

The Divided Self: How Ideological Compartmentalization Drives Rebel-to-Party Success in Sri Lanka

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How defeated insurgencies adapt to democratic politics without a formal peace accord remains an under-theorized puzzle in post-conflict studies. Existing frameworks, focused on negotiated settlements or military victories, offer few tools for explaining this increasingly common pathway. This article addresses this gap by theorizing ideological compartmentalization: the structural separation of a protected, rigid ideological core from a flexible, public-facing front designed for broad electoral competition. This dual structure enables strategic oscillation: shifts in which ideological compartment is emphasized to respond to the political context. This article tests the argument through a longitudinal analysis of Sri Lanka's JVP (2015–2024), drawing on party manifestos and official media. The findings reveal that the JVP's official outputs deployed a universalist, anti-corruption technocratic populist register, while keeping Sinhala-nationalist commitments comparatively less visible in those same arenas, a pattern consistent with compartmentalized public signaling. This study challenges linear models of rebel-party moderation by offering a new theoretical framework for understanding how former insurgents may navigate ideological contradictions to achieve electoral success, providing a new framework for analyzing a growing number of post-conflict cases where defeated groups remain influential political actors.

Keywords: Rebel-to-Party Transitions; Post-Conflict Politics; Populism; Sri Lanka; JVP

Introduction

Anura Kumara Dissanayake's 2024 presidential victory through the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP) coalition presents a puzzle. How did a party marked by two violent, failed Marxist-Sinhala nationalist insurrections (1971 and 1987-89) win a mainstream election in a post-war society fractured by grievances it once exacerbated? The 2022 economic collapse and Aragalaya protests created permissive conditions through incumbent delegitimation.

This article analyzes how ideological compartmentalization enabled the JVP to become electorally credible.

The JVP's adaptation hinges on ideological compartmentalization: structural separation of a protected, rigid core from a flexible electoral front, enabling strategic oscillation, shifts in which compartment is emphasized to respond to political context. This framework identifies patterns consistent with coordinated navigation of post-conflict pressures. The argument makes two contributions. First, it theorizes a pathway for post-defeat rebel parties operating without peace agreement constraints where conflict cleavages persist. Strategic oscillation specifies how parties vary repertoire salience across arenas over time, rather than recalibrating along a single dimension. Second, this study analyzes the JVP's public strategy (2015-2024) through manifestos and newspapers (Red Power, Niyamuwa), using Curtis and Sindre's framework. Two research questions guide analysis: (1) How did the JVP combine universalist anti-corruption populism while maintaining its Sinhala-nationalist core? (2) How did the JVP's insurgent legacy function as both mobilization resource and programmatic constraint?

Literature Review

Scholarship on rebel-to-party transformations organizes around how wars end, leaving under-theorized¹ cases where defeated actors enter elections without peace agreement constraints². Existing literature privileges negotiated settlements³⁴ and military victories⁵⁶, but a third pathway involves a "small but globally significant subset,"⁷ of defeated insurgents achieving organizational survival and electoral entry without settlements⁸. The puzzle is how they broaden electorally while preserving foundational commitments without organizational rupture or brand dilution in political landscapes where conflict cleavages persist⁹.

Early scholarship assumed unidirectional moderation toward the median voter¹⁰.

Subsequent research showed rebel parties possess "convertible capacities" that resist isomorphic pressures¹¹. The literature distinguishes behavioral from ideological change, exemplified by Hamas¹² and Sinn Féin¹³ moderating methods while maintaining revolutionary commitments.

Recent research shows trajectories shaped by post-war competitive structures rather than inevitable moderation¹⁴. Parties oscillate between radical and pragmatic registers, 'impervious to change' in certain domains while adapting in others¹⁵ e.g., the TNA in Sri Lanka, Burundi's combatant parties, Colombia's M-19¹⁶.

Sprenkels's "ambivalent moderation" describes the FMLN's "contradictory ideological repertoires in parallel"¹⁷; Sindre's "selective moderation" identifies downplaying conflict cleavages in manifestos while mobilizing bases on ethno-sectarian lines¹⁸. Wittig's "multidirectional" shifts note liberalization on some axes while hardening on others¹⁹. For instance, UNITA developed new urban support while maintaining "wartime networks and discourses" in traditional strongholds²⁰, but the sustaining architecture remains underspecified. The literature needs tools distinguishing dual repertoires from façade transformation²¹ or factionalism²².

First, organizational legacies matter. Insurgent "organizational DNA"²³ provides cohesion necessary to survive defeat but creates rigidity. Ishiyama identifies tension between "identity change" (necessary for expansion) and "organizational distinctiveness" (base retention)²⁴. Party politics research specifies micro-mechanisms sustaining contradictory repertoires: voters are hyper-sensitive to ambiguity on 'brand core' issues while permitting flexibility on peripheral ones²⁵. Organizations maintain dual repertoires through strategic ambiguity²⁶, differentiated messaging across arenas²⁷, and boundary work that varies salience by audience²⁸. This article integrates these

insights into a framework explaining how defeated insurgents use compartmentalization and oscillation to exploit political opportunities.

Conceptual Framework: Ideological Compartmentalization and Strategic Oscillation

Core Mechanism

Post-defeat insurgent parties combine electoral expansion with identity continuity through two integrated components. *Ideological compartmentalization* maintains two distinguishable repertoires: a rigid *Foundational Core* of insurgent commitments and a flexible *Pragmatic Frontier* for broader audiences. *Strategic oscillation* shifts emphasis between repertoires as issue agendas and political opportunities change.

Compartmentalization specifies what remains protected versus elastic; oscillation specifies when and where each compartment is foregrounded. This framework treats duality as a durable solution to Ishiyama's "Rebel Party's Dilemma": balancing identity change necessary for mainstream penetration against organizational distinctiveness necessary for veteran retention²⁹. Parties can harden identity signals after periods of apparent moderation without undoing electoral mainstreaming, because the architecture switches emphasis rather than converging to a single endpoint. Reversibility is the mechanism's adaptive capacity, enabling parties to navigate shifting terrain without organizational rupture.

Distinctions from Alternative Concepts

Compartmentalization and oscillation must be distinguished from four related concepts: factionalism, deception, opportunism, and moderation.

Factionalism involves unresolved contest producing irregular messaging from internal power struggles³⁰; compartmentalization involves coordination producing recurrent arena-audience pairings. If the same message type appears in the same arena across multiple years, this suggests coordination rather than factionalism. "Façade transformation"³¹ involves cosmetic party formation concealing continued armed struggle; compartmentalization involves genuine electoral engagement with parallel messaging structures without organizational rupture.

Elite-driven improvisation³² predicts increasing personalization and contradictions under pressure; oscillation predicts convergence during governance crises when constituencies share concerns, and divergence during low-stakes moments when base maintenance matters more.

The moderation thesis predicts unidirectional convergence toward the median voter³³ and uniform softening on identity-central commitments. Oscillation predicts multidirectional shifts maintaining compartmental architecture: stable Core with varying salience, uneven change across dimensions.

Mechanism Components

The Foundational Core contains non-negotiable normative commitments with high identity centrality and steep brand costs if blurred: interpretation of the political community (who belongs), state sovereignty (legitimate external relationships), and conflict narrative (how violence is remembered). These "constitutive" questions define community boundaries rather than resource distribution, functioning as "positional issues": divisive, zero-sum conflicts where parties stake opposing positions³⁴.

Ambiguity is costly on "brand centrality"³⁵ issues. For former insurgents, commitments forged through violent conflict involve existential identity questions; blurring risks Lupu's "brand dilution,"³⁶ severing affective ties with insurgency-era constituencies³⁷.

The Core's rigidity preserves party distinctiveness, ensures veteran loyalty, and stabilizes the electoral floor. However, maintaining a radical Core alongside moderate public face presents "hypocrisy risk." Compartmentalization structures what is salient in broad-facing versus partisan arenas, creating protected "backstage"³⁸ for Core activation.

The Pragmatic Frontier operates on "peripheral" dimensions where parties can be elastic without violating Core "red lines," focusing on "valence issues": broad consensus on desired outcomes (economic growth, efficiency, anti-corruption) where competition focuses on delivery competence rather than opposing positions³⁹. This contrasts with the Core's "positional issues," where parties stake opposing positions on divisive, zero-sum questions. By shifting contestation to the Frontier, parties can build cross-cleavage coalitions while avoiding Core's polarizing issues.

