Abstract: Contested cultural expressions such as ethnic processions, the display of religious symbols, pilgrimages, and commemorative ceremonies raise intergroup tensions and trigger violence in divided societies around the world. Yet we know little about who participates in these contentious cultural events or why they do so. Existing theories premised on the logics of ethnic rivalry and collective action fail to explain individual-level variation in participation. To fully understand this political behavior, I propose that we should recognize it as an example of ritual. Building on theories of ritual in sociology, anthropology, and religious studies, as well as the contentious politics literature, I argue that participation is motivated by the process-oriented benefits intrinsic to the act of taking part in a symbol-laden public tradition. I test this argument with data from an original household survey and semi-structured interviews from Northern Ireland, where contested parades by Protestant organizations are a major source of Protestant-Catholic tension, conflict, and violence.
As I walked apprehensively through the phalanx of parked armored police vehicles, my heart raced and two things struck me as bizarre. First, though the situation just a few yards to my left teetered on the edge of violence, no one stopped me as I made my way from the Catholic rioters’ area to behind the tight police line forming on the other side of the cars. And, second, this tumult erupted at a parade.

By the time I emerged from the commotion, the parade had passed, but a few of its Protestants supporters lingered—and the palpable tension remained much longer. The broader curiosity, however, is that this script—parade-protest-violence—is common in Belfast, Northern Ireland. While most Protestants see loyalist parades such as this one as an essential tradition celebrating their faith, culture, and history and a proud display of their loyalty to the United Kingdom, most Catholics see them as triumphalist demonstrations by Protestant supremacy organizations. As a result, these controversial parades remain a primary source of inter-ethnic tension and violence and an impediment to Northern Ireland’s transition from war to consolidated peace.

This dynamic, however, is not unique to Northern Ireland. Across the globe, people choose to participate in “contested cultural expressions” that heighten tension and trigger violence in divided and post-conflict societies (Ross 2007). Disputed ethnic and religious practices help determine the form (Davis 1973), timing (Tambiah 1996), and location (Feldman 1991) of violence. For example, Hindu religious processions through Muslim neighborhoods frequently trigger riots in India (Jaffrelot 1998; Wilkinson 2004) and pilgrimages were often occasions for violence in Mandatory Palestine (Wasserstein 1988). Even when they do not spark violence, cultural practices such as flag-flying, national holidays, pilgrimages to sacred sites,
ritual animal slaughter, visits to cemeteries, commemorative ceremonies, and mass worship can exacerbate group tensions, intensify an “us versus them” mentality, and make conflicts more difficult to resolve.

Despite the central causal role that these sparks and triggers play in the dynamics of ethnic conflict, scholars generally leave them undertheorized and assume that they will simply appear, particularly if it is in the interest of elites (e.g., Wilkinson 2004, 24). But polarizing cultural practices are often mass events involving many individuals, so we cannot presume participation (Olson 1965). Furthermore, contentious rituals, such as loyalist parades, make claims that are both sensitive and significant: we are dominant, you are subordinate; this is our territory, you do not belong; we can act with impunity, your desires do not matter to us. Intended or not, this is provocation. These bellicose performances drive wedges between groups, fan the flames of suspicion and hostility, and occasionally spark violence. This article asks why people choose to take part.

Existing theories of provocative behavior rest on narrowly instrumentalist assumptions that hinder a complete explanation of participation in loyalist parades. I argue this is because parades and many other triggers of conflict are rituals—“symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive” (Kertzer 1988, 9)—a distinct and non-instrumental type of collective action. Describing an act as “ritual” is often a way to ignore it or downplay its importance as “merely symbolic,” but I will argue that the ritual character of these contentious events is the key to their explanation.

2 Religion scholar Jonathan Z. Smith (1992, 102) attributes the general denigration of ritual in Western scholarship to the “Protestant insistence on the ‘emptiness’ of ritual.”
Drawing on research on ritual in sociology, anthropology, and religious studies, I provide two general insights that help explain why individuals participate. In brief, participating in a ritual is not just “going through the motions;” participation offers distinct and specific “process-oriented motivations” (Elster 1989, 44-46), benefits inherent in the process or experience of acting collectively in a meaningful activity. In this way, process-regarding benefits can motivate action without consideration of the act’s consequences. Furthermore, the meaning of ritual is ambiguous, which allows for multiple, even conflicting, meanings to exist simultaneously. Hence, participants need not share an understanding of their actions with other members of society, or even among themselves.

