed several obstacles for Hamas. First, Hamas had rejected the first (and only) elections to the PLC in 1996 as a product of the Oslo Accords. The group needed to separate its current behavior from its past decisions. To justify its choice, Hamas claimed that the Oslo Accords had failed and no longer influenced the political process. Deciding to participate paralleled a similar decision-making process as occurred in 1991, in anticipation of self-rule. At that time, and again before the 2006 elections, Hamas asked its members for input. The process of consultation and consensus that Yasin established early on continued to guide Hamas' actions (Tamimi, 2007, 210-11)

The decision to run in elections also reveals the importance of the group's leadership

in overcoming inertia. When the opportunity to participate emerged, more hardline members believed that the organization needed to maintain its commitment to *jihad*. Based on interviews with Hamas members and analysts, the International Crisis Group reports that militant members “feared that entering institutional politics was a slippery slope that would ultimately lead to abandonment of armed struggle, as well as to the loss of important constituencies to more radical groups,” (International Crisis Group, 2006, 6). However, key leaders, including Khalid Mish’al, the head of the Political Bureau, agreed that Hamas should participate (International Crisis Group, 2006). Mish’al and other leaders supportive of participation were able to maintain the organization’s cohesion throughout the electoral cycle.

Yet, even before the group decided to participate in elections, Hamas’ leaders had indicated a willingness to compromise on key elements of the group’s mission, including political participation. The unnamed internal document that went through the organization in the early 1990s concluded that electoral participation was not off the table; rather, elections needed to be separate from Israeli influence and participation could not be based on pre-conditions, such as recognizing Israel’s right to exist. Further in an interview conducted in early 2004, Sheikh Yasin “asserted that the movement would agree to a temporary peace with Israel in exchange for the establishment of a Palestinian state ‘on the basis of the 1967 borders’ and the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel,” (International Crisis Group, 2004, 3). The recognition of the 1967 borders indicates that the group was willing to compromise on the issue of Mandatory Palestine. Additionally, many commentators assert that acknowledging the 1967 borders is akin to a recognition of Israel.

The International Crisis Group (2004) reports that Yasin’s statements were part of a gradual change in Hamas’ perception and outlook. Yasin’s words were echoed by

other leaders including Marzuq and Rantisi.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, some leaders acknowledged that the hardline rhetoric that characterized the Charter did not guide all of Hamas' views and actions as the group evolved. Tamimi (2007) relates an interview with Khalid Mish'al, head of the Political Bureau, in which Mish'al argues, "the text of the Charter does not reflect the thinking and understanding of the movement... [it may create] an obstacle or a source of distortion, or a misunderstanding regarding what the movement stands for," (149). Hamas' dominant coalition was instrumental in the group's decision to develop a political wing.

Hamas also took proactive steps to learn about voter preferences prior to the 2006 elections. According to Gunning (2007), the group polled Palestinians on the issues that concerned them most. Assuming preferences remained fairly consistent across surveys, PSR polling results can provide some insight into the feedback that shaped Hamas' platform, which they called Change and Reform. In June 2005, 60% of respondents cited candidates being uncorrupt as their top priority ("very important"), followed by the level of a candidate's education, religiosity, and position on the peace process. In response to these answers, Hamas focused its campaign mainly on domestic issues. As Gunning (2007) notes, "Of the twenty subject headings in Hamas' 2006 election manifesto two focused on issues related to the resistance—and then only emphasising the liberation of 'the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem'..." (177). Further, Hamas built on the grassroots network initially established by Yasin to bolster their electoral chances. The group's extensive social service network contributed to its reputation of "incorruptibility, accountability, and efficiency" (Gunning, 2007, 153) which stood in stark contrast to Fatah's reputation as corrupt. The culture of cultivating grassroots support both through consultation and by providing necessary social services influenced

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<sup>11</sup>The International Crisis Group (2004) analysis concludes, however, that the recognition of 1967 borders is a temporary settlement; that is, one stage in a broader plan toward the recovery of Mandatory Palestine (13-14).

how Hamas crafted its political agenda and ran its campaign.