One plausible Frontier content is technocratic populism: moralized people-elite opposition combined with expert competence claims⁴⁰. This transforms former rebels' outsider status into electoral asset. Adopting "anti-party" stances lets former rebels delegitimize post-war establishments while promising efficiency rather than revolution. Simultaneously, promising to "run the state like a firm"⁴¹ neutralizes radicalism fears by offering efficiency rather than revolution. The Frontier's elasticity enables electoral expansion into constituencies rejecting Core commitments and signals administrative capacity to skeptical voters.

Strategic oscillation shifts emphasis between compartments across arenas and time. Two patterns characterize oscillation: (1) Convergence occurs when governance crises elevate valence issues above positional ones; different constituencies share concerns about competence, creating opportunities for cross-cleavage appeal. Parties foreground the Frontier to build broad coalitions. This predicts temporal correlation:

governance crises should trigger increased Frontier emphasis. (2) Divergence occurs when commemorative events activate partisan identities or electoral calendars provide low-stakes moments for base maintenance. Parties dedicate partisan arenas to Core activation while maintaining Frontier emphasis in broad-facing arenas. This predicts arena differentiation by channel type.

Political opportunity structures condition oscillation's activation. Economic shocks, incumbent delegitimization, or ethnic party fragmentation create permissive conditions by shifting issue salience toward Frontier domains. However, opportunities are necessary but insufficient; parties must possess organizational capacity for coordinated emphasis management and inherited symbolic resources allowing Core reactivation. Insurgent parties contain both ideologically committed members and office-seeking pragmatists⁴². Compartmentalization houses these tensions structurally: 'reformist' appeals live in the Frontier, 'revolutionary' commitments live in the Core, and oscillation determines emphasis.

Operationalizing Compartments: The Curtis and Sindre Framework

This study operationalizes compartments using Curtis and Sindre's three-dimensional framework for analyzing armed-groups-turned-parties⁴³. Their framework moves beyond the "moderation thesis" by disaggregating ideology into distinct dimensions that can change unevenly⁴⁴:

1. Dimension 1: The Political Community — Who belongs to the nation?
Encompasses state structure (unitary vs. federal), sovereignty (foreign relations), ethnic inclusion (minority rights), and conflict memory (how violence is justified). Typically positional, zero-sum issues.
2. Dimension 2: Governance — How is authority organized? Encompasses political institutions (executive vs. parliamentary systems), accountability

mechanisms (anti-corruption), inclusion procedures (civil liberties), and justice provisions. Can be positional but often permits valence competition.

3. Dimension 3: Distribution — How are economic resources allocated?

Encompasses economic models (market vs. state-led), redistribution (welfare, taxation), labor relations (unions), and development strategy. Typically permits valence competition on competence.

This disaggregation enables precise mapping. The Foundational Core concentrates in Dimension 1: claims about political community, sovereignty, and conflict memory carry high identity centrality. The Pragmatic Frontier concentrates in Dimensions 2 and 3: governance competence and economic management permit electoral expansion without violating Core commitments. Compartmentalization thus predicts *dimensional asymmetry*: uneven change rather than uniform convergence.

Strategic oscillation manifests as systematic shifts in which dimensions receive emphasis across arenas and time. Rather than a single "moderation score" assuming unidirectional change, this approach traces how parties vary dimensional salience, revealing coordination patterns distinguishing strategic management from inconsistency or factionalism. In what follows, the JVP/NPP provides a case in which this dual architecture can be observed in practice. The Foundational Core maps onto positions on political community, sovereignty, and conflict memory on Dimension 1, while the Pragmatic Frontier maps onto governance and distributive proposals on Dimensions 2 and 3. The empirical sections use this mapping to show how a compartmentalised structure was consolidated and activated across arenas, and when oscillation between compartments opened and then constrained the party's post-war electoral reach.

Methods

This study employs longitudinal qualitative analysis of the JVP in Sri Lanka, a defeated rebel movement achieving electoral success without a formal peace accord. Following Zaks, the JVP's 2024 presidential and parliamentary election victories represent a successful "seated participation"⁴⁵, a critical case for this rare outcome among defeated insurgents.

The empirical analysis focuses on 2015-2024, when messaging exhibits patterns consistent with strategic oscillation. Claims about organizational coordination are inferred from patterned messaging rather than internal processes. Whether compartmentalization operates through explicit directives, internalized norms, or structural separation cannot be determined from public outputs alone; the analysis remains agnostic about the party's internal decision-making processes.

This analysis examines two primary source types:

Electoral Manifestos (2015, 2019, 2024). Manifestos remain the most systematic source for tracking official platforms across elections⁴⁶, shaping the campaign's issue agenda⁴⁷, providing "programmatically detailed" content versus "vaguer" rally rhetoric⁴⁸ and serving as "authoritative indicators" of leadership intent; shifts in manifesto content, including "strategic silence," are "clear signs" of repositioning attempts⁴⁹. They are treated as windows onto rhetorical shifts, policy proposals, and ideological continuities. The 2015 *Accord of Conscience* had longer Sinhala and shorter English versions. I analyzed translated Sinhala text⁵⁰ as primary. For 2019 (*The Nation's Hope*) and 2024 (*A Thriving Nation*), Sinhala and English versions are substantively identical; I analyzed English texts.

Party Newspapers: I analyze the JVP's official newspapers using paired comparison: English-language Red Power and Sinhala-language Niyamuwa, testing whether systematic divergence exists between linguistic arenas and whether divergence

clusters temporally around predictable contexts. I selected months where both publications are available: July-August 2014; January 2016; November 2016; November 2018; December 2019; November 2020; November 2021; February 2022; June 2023; November 2023; March 2024. November issues are oversampled because they coincide with annual insurgency commemorations. The English outlet is treated as oriented toward broader audiences (coalition partners, international observers); the Sinhala outlet toward the party's mass base, where commemorative and sovereignty themes are hypothesized more explicit.

Although these primary sources are well suited to tracing how the organisation presents and sequences its dual architecture to the electorate, they do not capture internal bargaining, informal practices, or rank-and-file perceptions. The analysis therefore focuses on how the JVP/NPP structures and communicates its programme but does not provide a systematic account of voter reception, electoral behaviour, or intra-party dynamics. Survey data, television coverage, social media, and Tamil-language materials are used only illustratively and are not systematically coded.

Content is coded using Curtis and Sindre's three-dimensional framework: Dimension 1 (state structure, sovereignty, ethnic inclusion, conflict memory); Dimension 2 (governance, accountability, justice); Dimension 3 (economic models, redistribution, labor relations). Each manifesto section and newspaper article is coded by primary content. Compartments are inferred from patterned clusters: Core from Dimension 1 boundedness; Frontier from Dimensions 2-3 expansion. Oscillation is inferred from systematic shifts in which dimensions dominate which arenas at which times.

Table 1 presents sample coded excerpts showing how text maps onto dimensions.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Historical Context

This section traces how the JVP developed organizational capacity for compartmentalized strategy. Table 2 maps this trajectory, identifying critical junctures where compartmentalization was institutionalized (2019 NPP formation) and activated (2022 crisis).

Founded in the 1960s, the JVP combined Marxist class analysis with Sinhala nationalist appeals, attracting marginalized Sinhalese rural youth. This hybrid "sectarian socialism"⁵¹ provided the dual repertoire enabling compartmentalization: class-based economic critique (future Frontier, Dimension 3) and ethno-nationalist boundary defense (future Core, Dimension 1). The first insurrection (1971) failed militarily but established insurgent credentials. In the 1980s, the party re-entered mainstream politics⁵², positioning itself as bulwark of Sinhala nationalism⁵³; Wijeweera framed the Tamil insurgency as a "reactionary movement aligned with imperialist interests."⁵⁴ This ideological turn radicalized further after the 1987 Indo–Lanka Accord and the deployment of Indian forces, which triggered a second insurrection (1987-1989) inflicting 60,000 deaths. State-backed death squads eliminated the party's leadership but mid-level cadre maintained networks and veteran affiliations persisted⁵⁵. This violent legacy created raw materials for the Foundational Core. Defeat without negotiated settlement meant the JVP retained full autonomy over how it narrated its past without treaty obligations requiring renunciation or reconciliation. Annual November Heroes remembrance ritualizes this history as patriotic defense, framing violence as reactive response to state repression⁵⁶, providing convertible symbolic capital with Sinhala nationalist constituencies.