I test my argument against the alternative theories with original data on participation in loyalist parades collected during eight months of fieldwork in Northern Ireland. First, I use quantitative data from a randomized household survey that I conducted in Belfast in 2013. Then, I analyze semi-structured interviews with 82 participants and nonparticipants. By collecting data from participants and comparable nonparticipants, my research addresses shortcomings in existing studies of parades (McAuley, Tonge, and Mycock 2011) and other cultural forms of political action (e.g., Taylor et al. 2009), which only sample participants.

My argument and evidence challenge influential theories of ethnic conflict that are based on the instrumental logics of ethnic rivalry and collective action. The ethnic rivalry explanation assumes that individuals act to achieve an outcome oriented at a rival group, such as provocation, humiliation, or an advantage in competition over resources. The collective action explanation assumes that individuals act to maximize personal gain. Thus both theories treat participation in
parades as means toward an external end, whereas I show that people approach participation in ritual parades as an end in and of itself. They do view parades non-instrumentally.

Though the ethnic rivalry and collective action approaches have proven to be powerful explanatory tools in a wide range of contexts, by attributing instrumental motives to participants, they do not explain variation among individuals in Northern Ireland. Contrary to the expectations of ethnic rivalry theories of conflict, I find that participants are not more anti-Catholic or pro-Protestant than nonparticipants. And contrary to the predictions of collective action theories, I find that participants do not receive material benefits and that pre-existing social ties do not increase the likelihood of participation.

By developing an argument about participation in rituals and testing it on the case of loyalist parades, my research makes four contributions. First, I offer an original explanation for participation in acts of nonviolent ethnic conflict and mobilization. Ethnic conflict is not always violent (Varshney 2007, 278-9), yet scholars often equate conflict with violence while ignoring nonviolent mobilization. I focus on the nonviolent side of ethnic conflict and explain participation in it. Second, by approaching participation through the lens of ritual, I provide a new perspective on expressive motivations and behavior. Scholars generally turn to process-oriented explanations only as a residual explanation when instrumental accounts fail (e.g., Downs 1957, 48). I draw on multidisciplinary research on rituals to provide a proactive perspective on expressive, process-oriented political action. Third, I expand our view of political participation and contentious politics to include cultural practices, which, despite their political significance, are often ignored by political scientists (see also Harris and Gillion 2010). Fourth, I further the social scientific understanding of rituals and other cultural practices by highlighting
the question of choice faced by potential participants. In addition to these conceptual, theoretical, and empirical contributions, this paper helps explain a seemingly intractable political problem in contemporary Northern Ireland that regularly escalates Protestant-Catholic tension and violence.

In the remainder of this paper, I elaborate the argument of ritual participation and support it with original data from Northern Ireland. First, I set the stage by surveying the politics of parading in Northern Ireland. Second, I introduce the concept of ritual and show how rituals do and do not fit into existing conceptualizations of collective action. Third, I develop an individual-level theory of participation in rituals. Fourth, I review how dominant theories of ethnic conflict explain participation in parades. Fifth, I describe the quantitative and qualitative data used to test the competing hypotheses, my empirical strategy for analysis, and how it corrects for biases in existing studies. Sixth, I demonstrate statistically that ethnic rivalry and collective action approaches to conflict are insufficient to explain participation in parades. Seventh, I provide evidence from the survey and semi-structured interviews to support the ritual interpretation. Finally, I conclude by discussing the implications of my findings for our understanding of political participation and raising questions for further research.