As in the lead-up to the municipal elections, Fatah's increasing weakness contributed to greater opportunities for Hamas during its legislative campaign. Fatah was plagued by internal divisions and in-fighting which hindered the group's effectiveness. For instance, where Hamas members agreed to run a single candidate to contest each seat, disagreement within Fatah led to multiple candidates competing for the same seat, thus splitting the vote (Gunning, 2007, 154-5; Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2006). Hamas' leaders learned to run a smart, efficient campaign, which they expected to net enough seats to influence Palestinian policy. Hamas did not anticipate winning the election outright.<sup>12</sup>

In reaction to Hamas' win, the international community demanded the organization officially recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept and abide by previously negotiated settlements in order to receive aid. Israel withheld millions of dollars in customs and taxes and other resources were diverted away from the PA and channeled to President Abbas. These actions created significant financial constraints within the Territories. In a June 2006 PSR poll, respondents stated that domestic economic issues (poverty and unemployment) were of greatest concern (33%), underscoring the pressure created by international sanctioning. Further, support for Hamas decreased; there was no longer a difference between Fatah and Hamas (each party received approximately 33%; see Figure 4.5).

International isolation, an inability to address constituents' primary economic concerns, and decreasing support contributed to the resumption of violence after a 16 month ceasefire. The international community rejected Hamas' attempts to adopt the

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<sup>12</sup>Voters reacted to the failure of the peace (Hroub, 2006; Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2006; Tamimi, 2007; Wiegand, 2010), the inability of the PA to adequately address domestic problems (Hroub, 2006; Wiegand, 2010) and the persistent economic decline (Wiegand, 2010). Shikaki (Shikaki, 2006a) also notes that the voting system employed contributed to a "hefty seat bonus even when the popular-vote totals won by various parties were quite close to one another," (117).

role of political party.<sup>13</sup> Economic sanctioning reduced Hamas' ability to function as the governing party and the group lost popularity among its base of support. As a Hamas spokesman explained, "people are calling us traitors...we are being accused of...having forgotten the precept of jihad...we did not want to become a new version of Fatah...We were concerned we could lose our popularity," (as quoted in Gunning 2007, 239). Hamas relied heavily on the support of its constituents and prided itself on its grassroots support; the potential loss of constituent backing could severely undermine the group's effectiveness and long-term survival. Hamas faced multiple constraints which hindered its ability to govern; as a result of the narrowed strategic choices, Hamas resumed a strategy of violence from which it is still recovering.

## 5.5 Evaluation

Strategic choice theory highlights the process of organizational learning as a means of adapting to environmental changes. Specifically, organizational leaders acquire information about the environment and the group's performance, evaluate it, make a decision concerning the group's strategy and analyze the feedback in a continuous loop. The theory highlights that the ability to learn and adapt is limited by the dominant coalition's cognitive biases and prejudices. Further, organizational qualities, such as structure and culture, influence how leaders acquire information and how capable they are of acting on that information.

The development of Hamas indicates that the group's leaders play a significant role in how the organization evolved and adapted (Proposition 1). Sheikh Yasin established the Islamic Center and an internal group culture of collaboration and consensus that

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<sup>13</sup>Tamimi (2007) argues that anticipated international acceptance was a key factor in Hamas' decision to participate in 2006. She notes that Hamas' leaders expected recognition and legitimacy would inevitably follow a successful election (215).

influences the group's current operations. Marzuq's 1989 structural reorientation and division of authority marked a vital turning point in the group's formalization. It has created long-lasting effects on how leaders acquired and evaluated information. Mish'al pushed the Hamas into creating a viable political party and running in elections. Although the group maintained a high level of input from supporters and members, key decisions concerning adaptation were initiated by the organization's dominant coalition.

The case illustration also demonstrates the key role of information acquisition and learning in determining whether to adapt (Proposition 2). Throughout its history, Hamas's leaders sought input and information from its members (for instance, the unnamed document circulated in response to the Madrid Conference) and the general population (evidenced by its political platform) before making decisions, including adaptation (Proposition 4).

However, these decisions also highlight that the quality and quantity of information are vital to accurate learning. The reliance on grassroots support and input from supporters influenced the learning process. In the early 1990s, Hamas relied on a narrow, hardline base of support which encouraged violence despite a shift in the external environment and general support for peace. Hamas received information based on the preferences and perceptions of a small segment of the broader population. Basing strategic choices on this information hurt the group's performance. When Hamas' base expanded, the group was able to acquire information that helped it create a viable party and successful political platform. Additionally, the division of authority between internal and external leaders affected decision-making in the group. The external leadership's ability to acquire and accurately evaluate information was limited by their physical distance from the conflict zone. While less influential internal leaders urged compromise and accommodation in the face of Israeli and PA repression, the more powerful external leaders were not directly affected and were able to maintain a hardline

stance that encouraged the continuation of attacks.