Electoral Adaptation (1994–2014)

Re-legalized in 1994, the JVP re-entered electoral politics⁵⁷. Its positioning was reactive rather than coordinated, oscillating between anti-corruption campaigns⁵⁸ and Sinhala nationalist stances⁵⁹ fuelled by ongoing conflict with the LTTE separatists. Neither strategy succeeded: anti-corruption appeals failed to overcome voting patterns tied to patronage networks⁶⁰, while nationalist competition faced structural constraints from dominant parties controlling state institutions and monopolizing Sinhala Buddhist mobilization. The party's 2004 electoral peak, 39 seats as part of a coalition government, proved unsustainable. The JVP withdrew from government in 2005 to protest a post-tsunami aid agreement with the LTTE, which it portrayed as sovereignty violation⁶¹. It then joined Mahinda Rajapaksa's winning nationalist coalition, amplifying pro-war, anti-NGO stances that resonated with broader Sinhala-nationalist sentiment. This positioning triggered two critical splits: the 2008 National Freedom Front (NFF) departure extracted hardline nationalists⁶², while the 2012 Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) exit removed Marxist-Leninist purists, leaving "a moderate middle between Sinhala nationalism and revolutionary socialism."⁶³ These fragmentations strengthened compartmentalization capacity by removing factions most resistant to strategic flexibility.

Yet the post-2009 landscape left the JVP structurally marginalized. The Rajapaksa regime monopolized victory narratives and nationalist mobilization, presenting itself as savior of the Sinhala nation⁶⁴. The JVP's anti-Tamil, anti-devolution nationalism became indistinct from the regime's credible claims to have defeated the Tigers. Facing this "political wilderness,"⁶⁵ the party's 2015 decision to support the common opposition candidate against Rajapaksa on an anti-corruption platform represented strategic repositioning toward unoccupied electoral space. After the "Good

Governance" coalition's electoral success⁶⁶, the JVP left the coalition and party leader Anura Kumara Disanayake was appointed Chief Opposition Whip⁶⁷, a platform he used to criticize government failures including the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks⁶⁸ and unfulfilled anti-corruption promises⁶⁹.

NPP Formation (2019)

The 2019 National People's Power (NPP) formation institutionalized dual ideological architecture, solving the rebel party's dilemma: broaden electorally without diluting identity or triggering veteran defection. For party veterans, diluting Marxist-Leninist identity "felt like betrayal," but after "protracted consultations," the NPP was structured so "the JVP would remain the pivotal power" while maintaining "its position of pre-eminence"⁷⁰. This permitted electoral expansion without surrendering ideological authority: as noted in Jeyaraj, "the JVP would remain faithful to its political philosophy and retain its core principles. In a sense it would be old wine in a new bottle."⁷¹ Civil society members contributed policy expertise and middle-class credibility but did not control core party identity. The NPP brand functioned as "shield": critics attacking the JVP's violent past could be answered by pointing to the coalition's broader professional base⁷². The JVP core maintained custodianship of the Foundational Core (Dimension 1) while the NPP brand provided space for the Pragmatic Frontier (Dimensions 2-3). Where the 2008 and 2012 splits had fragmented the party, the NPP structure contained potential dissent by institutionalizing rather than resolving the tension between revolutionary identity and electoral pragmatism. Internal tensions remain but have not triggered major defections since 2019⁷³. However, the NPP initially failed electorally. The 2019 presidential election saw the NPP secure just 3.16 percent⁷⁴. This demonstrated that organizational architecture alone is insufficient:

compartmentalization requires *activation* through favorable political opportunity structures.

The Aragalaya and Mechanism Activation (2022-2025)

The 2022 economic collapse created permissive conditions for challengers through incumbent delegitimization. The Aragalaya protests represented acute governance failure: the Rajapaksa regime's core constituency turned against it as ideological mobilization failed to compensate for material hardship⁷⁵.

The protests fostered interethnic solidarity moments such as commemoration of Mullivaikkal Remembrance Day (honoring Tamil civilian deaths from the war's final offensive) and the country's first Pride parade⁷⁶ yet had complex undercurrents: Tamil representation was lower, protest discourse often sidelined Tamil grievances⁷⁷ and majoritarian nationalist undercurrents persisted⁷⁸. The Aragalaya temporarily sublimated ethnic tensions beneath anti-corruption banner, shifting issue salience toward Dimensions 2-3 (governance, economic management) and away from Dimension 1 (ethnic settlement, devolution). This created optimal conditions for Frontier dominance: the electoral terrain favored technocratic competence claims and anti-elite mobilization over identity commitments and boundary politics.

The JVP/NPP was uniquely positioned to exploit this shift. Having participated in but not led the Aragalaya, the party could claim alignment with protest demands while maintaining parliamentary legitimacy. When President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled in July 2022, the JVP/NPP engaged the constitutional succession process, a move critics saw as allowing the Aragalaya to "die in Parliament" by re-legitimizing the discredited legislature⁷⁹. This positioned the NPP as institutional inheritor of Aragalaya demands, capturing the disintegrating "vote of exchange" of the Rajapaksa base⁸⁰. The 2024 electoral sequence tested compartmentalization's limits for cross-ethnic reach. In

September's presidential election, the NPP polled poorly in Tamil-majority districts (7.29% Jaffna, 9.86% Vanni), reflecting skepticism about the JVP's historical positions and the NPP's silence on devolution⁸¹. However, November's parliamentary elections produced a shift: the NPP won Jaffna plurality (24.85%), becoming the first non-Tamil party to win the district since 1977⁸². This occurred as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) fragmented following leader Sampanthan's June 2024 death, splitting constituent parties into competing factions⁸³. Contemporary analyses noted voters "overlooked contentious ethnic issues and pitched for better governance"⁸⁴, precisely the Frontier domains where the NPP concentrated messaging. Support was contingent on agenda displacement, not Core revision: the 2024 manifesto made no reference to 13th Amendment, devolution, federalism, or accountability⁸⁵. By May 2025 local elections, when agenda shifted back toward "justice, accountability, and devolution," following the NPP government's hesitancy to deliver on these Tamil demands, the NPP's Jaffna vote collapsed to 20.45% while the main Tamil party ITAK surged to 31.95%⁸⁶.

This trajectory clarifies mechanism scope. Cross-group support occurred without programmatic concessions on devolution, ideological revision, or identity redefinition. Support emerged under *agenda displacement* when governance failure dominated and Dimension 1 issues were overshadowed. The fragility validates that compartmentalization produces contingent rather than durable cross-ethnic coalitions: when competition shifts back to Dimension 1 positional issues, Core constraints resurface and minority support evaporates. The framework explains both the temporary gain and the rapid loss without requiring assumptions about voter conversion or Core transformation.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

A Longitudinal Analysis of the JVP/NPP's Dual Ideological Compartments (2015-2024)

This section tests whether asymmetric adaptation appears across the JVP/NPP's three electoral manifestos (2015, 2019, 2024), using Curtis and Sindre's three dimensions. Table 3 presents key policy positions across manifestos, enabling direct comparison. The selection focuses on domains where change (or its absence) is theoretically diagnostic: devolution and foreign policy (Dimension 1 identity boundaries), anti-corruption and rights (Dimension 2 governance), and economic model and labor relations (Dimension 3 distribution).

[Insert table 3 here]

Dimension 1: Bounded Core

On devolution, the most sensitive Dimension 1 issue in Sri Lankan politics, the trajectory shows linguistic adaptation without substantive movement. The 2015 manifesto promised to abolish Provincial Councils once alternative structures were established, describing the existing system as "in no way a contributor to solving the national question" (p.15), aligning with the party's historical opposition to the 13th Amendment as Indian-imposed sovereignty violation. The 2019 manifesto shifted from explicit rejection to strategic omission: "13th Amendment," "devolution," and "federalism" do not appear in the 115-page text. This absence is analytically significant, as it represents calculated avoidance of vocabularies that would force explicit positioning. What appears instead is a "second chamber of parliament" with representatives elected from Provincial Councils, "representing the political aspirations and ambitions of all communities" (p.88). This architectural move is revealing: it offers minority representation at the national level while preserving the centralized state, since no legislative, land, or police powers are devolved to the periphery. When Provincial

Councils are mentioned, they appear only as administrative bodies requiring efficiency improvement (p.106), not as sites of political autonomy.