**Parades in Northern Ireland**

Each year in Northern Ireland, Protestant organizations perform 2,500 parades to display their allegiance to the Protestant faith, the Protestant people of Ulster, and the constitutional
union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain (Jarman 1997; Bryan 2000). Through bodies, banners, flags, and music, these processions represent the Protestant nation and its aspirations. The parades are often festive events along routes lined with cheering fans waving flags and happily singing along to the tunes. Most parades take place in the spring and summer, with the pinnacle of the parading season on the Twelfth of July. On that day, tens of thousands of members of the Orange Order, a Protestant fraternal organization, and marching bands parade past throngs of supporters in cities and towns around Northern Ireland to celebrate and commemorate the military victory of the Protestant King William III (of Orange) over the Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

But, in Northern Ireland’s divided social landscape, not all citizens view the parades favorably. Most Catholics see parades as anti-Catholic triumphalism and provocative “carnival[s] of hate” (quoted in Frampton 2008, 126). They associate the Orange Order with Protestant domination and the marching bands, particularly self-styled “blood-and-thunder” or “kick the Pope” bands, with loyalist paramilitaries. The Twelfth of July, to take the most well-known example, marks a great victory for Protestants, but for Catholics, the battle marks the start of a long era of subjugation to Protestant supremacy. The parade’s content and form symbolize the subsequent centuries of Protestant hegemony in Ireland. Most Catholics do not want this pageant strutting by their homes and communities. Consequently, groups of Catholic residents often protest parades, causing the police to occasionally block the marchers from entering certain

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3 A note on terminology: unless otherwise specified, I use “Protestant” and “Catholic” to refer to the two main ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. The terms do not imply religious beliefs or practices. Since I am writing primarily about ethnic relations, I use those terms rather than unionist/loyalist or nationalist/republican, which are political designations, not ascriptive identity groups. Unionism refers to the belief, held mainly by Protestants, that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom, while nationalism refers to the belief, held mainly by Catholics, that Northern Ireland should unite with the Republic of Ireland. The more extreme version of unionism, often associated with support for paramilitary violence, is loyalism; its nationalist counterpart is republicanism.
streets. Disputes over parades increase communal tension, harm the political peace process, and undermine grassroots peace-building on a regular basis.

This sectarian divide is clearly evident in public opinion: in a 2010 survey, 72% of Catholics stated that parades should not be permitted in Catholic neighborhoods, while only 8% of Protestants agreed (Tonge, Hayes, and Mitchell 2010). These disputes occasionally precipitate violence, including significant riots in 2012, 2013, and 2015. The seemingly endless cycles of parades, protests, and violence embody what O’Leary and McGarry (1993) call Northern Ireland’s “politics of antagonism.”

Though very few parades each year are protested—and even fewer turn violent—all of them are intimately political. Every parade makes a claim about the central question of politics: who should rule? Their answer—the United Kingdom—clashes with the aspirations of many Catholics who seek a united Ireland, free from British influence. Though the claim is often made obliquely through the use of flags, music, and other symbols, it touches on the question that has dominated politics in Northern Ireland—and before that, all of Ireland—for over a century.

Although all major parties agreed to the end of violence in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, tension between Protestant and Catholic communities persists. In fact, disputes over parades are a major arena in which the conflict between the two communities is continued. The most heated ongoing dispute is in north Belfast. For years, Catholics from the Ardoyne neighborhood protested and rioted in response to parades on a road adjacent their community. Against the backdrop of increasingly severe riots following parades in recent years, the failure to reach an agreement between the Orange Order and Ardoyne residents groups led the Parades Commission, the independent statutory body charged with regulating parades, to ban the route on
12 July 2013. The decision was followed by several nights of rioting by Protestants. Protestants have continued to protest nightly every since.

Broadly, there are two types of parading organizations: the Loyal Orders and marching bands. The Loyal Orders are all-male fraternal orders dedicated God, Northern Ireland, and the British Crown. They are seen by many Protestants as the embodiment of the community’s politics and values. The three main orders are the Orange Order, the Royal Black Institution, and the Apprentice Boys of Derry. With an estimated 36,000 members, the Orange Order is the largest and most prominent Loyal Order (McAuley, Mycock, and Tonge 2011, 126). It has long been an influential political force as a voice of grassroots unionism and came to hold tremendous power in the government. Throughout the half-century of unionist rule (1921-1972), all but three government ministers were members of the Orange Order (Bryan 2000, 60). Currently, 54% of elected official from Democratic Unionist Party, Northern Ireland’s largest political party and the senior party in the power-sharing executive, are members (Tonge et al. 2014, 149-152). The Royal Black Institution is seen as more focused on religion than politics. And, the Apprentice Boys of Derry parades to commemorate the events surrounding the 1689 siege of Derry.