Strategic choice also highlights the interaction between group leaders and the environment; group leaders exercise choice within a set of external constraints. Throughout the analysis above, Hamas' strategic choices were influenced by the group's own position, the prevailing environmental conditions and the strength of competitors. For instance, shifts in Fatah's dominance either crowded Hamas out (post-1993) or created space and new opportunities for Hamas to act (2003-2006). Hamas' strategic choices and decisions to adapt were highly influenced by the available opportunities at any given time.

Interestingly, although Proposition 3 anticipated that networked structural forms would face greater difficulty in adapting, Marzuq was able to successfully restructure Hamas' decentralized form into a hierarchy. It is possible that the legitimacy Marzuq gained from being part of Yasin's inner circle afforded him greater authority than in traditional networks. Thus, the expectation that networks would be less likely to adapt was not borne out in this case.

Strategic choice provides a unique frame for examining adaptation. It grants organizations and organizational leaders agency in determining when and how to adapt (in contrast to population ecology which removes agency). It describes a learning mechanism to explain both gradual and more radical adaptation. It also incorporates a more realistic understanding of how individual leaders process information. Rather than a strictly rational choice argument that anticipates adaptation in direct reaction to external changes, strategic choice acknowledges that individuals are subject to limitations on the ability to acquire and process information.

However, strategic choice concentrates too heavily on limitations of decision-making caused by cognitive constraints and information availability. Particularly in the learning models developed by Jackson et al. (2005a), structure and culture affect adaptation

in so far as they affect information flows. However, population ecology highlights that these elements also create inertia. That is, structure and cultural norms affect adaptation simply because they are difficult to change. Although learning may indicate a need to change, it is possible that inertial pressures are too strong to overcome. Further, while the focus on the dominant coalition prevents ascribing human characteristics to organizations, such as learning or evaluating, it focuses attention on individual learning patterns rather than how organization acquire, distribute and store knowledge (Jackson et al., 2005a). Finally, strategic choice demands a keen understanding of the internal decision making and influence of leaders on the decision to adapt. This level of information is often difficult to access in clandestine organizations, causing the research to focus primarily, if not solely, on observable indicators that may not represent the outcome of strategic choice and learning. Although Hamas has been widely studied, using strategic choice to examine other groups may not provide the same explanatory leverage.



# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

The growing prominence of dissident organizations in domestic and international arenas encourages a more comprehensive understanding of how these groups behave, including how and when they are likely to adapt. Many conflict scholars argue that adaptation is necessary not only for group performance but also basic group survival (Kurz, 2005; McCormick, 2003). Understanding the conditions under which dissident groups are likely to adapt (or not adapt) enhances conflict scholarship and improves the ability to craft more effective counterinsurgency policies.

Existing research on adaptation within conflict literature focuses primarily on significant change as a linear transition from violent to non-violent strategies, generally in reaction to external catalysts, such as regime change or variation in the degree of democracy. Much of this research is policy-oriented, emphasizing how to reduce the threat of armed dissident groups and or how to induce these groups to abandon their cause completely. However, few of these works focus on the process of adaptation independent of policy outcomes or examine how qualities of the group itself may facilitate or constrain adaptation. These questions are fundamental to understanding the full

range of dissident group behavior.

This dissertation extends the literature by analyzing adaptation through the lens of organizational theory. Although generally applied to firms, organizational change theories are applicable to all organizations, including dissident groups. By concentrating on organizations broadly, organizational theory has no underlying policy motivations. The focus remains on how and under what conditions organizations adapt given internal and external pressures. There is no necessary evolution in behavior, as implied by conflict literature's emphasis on linear transformations of form and function. Additionally, organizational adaptation theories are agnostic concerning the benefits, drawbacks, or moral implications of dissident group adaptation. By initially eliminating the normative view of whether adaptation is "good" or "bad," analysts can examine the mechanisms of adaptation from the organization's perspective. Finally, separating the adaptive process from an external measure of "success" (which in conflict literature equates to reducing the threat a group may pose), reveals new and influential variables that inform our discussion of dissident group adaptation.

## 6.2 Summary

The preceding chapters present three different models of organizational adaptation. Population ecology posits that organizations adapt through a process of natural selection. Inertial pressures, such as sunk costs, vested interests, and organizational identity, generate resistance to change. Organizations are unable to adapt, or adapt at a rate that keeps pace with external changes, and are likely to fail and be selected out when the environment changes. Those that still align with the environment will survive and new organizations, emulating the qualities of the survivors, are expected to emerge. The cycling in and out of organizations changes the population's composition over time; thus adaptation occurs at this broader level. Further, as emerging organizations mimic

the qualities of those that survive, organizations within a population at any given time are likely to resemble each other.