The 2024 manifesto marks another tactical shift: the first appearance of the word "devolution" in any JVP/NPP manifesto. Yet the formulation immediately constrains: "devolution of political and administrative power to every local government, district and province so that all people can be involved in governance within one country" (p.128, emphasis added). The closing phrase, "within one country", is well-understood code in Sri Lankan politics for rejecting federal arrangements and preserving the unitary state. Critically, the manifesto makes no reference to implementing the existing 13th Amendment, to federal restructuring, or to police and land powers, the core demands of Tamil political parties. The vocabulary inclusion signals rhetorical adaptation; the substance signals Core protection.

Foreign policy follows identical logic. The anti-imperialist frame established in 2015, "close relations with socialist countries" opposing "imperialist political, economic, and cultural neo-colonialist invasions" (p.89), persists through register shifts. The 2019 manifesto adopts diplomatic language: "non-aligned policy that builds cooperation instead of competition" (p.97). Yet by 2024, the manifesto hardens again: oppose "foreign military bases and similar military agreements" in the Indian Ocean (p.124). The lexical moderation (2019) proves reversible; the underlying sovereignty protection proves stable. The party moved from overt anti-imperialism to diplomatic non-alignment back toward explicit opposition to foreign military presence, demonstrating that vocabulary shifts need not reflect substantive repositioning.

Conflict memory, the third Dimension 1 domain, shows similar boundedness. The party's official commemorative practices, particularly annual November Heroes remembrance, ritualize the 1988-89 insurgency as patriotic resistance rather than terror.

While the 2019 and 2024 manifestos gesture toward transitional justice, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions examining violations by "all parties during the war" (2019, p.104; 2024, p.128), these formulations carefully avoid attribution. The 2024 manifesto expands commitments to abolish the Prevention of Terrorism Act and release political prisoners (p.128), but these are civil liberties pledges compatible with multiple narratives about the past. Critically absent are any manifesto language explicitly condemning the JVP's own 1988-89 violence, any acknowledgment of victims beyond a universalized "all parties" frame, or any accountability mechanisms that would require the party to reckon with its insurgent legacy beyond commemoration. The Core rests on curated insurgent memory. Official accounts frame the turn to violence as patriotic defense against repression and "Indian expansionism" (the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord)⁸⁷. Annual November Heroes commemorations sustain this revolutionary ethos⁸⁸. This produces observable ambiguity: Dissanayake has issued apologies aimed at broader electorates⁸⁹, while other prominent figures maintain harder registers for core supporters, including rhetoric casting JVP victims as "murderers, rapists,⁹⁰" conditional renunciation of armed struggle⁹¹, and dismissals of ethnic grievances as settled history⁹². This duality exemplifies the JVP's "convertible capacities": repurposing symbolic capital from insurgency for contemporary mobilization while managing its activation across arenas.

Dimensions 2-3: Frontier Expansion

The contrast with Dimensions 2-3 is qualitative. Anti-corruption, a Dimension 2 valence issue, evolves from symbolic gestures to institutionalized mechanisms. The 2015 manifesto offered hotlines and whistleblower protections; the 2019 manifesto targeted patronage practices; by 2024, proposals include a "stolen public assets recovery authority" in partnership with the World Bank's STAR Initiative and UNODC (p.112).

The progression from hotlines to international partnerships demonstrates Frontier elaboration: the party moves from signaling intent to demonstrating technocratic capacity. Rights expansion follows the same trajectory. Women's reproductive autonomy moves from abstract principle (2015, p.87) to specific legal reform (2019, p.43) to Law Commission recommendations on "safe termination of pregnancy" (2024, p.44). LGBTQ+ rights progress from absence (2015) through decriminalization (2019, p.49) to constitutional anti-discrimination protections (2024, p.45). Each iteration adds a layer of institutional depth, moving from recognition to legal reform to constitutional guarantee.

Economic policy undergoes the most dramatic transformation, reflecting navigation from socialist doctrine to technocratic flexibility necessitated by sovereign default. The 2015 manifesto centered a "production economy based on modern socialist policies" as remedy to the "predatory open market economic policy" that had "failed" (p.39). Labor relations would reverse privatizations with "new management that includes the workers" (p.51), signaling worker control. The baseline is state-led development anchored in Marxist-Leninist rhetoric.

The 2019 manifesto performs linguistic sanitization while retaining dirigiste substance. The economic model becomes "community-participatory, people-based economy" (p.59), shedding explicit socialism while maintaining state centrality. The manifesto's preface frames the document as "scientific document" compiled by "expert researchers, scholars, and intellectuals" (p.4). This technocratic framing, absent in 2015, signals epistemic repositioning: from revolutionary party asserting ideological truth to policy organization mobilizing expert knowledge. Labor relations shift from "worker control" to giving employees "a share of ownership" via "financial incentives" (p.60). The 2019 text also targets the "micro-finance loan trap" affecting 2.8 million people

(p.62), demonstrating the party's capacity to identify valence issues transcending communal boundaries.

The 2024 manifesto absorbs the IMF program into Frontier discourse rather than rejecting it. The party acknowledges the Extended Fund Facility from a protective nationalist stance: promise to "renegotiate with the IMF" toward a "more palatable and strengthened program" aimed at "salvaging the poor and deprived people from that painful condition" (p.59). This formulation is calibrated: it signals fiscal responsibility to creditors and business constituencies while assuring domestic audiences that austerity will be mediated and softened. The manifesto pairs conditionality acceptance with targeted relief: increase the annual income tax threshold from Rs.1.2 million to Rs.2.4 million (p.57), a direct appeal to middle-class voters hit by recent tax hikes. State-Owned-Enterprise reform similarly maximizes flexibility: promise "appropriate strategic decisions" for each SOE based on "strategic importance, potential for economic growth," and "relevance to national security" (p.60). The criteria are capacious enough to justify any decision, privatization, restructuring, or retention, without violating anti-neoliberal commitments. Environmental policy completes the technocratic turn: from aspirational "green economy" (2015, p.71) to regulatory "Polluter Pays Principle" (2019, pp.50-52) to state-led "transition to an energy mix... with significant increase in renewable energy" (2024, p.91) and dedicated public bodies for green hydrogen development (2024, p.92). The trajectory runs from moral aspiration to governance architecture to industrial policy.

The NPP Institutionalization Effect

Comparing pre-NPP (2015) with post-NPP (2019, 2024) manifestos reveals systematic intensification rather than directional change. Post-2019 manifestos exhibit: (1) more confident Frontier elaboration: Dimension 2 proposals shift from symbolic

pledges to institutionalized mechanisms; Dimension 3 rhetoric shifts from socialist doctrine to technocratic flexibility including IMF engagement; (2) stable Core with managed vocabulary: Dimension 1 commitments remain structurally rigid but increasingly expressed through omission and diplomatic register; (3) strategic silence as technique: post-NPP manifestos deploy absence as strategy, where 2015 promised to abolish Provincial Councils, 2019 omits devolution entirely, and 2024 uses "devolution" but empties it of federal content through the "within one country" qualifier.

This pattern confirms both dimensional asymmetry (Pattern 1) and institutionalization effects (Pattern 4). The 2019 NPP formation created organizational space for Frontier professionalization, the technocratic register, expert validation, and policy specificity observable in post-2019 texts, while the JVP's retention of "pivotal power" ensured Core protection. The compartmentalization architecture, formalized through organizational structure in 2019, became operationally more sophisticated across subsequent electoral cycles.

Newspaper Analysis: Arena Segmentation and Temporal Oscillation

The newspaper comparison tests whether the party systematically varies emphasis across arenas. Strategic oscillation predicts Dimension 1 emphasis in partisan arenas, Dimensions 2-3 emphasis in expansion arenas, with divergence clustering around predictable contexts rather than appearing randomly. Table 4 presents seven paired issues spanning 2014-2024, comparing how the same political moments were framed in *Niyamuwa* (Sinhala, partisan base) versus *Red Power* (English, coalition expansion). The selection focuses on theoretically diagnostic contexts: commemoration (November issues), sovereignty disputes, and governance crises.

[TABLE 4 HERE]

Commemorative Divergence: November Issue Evidence

The annual November insurgency commemoration produces the most consistent arena differentiation. Across seven November issues sampled (2014-2023), six exhibit the same directional pattern: Niyamuwa foregrounds Dimension 1 content while Red Power emphasizes Dimensions 2-3 or contains Dimension 1 through attribution shifts. November provides a recurring natural experiment where identity-maintenance incentives are predictably high.