The second type of parading organization is the marching band. There are approximately 600 bands and 30,000 members across the province (DCAL 2012, 12). While some bands are quite musically talented, the majority are known as blood-and-thunder bands because they play music that is more noted for volume than skill. Many people associate these bands with the

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4 There are also smaller orders including the Royal Arch Purple, the Independent Orange Order, and the Orange Order’s all-female sister organization, the Association of Loyal Orangewomen of Ireland.

5 The Orange Order’s membership is actually waning and is far below its apex of 93,000 in 1968. Liam Clarke, “Orange Order Ranks Drop to Record Low,” *Sunday Times* (London), June 28, 2009. But, as Tonge, McAuley, and Mycock (2011, 1) state: “although reduced [in size] in recent decades, [the Orange Order] still more than quadruples the combined memberships of all Northern Ireland’s political parties.”
loyalist paramilitaries, and during the Troubles they were often closely linked. Today, although both the Loyal Orders and bands have a reputation for sectarianism in many quarters, bands are seen as particularly hateful. Band members are viewed by many as “thugs” out to offend Catholics by flying loyalist paramilitary flags, carrying banners commemorating paramilitary members, and performing paramilitary or anti-Catholic tunes.\(^6\)

There are important differences between and among the Loyal Orders and bands, but they share core features, values, and interests, so for the purposes of this paper I consider them together. I will refer to parade participation as parading with either a Loyal Order or a band, without distinction. A further element they share is that each loyalist parades is an episode of contentious politics: a public “claim-making performance” that bears on the rights and interests of others (Tilly 2008, 4; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). At least four factors make Northern Irish parading contentious politics. First, they publicly represent the Protestant community and assert their power and political preferences. Furthermore, in the context of Northern Ireland’s deeply divided politics, parades’ claims are viewed as zero-sum: if they are for the Protestant community, they must be against the Catholic community. Second, as mentioned, loyalist parades make a claim directly about the division and the central political question, who should rule? Third, it is impossible to not know about the controversy surrounding parades; participants know that their actions are contested, even if they dismiss the legitimacy of the opposition. Finally, Catholics (as well as uninterested or disapproving Protestants) are always an audience of parades, even if not physically present (Fillieule and Tartakowsky 2013, 16-7).

\(^6\) Popular loyalist band tunes include “The Billy Boys,” with the lyrics “we’re up to our necks in Fenian blood / surrender or you’ll die,” and “No Pope of Rome,” with the lyrics “Oh give me a home / Where there’s no Pope of Rome / Where there’s nothing but Protestants stay. … No chapels to sadden my eyes / No nuns and no priests and no Rosary beads / Every day is the Twelfth of July.” Available at: http://rangerspedia.org/index.php/No_Pope_Of_Rome. Accessed 7 July 2014.
Theory of Ritual Participation

To explain participation, I propose that we view loyalist parades as an example of ritual and treat them as a distinct class of collective action for the purpose of analysis. As I will demonstrate, the concept of ritual helps explain these events and why people participate in them. Following political anthropologist Kertzer (1988, 9), I define ritual as “symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive,” though I restrict my interest to rituals that are collective and public. Importantly, rituals are not limited to religious acts; it is a more general type of action used by secular actors as well, including states, ethnic groups, and political parties (e.g., Edelman 1971; Etzioni and Bloom 2004; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Kertzer 1988; Wedeen 1999). Using this definition, there are innumerable instances of politically significant rituals. In fact, scholars have identified rituals as an element of successful contentious collective action, generally in discussions of “movement culture” or as mechanisms for generating solidarity and sustaining activism (e.g., Gould 2009; Jasper 1997, 1998; Staggenborg and Lang 2007). But there are far fewer investigations of ritual as collective action.