Punctuated equilibrium also highlights the role of inertia in influencing adaptation. Inertia within an organization's core domains (strategy, structure, and identity) contributes to periods of stasis. However, unlike population ecology, proponents of punctuated equilibrium do not assume that these pressures inhibit organizational adaptation. Rather, the theory anticipates that adaptation occurs in short bursts, termed reorientations, during which the organization's core domains change. Major external changes, prolonged low performance, and turnover in leadership are cited as potential catalysts for reorientations.

Finally, strategic choice theory posits that organizational leaders initiate and guide adaptation. The dominant coalition exercises choice over how or whether to change the organization given environmental conditions. The focus on decision-making parallels organizational learning models and highlights the factors that can impede a leader's ability to learn and react, including skewed perceptions and personal biases.

The similarities and differences among the models are summarized in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Comparison of Organizational Change Theories

	<b>Population Ecology</b>	<b>Punctuated Equilibrium</b>	<b>Strategic Choice</b>
Level of Adaptation	population	organization	organization
Rate of Adaptation	gradual	radical	both
Role of Leaders	no agency	some agency	full agency
Mechanism for Adaptation	natural selection	reorientation	learning

Additionally, a table of the propositions presented in each chapter as well as the findings are summarized in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Summary Table of Propositions and Findings

<b>Chapter 3: Population Ecology and the Adaptation of Dissident Groups</b>	
<b>Proposition 1:</b> Organizations are subject to inertia as a result of sunk costs, vested interests and identity which reduces the likelihood of adaptation.	Confirmed - Hamas was subject to pressure to maintain the status quo due to its structure, rhetoric and authority figures.
<b>Proposition 2:</b> Adaptation occurs through a process of organizational decline and emergence rather than through organizational-level change.	Not confirmed - Although the ANM declined as the environment shifted, both Fatah and Hamas adapted structure, strategy and identity as the environment changed.
<b>Proposition 3:</b> Groups operating in the same population are more likely to emulate each other than organizations outside a given population.	Confirmed - Palestinian groups operating at similar times resembled each other in mission and tactics. Additionally, new waves of groups emulated successful qualities of the previous groupings (Fatah relied on Arab country support, much like the ANM; Hamas mirrored aspects of the PLO's Charter and structure).
<b>Chapter 4: Punctuated Equilibrium and the Adaptation of Dissident Groups</b>	
<b>Proposition 1:</b> Adaptation occurs through periods of stasis followed by dramatic changes to an organization's core domains.	Confirmed - Hamas experienced periods of convergence/stasis interrupted by reorientations.
<b>Proposition 2:</b> Adaptation will occur over short temporal periods.	Confirmed - When Hamas did undergo reorientation, the changes occurred within a year.
<b>Proposition 3:</b> Significant environmental changes, low performance or shifts in constituent preferences will increase the likelihood dissident groups will adapt their core domains.	Partially confirmed - Although Hamas did adapt significantly and rapidly to major external changes in 1987 and 2004, the group failed to adapt to environmental shifts, changing public support and decreased performance beginning in 1993 (the post-Oslo period).
<b>Strategic Choice and the Adaptation of Dissident Groups</b>	
<b>Proposition 1:</b> Adaptation is initiated by the dominant coalition.	Confirmed - Hamas' leaders instituted major changes in strategy and structure.
<b>Proposition 2:</b> Adaptation occurs as a result of learning.	Confirmed - Hamas' changes resulted from acquiring and evaluating information. However, the quality and quantity of information greatly influenced the nature and effectiveness of those decisions.
<b>Proposition 3:</b> Hierarchical, centralized organizations are more likely to adapt than networked, decentralized groups.	Not confirmed - Hamas was able to adapt from a network to a hierarchy.
<b>Proposition 4:</b> Groups which actively seek feedback and information have a greater likelihood of adapting.	Confirmed Throughout its evolution, Hamas sought and acted on feedback from its members and potential constituents, as evidenced by its stance on self-rule, its political platform and the decision to return to violence in 2006.

The bolded propositions are those that are most critical to the integrity of the theory.

## 6.3 Different Theory, Different Focus

Population ecology, punctuated equilibrium, and strategic choice theory each present adaptation from a different perspective and, as such, highlight different factors influencing the adaptive process. As Allison and Zelikow (1999) write:

The glasses one wears magnify one set of factors rather than another in ways that have multifarious consequences. Not only do lenses lead analysts to produce different explanations of puzzles that appear...to be the same. Lenses also influence the character of the analyst's puzzle, the evidence assumed to be relevant...and what is taken to be an explanation, (387-8).

Depending on the framework used, analysts develop different explanations for when, how and why adaptation occurs.