November 2021: Niyamuwa featured party founder Rohana Wijeweera as "the great hero pilot" showing "the path to revolutionary sacrifice" (pp.5, 10), defending the 1988-89 insurgency as patriotic resistance against efforts to "smear and hide what happened between 1988 and 1989" (p.5). The text presents insurgent violence as sacrifice grounding the party's present political legitimacy, asserting the party's moral authority derives from its members' willingness to die resisting an unjust state. Red Power opened with "the JVP was not without its faults" (p.2), immediately signaling distance from hagiography, then argued that attributing violence primarily to the JVP is "fraud": "What has been publicized as the 1988-1989 'terror' is a history that has been written by the murderers [the UNP]" (p.2). November 2016: Niyamuwa stated "the blood shed in November demands justice in everyday life" (p.2), linking sacrifice directly to present distributive claims, the martyrs' deaths authorize policy positions. Red Power redirected: "the real meaning of commemorating November Heroes is to strengthen the struggle for socialism" (p.5), shifting from sacrifice-as-legitimacy to sacrifice-as-inspiration for ongoing ideological work. November 2018: Niyamuwa made the ideological commitment explicit: "What is the alternative to capitalist barbarism? It is socialism" (p.1), embedding commemoration in partisan doctrine. Red Power December 2018 (the subsequent issue) focused on the constitutional crisis as elite capture (p.4), addressing governance breakdown through Dimension 2 framing rather

than ideological assertion. November 2023: Both newspapers commemorated Heroes while linking commemoration to inclusive governance. Red Power stated that martyrs "Give Strength and Courage to Make Our Motherland Amicable to All" (p.5), explicitly connecting insurgent legacy to cross-ethnic promise. Niyamuwa tied commemoration to judicial validation of the party's anti-Rajapaksa stance: "history has acquitted us" (p.3), framing vindication as retrospective legitimacy. Both texts use the legacy to authorize present positioning, but the positioning itself, inclusive governance, anti-corruption vindication, is Frontier rather than Core. This recurrent pattern discriminates between alternative mechanisms. Editorial drift would not produce the same directional pattern across multiple years. Factionalism would produce irregular patterns reflecting shifting factional power or eventual organizational rupture. Instead, the pattern is recurrent (same month annually), directional (Sinhala foregrounds Dimension 1, English contains or redirects), and stable (persists across six of seven years). The divergence concerns what the insurgent past does in each arena. Niyamuwa treats the 1988-89 violence as constitutive sacrifice: the party exists because its members were willing to die, and this sacrifice grounds moral authority to speak for the nation against elite betrayal. The insurgency is not historical event requiring justification, it is the party's credential. Red Power cannot ignore this history (it defines the party), but it cannot reproduce the direct legitimacy claim in arenas where audiences may view the insurgency as terrorism. Instead, Red Power deploys a double move: acknowledge imperfection ("not without its faults") while relocating primary responsibility onto state repression ("history written by murderers"). This makes the legacy indirectly usable: the party opposed injustice, the state was brutal, the JVP's violence was reactive. Both texts invoke the same history, but Niyamuwa makes it foundation, while Red Power makes it context. Critically, this is not concealment: both outlets openly discuss the insurgency. Compartmentalization

operates through framing divergence, not topic avoidance. The coordination is visible in temporal regularity: the same month, the same pattern, across six of seven years. If this reflected factional struggle, we would expect the pattern to break down precisely when electoral stakes rise and factions compete for control. Instead, the pattern remains stable through 2019 electoral failure and 2024 electoral success, suggesting internalized strategic norms or centralized coordination. November 2023 reveals the sophistication trajectory. Rather than crude separation (partisan commemoration in Sinhala, governance talk in English), both outlets deploy the insurgent legacy to validate Frontier promises. The party has learned to use Core symbols as affective resources for Frontier claims, rather than treating them as separate messaging tracks. This represents organizational learning: by 2023-2024, compartmentalization operates through integration rather than through segregation.

Sovereignty Crises: Selective Dimension 1 Activation

Outside the November commemoration cycle, Dimension 1 emphasis in Sinhala arenas clusters around sovereignty disputes, irregular events sharing the same structural feature as commemorations: they activate identity-boundary anxieties where Core signaling carries political value.

The June 2021 Trincomalee oil tank lease to India provides a clear test. *Niyamuwa* led with: "Withdraw the agreement betraying the Trincomalee oil tank national asset to India" (p.1). The lexical choices, "betraying" and "national asset", are theoretically diagnostic. "Betraying" moralizes the transaction as elite perfidy rather than policy disagreement, activating the party's anti-elite populism through nationalist affect. "National asset" frames the tanks not as economic infrastructure but as patrimony, making the lease a sovereignty violation rather than a commercial

arrangement. The framing mobilizes the anti-imperialist Core established in manifestos: India as external power, elite as compradors, JVP as sovereignty defender.

Red Power opposed the same lease through different justificatory architecture: "Trinco oil tanks: A casualty of the regional power games... With this deprivation of energy rights, suspicion has been aroused that the sovereignty would be handed over to India" (p.4). The register is analytical rather than moralized: "casualty of regional power games" situates the dispute in geopolitical competition, "deprivation of energy rights" frames opposition through strategic vulnerability and resource governance (Dimension 2), and "suspicion has been aroused" adopts a distanced epistemic stance rather than asserting betrayal directly. Sovereignty appears but as inference ("suspicion") rather than as foundation. Opposition is justified through instrumental reasoning, energy security, strategic autonomy, rather than through identity-defense.

The divergence follows the same logic as commemorative divergence: both outlets oppose the lease, but they do so through justifications targeting different audiences. *Niyamuwa* activates nationalist affect valuable for base mobilization; *Red Power* deploys governance and strategic reasoning valuable for coalition partners and external audiences who might reject nationalist framing but respond to sovereignty concerns expressed through procedural and strategic vocabularies.

Crisis Convergence: Cross-Arena Alignment

Governance crises produce cross-arena convergence on Dimensions 2-3 despite tonal differences, testing whether compartmentalization enables unity during high-stakes moments or produces contradictions when pressure intensifies, a key test distinguishing strategic oscillation from opportunistic improvisation.

The December 2018 constitutional crisis, triggered by President Sirisena's attempted unconstitutional dismissal of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, generated

parallel diagnoses across arenas. *Niyamuwa* framed it: "The real rulers are not the people... but the monopolistic capitalist class" (p.1). *Red Power* stated: "Treasonable conspiracy... ruled by political authorities and capitalist class" (p.4). Both texts located the crisis in elite capture and institutional decay (Dimension 2), deployed class analysis (Dimension 3), and diagnosed the problem as governance structure rather than as ethnic conflict or sovereignty threat. The tonal difference, *Niyamuwa*'s assertion of class rule versus *Red Power*'s "treasonable conspiracy" emphasizing constitutional violation, reflects audience calibration, but the dimensional emphasis converges: both foreground governance failure, both background identity boundaries.

February 2022, as the economic crisis accelerated and Aragalaya protests began, shows the same convergence. *Niyamuwa* framed the regime-backed "Egg Attack" on an NPP rally as evidence of authoritarian decay: "The secret of the enemy's panic is our success! The government has launched egg attacks on the conference using its mercenaries" (p.1). The language is confrontational but the claim is institutional: the regime relies on coercion because it lacks political legitimacy. *Red Power* covered the same episode by naming actors and institutional links: "One is Senadhipathy's bodyguard. They are clearly linked to Nissanka's Avantgarde security service... This attack cannot be taken lightly as the Avantgarde Defense Agency operates as paramilitary force with retired soldiers" (p.1). While *Niyamuwa* denounces and *Red Power* attributes, both locate the episode in state-organized coercion and governance collapse rather than in ethnic conflict or sovereignty disputes.

June 2023, during the Aragalaya's consolidation into electoral strategy, produced the tightest convergence. Both outlets foregrounded democratic procedure and cross-ethnic coalition under identical framing: "Let's Fight to Win Democracy" paired with claims that "Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are gathering under the shade of one flag"

(*Niyamuwa* p.12, *Red Power* p.8). The political community is described through civic anti-corruption alliance rather than through ethnic identity or sovereignty claims. Both outlets attacked IMF-mandated austerity, VAT increases, domestic debt restructuring, social spending cuts, using shared technical vocabulary and distributional critique rather than anti-imperialist nationalism. The agenda displacement is complete: when governance failure and material crisis dominate, both arenas converge on Dimensions 2-3 competence claims, temporarily subordinating Dimension 1 commitments.