Rituals are not normally discussed in the language of political economy, but in some ways many of them are usefully classed as collective action according to Olson’s (1965) definition. This is because many rituals involve multiple people working together to produce a non-excludable, public good. Though not all rituals produce a public good, many do, be it pleasing the gods, providing a socially integrative function, or communicating on behalf of the

7 This is not a novel step. Ritual is a central concept in most scholarship on parades (e.g., Jarman 1997; Bryan 2000) and paraders themselves use the term. My contribution, laid out in the coming pages, is to use ritual to develop an argument about participation.
8 Included among them are loyalist parades, which meet Kertzer’s definition of ritual, make a political claim, and have political consequences.
9 For exceptions, see Chwe 2001; Patel 2007; and Stepan 2012.
group. Consider, for instance, a sacrifice made to a divine being to bring rain. If it succeeds (within the actors’ worldview), contributors and free-riders alike reap the benefits.

Framing rituals in this way highlights the dilemma of individual participation in a way left unquestioned by sociological, anthropological, and popular theories. Some accounts even describe rituals as if they somehow compel people into participating. For example, Durkheim (1995, 192) claims, “When a native is asked why he follows his rites, he replies that ancestors have always done so and that he must follow their example” (emphasis added). However, as religion scholar Bell (1992, 92) argues, “Ritual is never simply or solely a matter of routine, habit, or ‘the dead weight of tradition.’” Even when faced with a ritual, humans retain agency and individuals still confront the choice to participate or not.

But, rituals differ from canonical collective actions, such as labor strikes and peasant rebellions, in three critical ways: repetition, goal demotion, and perception. Rituals are characterized by repetition. This alone is not unique: many collective actions are repeated. Unlike repeated contentious performances, however, rituals are repeated out of adherence to rules, not to achieve some extrinsic goal. For rituals, repetition is not strategic, it is the rule. This leads to “goal demotion,” the second distinction. As Liénard and Boyer (2006, 816) explain, “Frequent repetition bolsters this intuition that [ritual] actions are disconnected from their ordinary goals.” Staal (1979, 9) famously argues this point in its extreme: “Ritual is pure activity, without meaning or goal.” Third, ritual actors and observers view rituals as a distinct type of action, somehow set apart from normal life. Rituals are experienced differently, and therefore are approached differently, than other actions (Bell 1992; Durkheim 1995; Turner 1969). For these
three reasons, it is valuable to understand ritual as a distinct and “particular type of social action” with “properties that distinguish [it] from other types of action” (Roth 1995, 320).

Consequently, rituals cannot be fully explained with theories of participation developed with other behaviors in mind. Political science understands most human actions through a narrowly rationalist and strategic lens that requires an analytic distinction between desired ends (benefits) and the means used to achieve them (costs) (Jasper 1997, 23-4, 26; Hirschman 1982, 82-91). But, as the previous paragraph adumbrated, in ritual, means and ends are not always neatly separable. As Liénard and Boyer (2006, 816) suggest, “the standard connections between means and ends seem broken.” Further, an implicit assumption of rational choice theory is that people approach all actions in the same way. I have argued, however, that people explicitly approach rituals differently. A full explanation of participation in rituals, requires a theory that can account for these peculiar features. Therefore, we must turn to scholarship on what rituals are, how they function, and what they mean for participants. In particular, two fundamental insights from the sociology and anthropology of ritual and religious studies illuminate the question of participation.

The first insight is that rituals are not “merely symbolic” reflections of reality; for participants, rituals do things. Specifically, rituals provide benefits for participants such as collective effervescence, emotional energy, a sense of belonging, and meaningful interpretations of the world (Eliade 1959; van Gennep 1960; Douglas 1966; Turner 1969; Durkheim 1995; 

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10 There are other collective actions, however, which have elements of ritualization. Social and political actions which are often considered expressive, for example protest or voting, take on, to greater and lesser degrees, these three features of ritual.

11 For example, Anthony Downs (1957, 7-8, quoted in Green and Shapiro 1994, 35) states that people approach “every situation with one eye on the gains to be had, the other eye on costs, a delicate ability to balance them, and a strong desire to follow wherever rationality leads” (emphasis added).
Collins 2004). The second conclusion is that rituals are multivocal and ambiguous (Turner 1967; Cohen 1985; Kertzer 1988). They do not have a fixed meaning across time or individuals. Together these two observations suggest that rituals provide valued experiences for participants and that these experiences can be different for each participant.