Population ecology's emphasis on inertia effectively blackboxes individual organizations, instead drawing analysts' attention to the conditions that affect the population of groups under study. Changes in these conditions determine the type of organizational qualities that are likely to thrive, and by extension, those that are not likely to succeed. The theory focuses on the trends that contribute to selection and retention of particular types of organizations. Examining Hamas' adaptation through this framework highlights major external events that influenced the form and function of the majority of groups operating in a given population. In particular, the establishment of Israel in the mid 1940s and Egypt's prominence in the region contributed to the pan-Arab identity assumed by the ANM. The defeat of Arab countries in 1967, in conjunction with the growth of guerrilla movements across the developing world, changed the environment and induced changes within the population of Palestinian nationalist movements. Pan-Arab movements no longer fit and were selected out, while secular groups, with a distinctly Palestinian identity, such as Fatah and other organizations in

the PLO, better aligned with the external conditions. The emergence of political Islam, spearheaded by the Iranian revolution, shifted the environment again, privileging groups that integrated nationalism and religion, contributing to the rise of groups like Hamas and the PIJ.

Analysts examining the adaption and evolution of Palestinian nationalist movements through the lens of population ecology would anticipate that these environmental changes would lead to the decline of groups due to organizational inertia. However, both Fatah and Hamas adapted to a changing environment. Fatah embraced the changes introduced in the early 1990s, publicly abandoned terrorism as a strategy, and transitioned into a political party that was internationally recognized. Hamas initially faced low performance and support due to the continuation of attacks in a pro-peace environment, signaling its decline and potential failure. However, the group regained its strength and status during the Al-Aqsa Intifada and later transitioned to a political party and successful electoral candidate.

Population ecology fails to account for Fatah and Hamas' successful organizational adaptation. However, the theory does highlight the importance of inertia in influencing group strategy and structure. The theory also points to population-level trends and events that affect groups' choice of strategy and supporting structures. By placing Palestinian nationalist movements in a broader context, analysts gain a better understanding of the historical precedents that influence dissident groups' development.

Punctuated equilibrium brings the analyst's focus back to the organization. This theory highlights catalysts of radical change, which are necessary to disrupt inertia. Analysts are primed to expect that "frame-breaking" changes, such as major external events, decreased performance and the introduction of leaders from outside the organization will lead to strategic, structural and identity adaptation. Due to the emphasis on reorientations, punctuated equilibrium downplays incremental, gradual adjustments.

Examining Hamas' adaptation through the lens of punctuated equilibrium emphasizes the reverberating effect of major external changes. In this light, the theory correctly predicts the major organizational changes that occurred as a result of the 1987 Intifada and the 2004 elections. In both instances, Hamas underwent significant shifts in structure, strategy and identity. However, not all major events resulted in a reorientation. A significant external event (the signing of the Oslo Accords) and prolonged low performance (signified by a reduced number of attacks and low levels of public support) did not result in a major organizational change. The theory does not account for Hamas' lack of adaptation in the early 1990s.

Strategic choice focuses the analyst's attention on the organization's leaders and their role in initiating adaptation. In particular, the theory highlights that leaders make decisions concerning whether and when to adapt within a set of environmental constraints, such as government regulation and the strength of competitors. Since decision-making is central to explaining adaptation, strategic choice points analysts toward examining the way information flows through the organization, how the dominant coalition acquires and evaluates information and the choices that result. Analyzing Hamas' adaptation and development through the framework of strategic choice emphasizes the role of the group's leaders, namely Yasin and Marzuq, in influencing the group's strategy and structure. The culture of consensus and consultation developed by Yasin explains Hamas' response to the prospect of self-rule in the early 1990s, the content of its political platform in 2004, and the decision to resume violence in 2006. Further, the decision to divide the group's authority between internal and external leaders affected the way information flowed through the group. A strong case can be made that externally-based leaders did not have full or complete information concerning conditions on the ground and thus continued to call for violent attacks despite a changing environment and decreasing public support for violence. Additionally,

the theory highlights that leaders learn and make decisions within a set of external constraints; Hamas' choices can be understood given constituent feedback, opposition government policies, and competitor strength at any given time. Thus, adaptation results from a process of information acquisition and learning by group leaders within a set of environmental constraints.