Across the four post-Aragalaya issues sampled (February 2022, June 2023, November 2023, March 2024), sustained Dimension 1 divergence is absent. This pattern is difficult to reconcile with a factional-compromise account, which would predict increased Sinhala Core emphasis when electoral expansion pressures are highest. It is also inconsistent with opportunistic improvisation, which predicts contradictions when stakes rise. Instead, convergence indicates compartmentalization is conditional emphasis management: the architecture enabling divergence during commemoration enables convergence during crises when constituencies share concerns. The mechanism is adaptive rather than static.

Longitudinal Patterns in Arena Differentiation

The earliest paired issue (July-August 2014) shows the crudest form of compartmentalization: arena separation with minimal integration. *Niyamuwa* led with "The people rise to reclaim sovereignty," grounding legitimacy in collective struggle against state betrayal (p.1), a Dimension 1 sovereignty and resistance frame. *Red Power* in the same period emphasized institutional critique: "The Presidential System concentrates power at the top, undermines parliament, and makes possible the continued exploitation and suppression of the working class" (p.8), Dimension 2 governance structure and Dimension 3 class analysis. The two arenas *speak past each other*: there is

no integration, no shared framing, no mutual reference. One audience receives sovereignty mobilization, another receives institutional Marxism.

By 2019, *Red Power* signaled subordination of revolutionary aspiration to electoral pragmatism. January 2019 stated: "the revolution has not been achieved... due to the objective difficulties" and "we must always talk about practical issues" (p.1). Through this deprioritization, the insurgent past moves from immediate strategic horizon to background justification, creating space for Frontier emphasis without requiring Core abandonment.

By early 2024, both arenas deployed shared mobilizing narratives while retaining distinct emphases. "Renaissance" (*Punardhaya*) appeared in both outlets as the campaign's master frame. *Niyamuwa* January 2024 framed Renaissance as requiring "a new social system that brings the shattered society into a unity" (p.1), social solidarity and system transformation, legible to partisan audiences as continuity with transformative ambitions. *Red Power* January 2024 grounded Renaissance in comparative development trajectories: "Japan, China, India, and Vietnam have become the fastest-changing countries in the world today... Everyone should come together and recover the fallen country with a new awakening" (p.1), technocratic catch-up mobilization, legible to expansion audiences as modernization program. Both texts use the same master frame, both call for collective mobilization, but they fill the frame with content calibrated to audience: social transformation versus developmental catch-up.

March 2024 continues this pattern, with both outlets using Renaissance while varying emphasis: *Niyamuwa* emphasizes bringing "shattered society into unity" (social cohesion after crisis), *Red Power* emphasizes recovery through awakening and comparative learning (technocratic competence). The sophistication lies in finding formulations that are *semantically flexible* enough to accommodate both readings

without contradiction. "Renaissance" can mean social transformation or developmental catch-up depending on interpretive context, allowing audiences to project compatible meanings without the party explicitly choosing between them.

This longitudinal trajectory, from crude separation (2014) through subordination (2019) to integrated layering (2024), indicates organizational learning. The party became more sophisticated at deploying Core symbols to validate Frontier promises. November 2023 exemplifies this: Heroes commemoration authorizes inclusive governance rather than restating exclusionary nationalism. By 2024, the boundary between compartments becomes less visible even as the underlying structure persists.

Discussion

The findings show a patterned fit with the compartmentalization–oscillation mechanism. Manifestos document dimensional asymmetry: a rigid Foundational Core on political community, sovereignty, and conflict memory alongside an expanding Pragmatic Frontier on governance and distribution. The newspaper evidence shows how this dual repertoire varies systematically across arenas and moments, as anticipated by the strategic oscillation framework.

Alternative Explanations

Several alternatives challenge the interpretation that the observed patterns reflect organizational strategy. The moderation thesis predicts softening on identity-central commitments, convergence between Sinhala and English messaging, and declining Dimension 1 salience. The opportunism thesis predicts increasing personalization, factional resistance, and strategic fragility. The manifesto evidence sits uneasily with both. On state structure, the sequence is not straightforward softening: the 2015 manifesto promised to abolish Provincial Councils, the 2019 manifesto avoided

devolution vocabulary, and the 2024 manifesto adopted devolution language while constraining it with “within one country.” On foreign policy, the manifestos retain anti-imperialist commitments even as the register becomes less confrontational. The pattern is selective movement on Dimensions 2 and 3 alongside boundedness on Dimension 1. The newspaper evidence points in the same direction. Six of seven November issues sustain Dimension 1 salience in Niyamuwa while Red Power places relatively greater weight on governance and distribution. The pattern predates Dissanayake’s later leadership centrality, since paired issues from 2014 already show arena differentiation when he was a newly appointed parliamentary leader. The broader organizational record also fits awkwardly with an opportunism story that expects instability under pressure. Major splits (2008, 2012) occurred before the period studied here and were linked to alliance disagreements rather than to dual messaging disputes. Although this analysis does not observe internal discipline directly, senior JVP accounts nonetheless describe post-decision implementation as extremely disciplined and continuous across leadership transitions⁹³. Against that background, the persistence of a dual architecture across a decade is more consistent with the compartmentalization/oscillation framework than with ad hoc improvisation.

A related rival account is intra-party contestation: outputs could reflect negotiated compromise between harder-line and pragmatic tendencies rather than coordinated emphasis strategy. If so, periods of acute stress should amplify divergence as factions push their preferred frames, producing inconsistent cross-arena messaging or visible contradictions. The evidence shows the opposite. Arena divergence clusters in predictable, low-choice moments such as November commemoration and specific sovereignty disputes, while periods of governance collapse are marked by cross-arena convergence on governance failure and institutional breakdown. This pattern is difficult

to reconcile with a factional-compromise account, but consistent with centralized or internalized coordination that suppresses internal divergence precisely when electoral payoff depends on message unity.

A fourth alternative treats the Aragalaya as the sufficient cause of JVP/NPP success: economic collapse delegitimized incumbents, fractured the Rajapaksa coalition, and temporarily displaced ethnic alignment⁹⁴. This explanation is insufficient because it cannot specify the selection mechanism turning generalized incumbent rejection into victory for one particular challenger. In 2022–24, several actors could credibly claim anti-incumbency, including the main center left opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya. The evidence presented here points to what the opportunity account leaves underspecified: the JVP's compartmentalized repertoire and capacity to shift emphasis allowed it to foreground governance failure and administrative competence at the moment of crisis while leaving identity-central commitments intact, differentiating itself from rival challengers competing over the same anti-incumbent space.

The combined evidence supports a conditional inference: the JVP was well placed to exploit a crisis-created opening because compartmentalized messaging reduced the tension between retaining a Sinhala nationalist electoral floor and expanding into new constituencies. For disgruntled Rajapaksa voters, the party offered nationalist credibility (sustained Dimension 1 in Sinhala, maintained anti-devolution positions) combined with economic competence narratives. For urban professionals, it offered technocratic governance credentials without requiring acceptance of nationalism. In the period when street protest and economic collapse dominated, both arenas converge strongly on Dimension 2 and 3 themes (February 2022, June 2023), which is consistent with preparedness rather than improvised repositioning. The post-Aragalaya period then

shows continued boundary maintenance during consolidation, including renewed ritual activation in November 2023.

Cross-Group Electoral Viability and the Compartmentalization Framework

The electoral volatility in the North provides an implication test. The NPP's 2024 manifesto offered no programmatic commitments on devolution or war accountability, positions central to Tamil party competition⁹⁵, yet briefly achieved unusual Tamil support in late 2024. Contemporary analyses highlighted that the JVP supported "territorial integrity and sovereignty without compromise"⁹⁶ (Core rigidity), but voters "overlooked the contentious ethnic issues and pitched for better governance, less corruption and more people-centred development"⁹⁷, the Dimensions 2 and 3 domains where NPP messaging emphasized technocratic competence (Pragmatic Frontier). The party avoided binding movement on its Dimension 1 Core, while presenting a Frontier repertoire in Dimensions 2 and 3 that was legible across communities in a moment of acute governance failure. The same episode also clarifies scope. The rapid North-East reversal in the 2025 local polls, where the NPP's Jaffna vote share fell and the Tamil Federal Party rebounded amid renewed focus on justice, accountability, and devolution⁹⁸, is consistent with the expectation that cross-group reach produced through displacement is fragile once the agenda shifts back toward positional issues. Cross-group reach occurred without the causal pathway normally implied by minority incorporation theories (programmatic concession, ideological revision, or identity redefinition). Although explaining why Tamil voters selected NPP requires survey data beyond this study's design, the evidence shows that support emerged under conditions of agenda displacement, when governance failure and economic crisis dominated political competition, and under arena-specific management that limited the visibility of the JVP's Foundational Core. For this reason, the framework treats cross-group reach

not as evidence of Core revision, but as a contingent effect of agenda dominance and arena-specific emphasis under crisis conditions. Doing so allows the framework to explain both the NPP's temporary minority gains and their rapid reversal without invoking ideological change or voter conversion.