These insights lay the groundwork for my argument about participation in political rituals. The benefits that rituals provide are intrinsic to the act of participation and thus not reliant on the successful achievement of a communally valued outcome. Therefore, participation is not motivated by expectations of outcome benefits—the benefits to the individual that result from achieving the goal of the collective action—but by expectations of process-regarding, or intrinsic, benefits which are internal and inherent to the process of acting collectively (Elster 1989, 34-46; Wood 2003, 231-256; also Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1995; Jasper 1997; Varshney 2003). To act on process-regarding motives is to make a future-oriented calculation designed to obtain the benefits provided by participation, which as noted earlier include emotional energy, a sense of belonging, and meaningful interpretations of the world. My argument, therefore, is not that participants are irrational; they are simply acting to receive a different type of benefit. The benefit is participation, not its consequences.

Intrinsic benefits are not unique to rituals. Scholars have found them to motivate a wide range of collective behavior, especially when the actions or their contexts lack the usual conditions conducive to collective contention. For example, Wood (2001; 2003) finds that during the civil war in El Salvador, both nonparticipants and participants received access to liberated land, but acts of rebellion provided pride and pleasure in agency only to campesinos who participated. Einwohner (2003) finds that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising took place under
conditions of reduced political opportunity, but resistance gave Warsaw Jews the occasion to assert their dignity and honor in the face of certain death. And a number of scholars have attributed people’s choice to vote to “expressive motives,” since it is otherwise irrational to go to the polls (e.g., Downs 1957, 48; Schuessler 2000; Hamlin and Jennings 2009). But in all of these cases, there is no ex ante reason to suspect that process-oriented motives would trump outcome-oriented, instrumental ones. Generally, scholars find expressive motives only when all else fails. By pointing to specific features of ritual, my argument provides an a priori justification of when to expect intrinsic motives to matter.

Observable Implications

The argument for ritual participation provides several observable implications that we can expect to find in the data. If participants act on process-oriented benefits, we expect to find two regularities in the data. First, participants need not be motivated by material rewards or the threat of social sanctions. Second, should view parades non-instrumentally, as their own end. Their discussions should center on the value of participation itself. Descriptions of parades, therefore, should minimize or even neglect the outcomes of parades (exciting the Protestant community, intimidating the Catholic community, receiving material benefits, etc.). Rather, they should highlight the experience of participation: what it is like to march through the streets. Relatedly, they should not view participation as a cost or burden, but as a benefit in and of itself—despite the significant time and resources it requires.

If rituals are polysemic, and open to interpretive ambiguity, we expect one pattern in the data. The multiple available meanings imply that Protestants and Catholics can maintain firm and
opposing interpretations of parades, each valid. So the fact that Catholics view parades as hateful does not mean that Protestants do too. If Protestants do not view parades as hostile attempts to offend Catholics, there is no reason to expect that participants hold more ill will toward Catholics than nonparticipants. Therefore, an implication of ritual’s ambiguity is that parade participants should express the same level of sectarian attitudes as nonparticipants.

**Alternative Explanations**

Before testing the argument about ritual, we must review other possible explanations for participation. In this section, I present the logic and hypotheses of two alternative approaches to ethnic conflict: ethnic rivalry and collective action. Each provides a plausible explanation for individual behavior, but I will show that they do not adequately account for participation.¹²

*Ethnic Rivalry Approach*

The first explanation focuses on the role of ethnic rivalry in motivating conflict. This approach comes in primordial and constructivist flavors, but both camps argue that conflict and contentious rituals stem from the existence of ethnic difference (see also Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986). Through this lens, contentious rituals are seen as symbolic assertions of group dominance (Horowitz 1985, 2001) or status (Petersen 2002, 2011) intended to intimidate the out-group into submission. The logic of these arguments suggests that participation is explained by the group