The findings of this dissertation reveal promising improvements to current theories of adaptation featured in conflict literature as well as point to avenues of future research. However, it is necessary to note the limited generalizability of the findings. Hamas served as a illuminating case for several reasons. It has longevity, particularly when incorporating the Islamic Center in the group's development. It also operates in a region that receives significant media coverage and scholarly attention. The primary and secondary resources available allow for an in-depth analysis of the group's behavior. However, utilizing a single case inhibits empirical testing. Thus, while this work suggests factors that influence adaptation, it is unable to speak definitively to larger questions concerning the conditions under which groups are likely to adapt or the types of groups that are more or less likely to adapt. Additionally, the adaptive process in which Hamas engaged may not translate to other organizations and in this sense, these findings should be considered a first, but important, step in expanding our understanding of dissident group behavior. In order to test the applicability of this dissertation's findings, it is necessary to examine adaptation in multiple dissident organizations.

Despite these limitations, this dissertation provides initial support for incorporating organizational change theories into examinations of adaptation. In particular, I argue that of the three theories, strategic choice offers the most comprehensive framework for analyzing dissident group adaptation. More so than population ecology and punctuated equilibrium, strategic choice addresses *who* decides to adapt, *how* adaptation occurs and *why* adaptation occurs. Importantly, the theory can also explain why adaptation



may not occur.<sup>1</sup>

Strategic choice's focus on the dominant coalition clearly indicates the individuals who initiate and influence adaptation. These decision-makers evaluate information and determine whether to change the organization, manipulate the environment, or do nothing at all. Rather than eliminating organizational agency, as predicted by population ecology, or focusing primarily on leadership change, as championed by punctuated equilibrium, strategic choice highlights the role of existing group leaders to influence the trajectory of the group. Examples of major adaptations, such as the PIRA's decision to abandon abstentionism or the PLO's choice to negotiate with Israel can be traced back to the group's dominant leaders, Gerry Adams and Yasir Arafat, respectively. These leaders initiated and guided major organizational-level change and did not come from outside the group; rather, these leaders' tenure within the group may have contributed to their credibility and legitimacy in calling for adaptation.

Strategic choice's emphasis on learning also addresses how and why adaptation occurs. Child's (1997) description of the strategic choice cycle, which includes evaluating information, making a choice, initiating an action, and getting feedback on the outcome, emphasizes that the flow of information is key to the adaptive process. Adaptation occurs because leaders learn about a changing environment and determine that there is a need for organizational change. Additionally, strategic choice remains neutral concerning the type and degree of change that occurs; the dominant coalition can initiate incremental adjustments or more radical changes, depending on the need. Finally, the focus on learning can address why adaptation may not occur. Bounded rationality, biases, and information constraints all influence how accurately leaders can assess the need to adapt. Whereas punctuated equilibrium predicts all major external changes

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<sup>1</sup>Strategic choice does not provide a similarly adequate explanation for *when* adaptation should occur. Integrating aspects of punctuated equilibrium, namely the theory's focus on catalysts of adaptation, can improve the theory's explanatory power.

will lead to reorientations, strategic choice highlights that leaders' perception of those changes can influence whether or not adaptation occurs.

Strategic choice does not provide a complete theory of adaptation and can still be informed by aspects of population ecology and punctuated equilibrium, such as the role of inertia and identifying catalysts of change. Work by Karen Rasler (2000) illustrates how these broad theoretical frameworks can be combined. Rasler's work focuses on the de-escalation of enduring conflicts. She finds that changing expectations concerning the opponent's motivations is fundamental to changing strategies. She emphasizes the need for political shocks to bring about a change in expectations. She also highlights the role of leaders or "policy entrepreneurs" to push for change, third parties to renew or begin supporting de-escalation, and positive tit-for-tat behavior. This combination of factors contributes to higher rates of agreements, as supported by an empirical analysis of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Rasler's research highlights the need for political shocks to break policy and strategic inertia, as anticipated by punctuated equilibrium. However, she also notes that for shocks to have a positive effect on de-escalation, leaders need to perceive that shocks "disconfirm their expectations," (702). Although not explicitly an examination of these organizational theories, Rasler's theory and positive findings indicate that these frameworks can contribute to conflict literature and our understanding of dissident group behavior.

## **6.4 Policy Implications**

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of adaptation and the factors that facilitate or inhibit organizational change can inform more effective policy development. The existing focus on state-generated catalysts of change highlight the ability of governments to change a group's cost calculation concerning the utility of using one type of strategy over another. For instance, a majority of current policy solutions focus on

increasing the cost of maintaining “unfavorable” strategies or increasing the benefits of “acceptable” strategies. This type of cost-benefit model has been used to examine the effectiveness of raising the costs to particular violent tactics, such as hostage-taking and hijackings (Dugan, LaFree and Piquero, 2005; Enders and Sandler, 1993; Sandler and Enders, 2004). Additionally, increasing the benefits of non-violent strategies can come in forms of amnesty to individual members or offers to negotiate with the organization in exchange for the cessation of violence. These policies are emphasized by scholars and practitioners who focus on a linear transition of groups from violent strategies to non-violent political participation (de Zeeuw, 2008; van Engeland and Rudolph, 2008).