Conclusion

This analysis has examined how a defeated insurgent party without a peace accord could become a central electoral actor in a post-war polity still structured by the conflict it helped to produce. This analysis demonstrates that strategic oscillation, systematic variation in ideological emphasis across arenas and time, enabled the JVP/NPP to navigate the base-expansion dilemma inherent in post-defeat rebel-to-party transitions. Manifestos (2015-2024) and paired-language newspapers (2014-2024) analysis reveals a rigid Foundational Core (Dimension 1: sovereignty, national identity) coexisting with a flexible Pragmatic Frontier (Dimensions 2-3: governance competence, economic management). The 2024 electoral breakthrough resulted from structural opportunity (2022 Aragalaya, economic collapse), strategic positioning (compartmentalized messaging), and organizational capacity (inherited hierarchical structures permitting coordinated emphasis management).

The analysis makes three theoretical contributions. First, it specifies a mechanism linking organizational legacies to post-conflict electoral performance: inherited hierarchical structures enable coordinated emphasis management, permitting activation of different ideological compartments without organizational rupture.

Second, the findings demonstrate that ideological change is dimensionally asymmetric rather than uniform. The JVP shows movement on valence-heavy domains (governance, economic management) alongside rigidity on identity-central domains (state structure, sovereignty, conflict memory). Scholars should measure moderation

dimension-specifically rather than as unidirectional convergence toward the median voter.

Third, the study demonstrates that reversibility is an adaptive feature rather than incomplete transformation. The capacity to reactivate nationalist commitments during ritual moments while converging on governance themes during crises shows that compartments need not collapse into synthesis to be electorally effective.

The framework travels best to defeated rebel parties operating where ethnic or ideological cleavages remain salient but not fully determining, cases such as UNITA in Angola, M-19 in Colombia, and the Tamil National Alliance in Sri Lanka.

This analysis relies on elite-produced public documents to infer coordination patterns. The claim that messaging divergence reflects coordinated strategy rests on temporal regularity and predictability rather than direct observation of organizational directives. Future work using internal documents or elite interviews could test this coordination claim more directly.

Three research priorities emerge. First, elite interviews could validate or challenge the coordination inference. Second, analysis of additional communication channels could test whether arena-specific patterns hold across platforms. Third, comparative analysis would clarify whether the prerequisites identified here predict oscillatory patterns elsewhere. The JVP/NPP's post-2024 governing trajectory will test whether compartmentalization survives the transition from opposition to government.

The framework suggests defeated insurgencies can remain electorally competitive by managing rather than resolving ideological contradictions. Cross-group electoral reach can coexist with a rigid positional core when contestation shifts toward the Pragmatic Frontier. Whether this management proves sustainable in government, when campaign promises must be translated into policy and coalition partners may

demand ideological clarity, remains an open question with significant implications for understanding post-conflict political trajectories.

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Tables

Year & Source	Original Manifesto Excerpt	Curtis & Sindre Dimension	Compartment	Pattern Illustrated
2015 JVP	"We will build a production economy based on modern socialist policies to end the predatory open-market model that has bankrupted our people."	3. Distribution	Frontier	Economic rhetoric evolution
2019 NPP	"A community-participatory, people-centered economy will be guided by a scientific national plan drawn up by experts."	3. Distribution	Frontier	Technocratic turn
2024 NPP	"The devolution of political and administrative power to every province will be guaranteed within one country."	1. Political Community	Core	Bounded devolution stance
2015 JVP	"Selling land to foreign companies or foreigners will be stopped; Sri Lanka's resources are not for sale."	1. Political Community	Core	Sovereignty protection
2024 NPP	"We shall establish a stolen-public-assets recovery authority in partnership with the World Bank STAR initiative."	2. Governance	Frontier	Anti-corruption institutionalization

Table 1 Sample of coded manifesto excerpts, showing the assignment of text units to the Curtis & Sindre dimensions and the corresponding ideological compartment.

Period	Timeframe	Key Events / Context	Organizational Features
Insurgent Origins	1965–1989	Economic inequalities; two failed insurrections (1971, 1987-89); state crackdown	Hybrid ideology (Marxist-Leninist + Sinhala nationalism); creation of symbolic resources; mid-level cadre survival
Electoral Adaptation	1994–2014	Re-legalization; electoral entry; 2004 peak; 2008 & 2012 splits	Reactive positioning; fragmentation removing hardliners and purists; post-2012 cohesive core
Institutionalizing Compartmentalization	2015–2019	Post-Rajapaksa repositioning; NPP formation (2019); internal resistance managed	Dual architecture institutionalized: JVP core + NPP coalition; "old wine in new bottle" compromise

Period	Timeframe	Key Events / Context	Organizational Features
Activating Oscillation	2022–2024	Economic collapse; Aragalaya protests; 2024 electoral breakthrough	Crisis-triggered Frontier dominance; agenda displacement enabling cross- ethnic reach; organizational capacity demonstrated

Table 2 The strategic evolution of the JVP, tracking ideological and organizational shifts contextualizing post-2015 compartmentalization.

Issue Area	2015 Position	2019 Position	2024 Position
DIMENSION 1: Political Community			
Devolution	“Abolish Provincial Councils once People’s Councils established” (p.15)	No “devolution,” “13A,” “federalism”; second chamber with PC reps (p.88)	First “devolution,” but “within one country” (p.128); no 13A implementation
Foreign policy	“Close relations with socialist countries”; oppose “imperialist neo-colonialist invasions” (p.89)	“Non-aligned” cooperation not competition (p.97)	Oppose “foreign military bases and military agreements” (p.124)
DIMENSION 2: Governance			
Anti-corruption	24/7 hotline; whistleblower protection; abolish MP pensions (pp.9, 89)	Ban nepotism in MP staffing; remove tax-free vehicle permits (p.89)	Asset recovery authority; World Bank STAR Initiative; UNODC support (p.112)
Rights expansion	Women’s “right to make decisions regarding childbirth” (p.87)	“Right over one’s own body” (p.43); amend Penal Code 365/365A (p.49)	Safe pregnancy termination; constitutional protections for gender identity/sexual orientation (pp.44–45)
DIMENSION 3: Distribution			
Economic model	“Production economy... modern socialist policies”; critique “predatory open market” (p.39)	“Community-participatory... economy”; “scientific document” by “expert researchers, scholars, intellectuals” (pp.4, 59)	“Social market economy”; IMF acknowledged; “renegotiate” “more palatable” terms (pp.59–60)
Labor relations	Reverse privatizations; “new management that includes the workers” (p.51)	Employees “share of ownership” via incentives (p.60)	SOE reform by “strategic importance... potential for growth... national security relevance” (p.60)

Table 3 JVP/NPP policy positions across manifestos

Month/Year	Context	<i>Niyamuwa</i> Lead Emphasis	<i>Red Power</i> Lead Emphasis
DIVERGENCE PATTERN			
Jul–Aug 2014	Pre-repositioning	“People rise to reclaim sovereignty”; legitimacy via collective struggle against state (p.1)	Presidential system concentrates power, weakens parliament, enables exploitation (p.8)
Jun 2021	Sovereignty dispute	“Withdraw agreement betraying Trincomalee oil tanks to India”; sovereignty violation (p.1)	Trinco oil tanks as casualty of regional power games; energy governance frame (p.4)
Nov 2021	Commemoration	Wijeweera as “great hero pilot”; 1988–89 framed as patriotic sacrifice (pp.5,10)	Violence attribution rejected as “fraud”; blame assigned to UNP “history written by murderers” (p.2)
CONVERGENCE PATTERN			
Dec 2018	Constitutional crisis	“Real rulers... monopolistic capitalist class”; elite capture (p.1)	“Treasonable conspiracy”; political–capitalist elite capture (p.4)
Feb 2022	Economic collapse	State coercion: “enemy’s panic... egg attacks using mercenaries” (p.1)	State coercion with attribution: Avantgarde-linked paramilitary actors (p.1)
Jun 2023	Post-Aragalaya	“Let’s Fight to Win Democracy”; multi-ethnic civic unity (pp.1,8,12)	Identical slogan; civic anti-corruption coalition (pp.1,8)
Mar 2024	Electoral mobilization	“Renaissance” through social unity and new social system (p.1)	“Renaissance” via development models (Japan, China, India, Vietnam) (p.1)

Table 4 Arena differentiation and temporal oscillation in JVP newspapers (2014–2024).

¹ Söderberg Kovacs, “The Legacy of a Revolution,” 245–259.

² Pospisil, *Peace in Political Unsettlement*.

³ Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz, “Rebel-to-party transformations.”

⁴ Stedman, Rothchild, and Cousens, *Ending Civil Wars*

⁵ Lyons, “From Victorious Rebels,” 1026–1041.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Manning and Smith, “Electoral Performance,” 415–453.

⁸ Söderberg Kovacs, “The Legacy of a Revolution,” 245–259.

⁹ Manning, “Armed Opposition Groups.”

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- ¹⁰ Schwedler, “Democratization, Inclusion,” 56–61; Tezcür, “The Moderation Theory Revisited,” 69–88.
- ¹¹ Manning and Smith, “Political Party Formation,” 972–989.
- ¹² Kear-Martin, *Hamas and Palestine*..
- ¹³ Whiting, “Moderation without Change.”
- ¹⁴ Xu and Bertrand, “Between the Ballot.”
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ¹⁶ Sindre, “Adapting to Peacetime Politics?,”; Ams, “Rebel Participation,”; Wittig, “Politics in the Shadow,” 137–159; Dudouet, *From War to Politics*.
- ¹⁷ Sprenkels, “Ambivalent Moderation,” 536–558
- ¹⁸ Sindre, “Adapting to Peacetime Politics?,” 485–512; Berti, “Rebel Groups between Adaptation,” 513–535.
- ¹⁹ Wittig, “Politics in the Shadow,” 137–159.
- ²⁰ Pearce, “From Rebellion to Opposition.”
- ²¹ Rufyikiri, “The Post-wartime Trajectory,” 220–248.
- ²² Ghanem, “The Democratic Contributions.”
- ²³ Zaks, “Repurposing Rebellion,” 480–506.
- ²⁴ Ishiyama, “Identity Change and Rebel Party Political Success,” 437–464.
- ²⁵ Lupu, *Party Brands in Crisis*; Gunderson, “Brands that Bind.”
- ²⁶ Eisenberg, “Ambiguity as Strategy.”
- ²⁷ Borbáth and Gessler, “How Do Populist Radical Right Parties.”
- ²⁸ Ringel, “Unpacking the Transparency-Secrecy Nexus.”
- ²⁹ Ishiyama, “Identity Change and Rebel Party Political Success,” 437–464.
- ³⁰ Ghanem, “The Democratic Contributions”
- ³¹ Rufyikiri, “The Post-wartime Trajectory,” 220–248.
- ³² Peters and Pierre, “Populism and the Politics of Governance,” 252–255.
- ³³ Schwedler, “Democratization, Inclusion,” 56–61; Tezcür, “The Moderation Theory Revisited,” 69–88.

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- ³⁴ Zulianello and Larsen, “Blurred Positions.”
- ³⁵ Gunderson, “Brands that Bind.”
- ³⁶ Lupu, *Party Brands in Crisis*.
- ³⁷ Lupu, *Party Brands in Crisis*.
- ³⁸ Borbáth and Gessler, “How Do Populist Radical Right Parties.”
- ³⁹ Zulianello and Larsen, “Blurred Positions.”
- ⁴⁰ Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,”; Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, “Populism and Technocracy,”
- ⁴¹ Bušítková and Guasti, “The State as a Firm,”
- ⁴² Ishiyama, “Identity Change and Rebel Party Political Success”; Ishiyama and Basnet, “Born Out of Civil Wars.”
- ⁴³ Curtis and Sindre, “Transforming State Visions,” 387–414.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁴⁵ Zaks, “Do We Know It,” 246–262.
- ⁴⁶ Harmel et al., “Manifestos and the Two Faces,” 278–288.
- ⁴⁷ Kovarek and Oross, “Charter–Manifesto Congruence,” 1467
- ⁴⁸ Saidou and Bertrand, “Security as a Campaign Issue,” 1438.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1062.
- ⁵⁰ All Sinhala texts translated into English by a professional translator
- ⁵¹ Venugopal, “Sectarian Socialism,” 567–602.
- ⁵² Hill, “The Deception of Victory,” 357–374.
- ⁵³ Korf et al., “The ‘Cultural Life’ of Democracy,” 960–1007.
- ⁵⁴ Venugopal, “Sectarian Socialism,” 567–602.
- ⁵⁵ Moore, “The Insurrectionary JVP.”
- ⁵⁶ Ruwanpathirana, “Memorialisation for Transitional Justice in Sri Lanka.”
- ⁵⁷ Dewasiri, “The Revival of the JVP.”
- ⁵⁸ Peiris, *Catch-All Parties*.
- ⁵⁹ Dewasiri, “The Revival of the JVP.”

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- ⁶⁰ Peiris, *Catch-All Parties*.
- ⁶¹ Stokke, Törnquist and Sindre, “Conflict Resolution and Democratisation,” 129–150.
- ⁶² Venugopal, “Democracy, Development and the Executive Presidency,” 670–689.
- ⁶³ Jeyaraj, “When ‘Comrade’ Anura Became the Fifth JVP Leader.”
- ⁶⁴ Uyangoda, “Sri Lanka in 2010.”
- ⁶⁵ Dewasiri, “The Revival of the JVP.”
- ⁶⁶ Sahadevan, “The Politics of the Status Quo,” **91–103**.
- ⁶⁷ Verité Research, *Mapping Sri Lanka’s Political Parties*.
- ⁶⁸ Rameez, “Rise of Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna” **1–21**.
- ⁶⁹ Kapur and Attanayake. “Sri Lanka’s Presidential Election 2019.”
- ⁷⁰ LankaEnews, “Anura’s Gamble”
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, “**The Sri Lankan Left’s Long Road to Power.**”
- ⁷³ LankaEnews, “Anura’s Gamble.”
- ⁷⁴ Krishnamohan, “The Ethno-political Polarization Scenario,” 140-145
- ⁷⁵ Jayasundara-Smits, *An Uneasy Hegemony*.
- ⁷⁶ Perera, “Aragalaya: Struggle for Space”
- ⁷⁷ Mihlar, “Representation of the North and East Is Critical.”
- ⁷⁸ Rabukwella, “Whiplash and Contradiction”
- ⁷⁹ Perera, “Aragalaya: Struggle for Space.”
- ⁸⁰ Imtiyaz, “An Analysis of the 2024 Sri Lankan Presidential Elections,” **384–405**.
- ⁸¹ Groundviews, “The Implications of the Presidential Election on National Unity.”
- ⁸² Daily Mirror, “Anura “Alai” Engulfs Tamil Nationalist Stronghold of Jaffna.
- ⁸³ “Sri Lanka elections: Out with the old, in with the new – for Tamils too.”
- ⁸⁴ Balachandran, “Tectonic Shift In Sri Lankan Tamil Politics.”
- ⁸⁵ Groundviews, “The JVP and Ethnic Relations;” Tamil Guardian, “NPP will “not seek to punish” perpetrators of war crimes in Sri Lanka.”
- ⁸⁶ Tamil Guardian, “Tamil nationalist parties surge”

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- ⁸⁷ Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. "History of 1965–1994."
- ⁸⁸ Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. "It Was the Heroes of April 71."
- ⁸⁹ Sri Lanka News, "Anura Kumara Says 'Sorry'"
- ⁹⁰ Sunday Times, "Storm over JVP Hewage's Statement."
- ⁹¹ Daily Mirror. "JVP-Led NPP."
- ⁹² EconomyNext. "AKD on Sri Lanka's Ethnic Issue
- ⁹³ Silva, "The Long Game."
- ⁹⁴ Ruwanpura and Saleem, "Slivers of Sri Lanka," **45–48**; Centre for Policy Alternatives, *A Brief Analysis of the Aragalaya*, **18–22**.
- ⁹⁵ Groundviews, 'The JVP and Ethnic Relations'; Tamil Guardian, 'NPP will "not seek to punish."
- ⁹⁶ Tamil Guardian, "What Does Sri Lanka's NPP-Majority Government Mean for Tamils?"
- ⁹⁷ Balachandran, "Tectonic Shift in Sri Lankan Tamil Politics."
- ⁹⁸ Tamil Guardian, "Tamil Nationalist Parties Surge."