As noted previously, the underlying assumption in most of these policy arguments is that dissident groups will easily respond to changes in cost calculations and re-evaluate the utility of particular strategies, particularly violence, and decide to adopt a non-violent form of protest or abandon their cause completely. However, not all organizations respond as expected. Organizational theory points to potential policy incentives that can influence adaptation within dissident groups.

Both population ecology and punctuated equilibrium highlight the role of internal organizational elements that generate resistance to change. Sunk costs, vested interests and organizational identity can inhibit adaptation. For instance, the structure a group adopts in order to support a given strategy often limits strategic change. Even if the opposition government reduces the costs of political participation, the costs of adapting structure to support a new strategy may prove too high to overcome. Third parties can aid structural adaptation by offering financial resources to develop a political wing. Findings from Manning (2004) and Söderberg (2004) indicate that access to resources is key to a successful structural and strategic adaptation. Financial aid, in addition to changes in the external environment, can provide incentives for violent dissident groups to adapt to non-violent strategies.

Strategic choice emphasizes the role the dominant coalition plays in initiating adaptation. Drawing on Rasler's findings (2000), she finds that policy entrepreneurs in the dominant coalition are often more willing to abandon long held-strategies and initiate policy change. Policies focused on identifying and cultivating these individuals can support a strategic shift. For instance, President Clinton's invitation to Gerry Adams to come to the White House gave credibility to Adams as leader of Sinn Fein and legitimacy to the party's political platform. Additionally, some scholars (Manikkalingam and Policzer, 2007) have pushed for opening talks between the US and al Qaeda's peripheral members as a means of broaching negotiations; these peripheral members might serve as a type of policy entrepreneur. The recent overtures by the Taliban to establish a presence in Qatar might also signal the emergence of policy entrepreneurs.

By highlighting unique factors that influence adaptation, organizational theories provide support for crafting more pointed and case-based policies to address dissident organizations. By understanding the elements that contribute to inertia or the degree of organizational awareness and ability to learn, policymakers can craft incentives that are more likely to support a viable and successful adaptation.

## **6.5 Future Research**

Examining adaptation through the frameworks of population ecology, punctuated equilibrium and strategic choice reveal factors influencing group change that are currently downplayed in conflict literature, including organizational inertia and learning. Systematically identifying inertial forces and the factors that influence the quality of learning can provide a more nuanced understanding of dissident group behavior. Additionally, this dissertation points to conditions under which groups are likely to overcome inertia, and the types of groups that are more or less likely to adapt.

The case illustrations demonstrate that inertia influenced Hamas' development and

provides some insight into examining constraining forces on adaptation. Hamas' structure, namely the existence of internal and external authorities, not only affected how leaders received information, but also created vested interests in the status quo. External leaders frequently undermined attempts by internal leaders to compromise due to the risk negotiations posed to their authority. Several scholars also allude to the role of vested interests in influencing adaptation. De Zeeuw and contributors find "a key challenge facing a rebel group's transformation into a political party is the necessary transformation of internal power configurations and the accompanying organizational restructuring," (Ishiyama and Batta, 2011, 370). Similarly, Manning (2004) argues that elite engagement is necessary to transform rebel movements to political parties. Elites who risked losing authority due to adapting created resistance to change. Understanding how vested individuals may serve as gatekeepers or veto players to adaptation can improve our understanding of organizational change as well as contribute to policy on conflict resolution.

Group structure also addresses whether an organization is hierarchical, with a centralized command, or networked with a more diffuse command and control features. Some research has addressed whether hierarchies or networks are more likely to adapt (Jackson et al., 2005a; Martin, 2011; Weinberg, Pedahzur and Perliger, 2009). Most scholars argue that hierarchies provide the control and coordination that is necessary for organization-wide adaptation (Cronin, 2006; Jackson et al., 2005a). However, the case illustrations indicate that Hamas was able to adapt from a loose network under Yasin to a formalized hierarchy under Marzuq. Further, Martin (2011) found no statistically significant relationship between structure and adaptation. The continued debate on structure's role in adaptation points to the necessity of additional research. One way forward is to disaggregate structural types beyond the current dichotomy of "network" and "hierarchy." Indeed, Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2001) and Johnston (2008) argue for

utilizing multiple variants of network and hierarchy, respectively.

Hamas' evolution also demonstrated that constituents can serve as both a source of inertia and a catalyst for change. While many conflict scholars acknowledge that dissident groups adopt or adapt tactics to appeal to supporters (Bloom, 2005; Bloom and Horgan, 2008; Crenshaw, 1987), few examine how the type of constituent can influence the likelihood of adaptation.<sup>2</sup> Supporters' preferences range based on their degree of homogeneity, rigidity and extremity. Constituents who hold homogeneous, rigid and extreme preferences are easy to appeal to (the range of acceptable strategies is narrow). However, deviating from their preferences is often costly. Should the constituent base hold preferences for strategies that deviate from what is most beneficial given the external conditions, the group faces high levels of tension and limited adaptability. In contrast, constituents that hold heterogeneous, flexible and more moderate preferences may be initially harder to attract but are more likely to aid adaptation. Should a group adapt its strategies, it is likely the group will still maintain some segment of its base. Further, the degree to which constituents influence adaptation is mediated by the level of a group's dependence on their support. Higher levels of dependence on constituent support means groups are more likely to adopt strategies that appeal to supporter preferences, regardless of whether those strategies are rational vis-à-vis the external context. Further research disaggregating the type of supporters dissident groups attract could expand our understanding of the types of groups are more or less likely to adapt.

The case illustrations also emphasize the role of learning in adaptation. While learning does appear in some conflict adaptation theories, namely in reference to building

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<sup>2</sup>Irvin (1999) serves as an exception.

reciprocity (Goldstein et al., 2001; Rasler, 2000), very few scholars examine the internal learning process itself.<sup>3</sup> How dissident groups acquire information, the means of evaluating information, and who within the group makes decisions all influence how capable groups are of adapting. As Jackson et al. (2005a) emphasizes, understanding this internal learning process can contribute to counterterrorism policies. Additionally, recognizing the types of resources that are necessary for accurate learning, including financial resources or specific group infrastructure, can improve scholars knowledge about the types of groups that are most likely to learn and subsequently adapt.

Although the examination of Hamas provides only a single, though in-depth, case of adaptation, it does reveal some preliminary insights about the conditions under which adaptation occurs and the types of groups that are most likely to adapt. As seen in all three chapters, Hamas reacted to major external changes, such as the outbreak of violence or the initiation of violence. However, not all catalysts resulted in an adaptation. In both instances of adaptation (1987 and 2004), Hamas' constituents held preferences that supported adaptation, whereas in the early 1990s the group's support base was fairly small and extreme. As noted above, constituent type affects the likelihood of adaptation.

The instances of adaptation also point to role of competitors and maneuverability as influencing the likelihood of adaptation. In 1987 and 2004, the political landscape was fairly open and Hamas' competitors were relatively small or weak, providing Hamas the space to enter a new market and establish itself. In contrast, in 1993, Fatah and the PLO dominated the Territories, providing little room for Hamas to compete as a viable political actor without the risk of being completely defeated or co-opted. For example, James Ron's (2001) analysis of Sendero Luminoso indicates a similar dynamic. Despite democratization and the inclusion of former resistance movements

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<sup>3</sup>Jackson et al. (Jackson et al., 2005a,b) serves as an exception

into the political process, Sendero continued to use violence as a means of distinguishing itself from the larger, stronger leftist parties that were transitioning to political parties. The risk of being co-opted or pushed out entirely prevented Sendero from adapting. Strong competitive pressures limits the space in which groups can operate and reduces the likelihood of adaptation. Further research on the interaction between groups and competitors can improve our understanding of the groups that are most likely to adapt, and the conditions that are likely to support the adaptive process.<sup>4</sup>

Utilizing organizational change theories provides some interesting insight into the factors that influence the adaptive process, independent of policy implications. This dissertation demonstrates the viability of utilizing cross-disciplinary approaches to examining the adaptive process. By recognizing the multiple factors that affect adaptation, such as inertia or learning, scholars can improve their understanding of dissident group behavior and contribute to policy development that enhance the likelihood that dissident groups, particularly those utilizing violence, will adapt to non-violent behaviors.

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<sup>4</sup>Current research is making significant headway in this line of inquiry. In particular, Suzanne Martin's dissertation (2011) specifically addresses the conditions under which political parties are likely to utilize terrorist tactics and vice versa. She also examines the types of groups that are likely to undergo this type of adaptation. Her work builds on previous work by Weinberg et al. (2009) and utilizes new datasets on political groups to test her theory. Her work is one of the few comprehensive pieces to empirically test the affect of regime type, timing, region, group type and structure on the likelihood of adaptation.



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