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¹² A third influential theory of ethnic conflict focuses on strategic elites (e.g., Snyder 2000; Snyder and Ballentine 1996; de Figueiredo and Weingast 1999; Gagnon 2004). The theory suggests that inflammatory acts, such as contentious rituals, are used strategically to polarize a society by provoking the out-group into overreacting in order to promote distrust between communities, create a negative image of the out-group in local or international courts of opinion, or discredit in-group moderates (Wilkinson 2004; Brubaker and Laitin 1998, 433). The elite approach, however, fails to account for why anyone participates, so I ignore it henceforth.
attachments that people hold. Participation is a way for people to further the interests of their ethnic group and thus it is expected that the more people identify with their ethnic group, the more likely they are to participate (see Varshney 2003, 93). But these events do not just celebrate the ethnic in-group and help it achieve its goals, they also denigrate and offend the ethnic out-group. For individuals, they are opportunities to express grievances against the out-group (Gurr 1970). Therefore, it is expected that people are more likely to participate the more they dislike the out-group. Overall, the ethnic rivalry approach suggests that participants are distinguished from nonparticipants by their attitudes towards the in-group and out-group.

Collective Action Approach

A second major approach builds on Olson’s (1965) logic of collective action. Given that the private costs of ethnic conflict outweigh the private benefits, thereby creating incentives to free-ride on the actions of others, collective action theorists ask: Why would anyone voluntarily participate? One answer is that participants are provided selective material incentives (Popkin 1979; Lichbach 1995). Thus, it is expected that people are more likely to participate if they receive selective material benefits. Some theorists of collective action have expanded their understanding of selective rewards to include non-material benefits such as “fun” (Muller and Opp 1986) and “reputation” (Chong 1991), but, as critics have shown, these attempts to rescue the rationalist approach fail to provide a coherent explanation of participation (Green and Shapiro 1994; Jasper 1997, 23-9; Petersen 2002, 32-3; Wood 2003, 253-4). So a clean test

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13 This hypothesis is also supported by studies of social movement mobilization such as Klandermans, van der Toorn, and van Stekelenburg 2008; and Simon et al. 1998.
between the collective action theory and the ritual argument requires clearly limiting the selective benefits of collective action to material benefits.

Other scholars argue that rational individuals will participate to avoid social sanctions targeted at nonparticipants (Taylor 1988; Chong 1991). Consequently, it is hypothesized that people are more likely to participate if they expect social sanctions for not taking part. Overall, the rationalist collective action approach suggests that participants are distinguished from nonparticipants by their private rewards or punishments.

Research on collective action also finds that pre-existing social ties to other participants are an important predictor of participation (e.g., McAdam 1986; Kitts 2000; Krinsky and Crossley 2014). Social ties can increase the likelihood of mobilization by providing information, nurturing an activist identity and solidarity, or giving social approval and encouragement. Therefore, it is expected that people are more likely to participate if they have social ties to parade participants.

Table 1 summarizes what the three theoretical approaches lead us to suggest we will observe in the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Quantitative Data</th>
<th>Qualitative Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Rivalry</td>
<td>• More pro-Protestant than nonparticipants</td>
<td>• More anti-Catholic than nonparticipants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Action</td>
<td>• Receive material rewards</td>
<td>• Report experiencing more social sanctions than nonparticipants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>• No more anti-Catholic than nonparticipants</td>
<td>• Do not see parades instrumentally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No material rewards or social sanctions</td>
<td>• Discuss experience of parading, not the outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Design and Data

Testing hypotheses about participation in contentious rituals requires systematic data on participants and nonparticipants. Yet existing studies of participation in loyalist parades (McAuley, Tonge, and Mycock 2011) and other cultural forms of political action (Rupp and Taylor 2003; Taylor et al. 2009) only collect information on participants. As a result, they cannot compare the two groups or make empirical claims about what differentiates them. Even the most systematic and methodologically sophisticated study of cultural contentious politics, Taylor et al.’s (2009) research on same-sex weddings in San Francisco, is limited by this sampling issue (pp. 872-3, esp. note 6). This paper addresses these limitations by using quantitative and qualitative data collected from participants and nonparticipants. By exploiting Belfast’s sectarian housing segregation, I am able to construct a random sample of participants and comparable nonparticipants with which I can test the competing hypotheses.14

I collected quantitative data from a randomized household survey conducted in nine Protestant neighborhoods in Belfast between May and August 2013. Local interviewers, whom I trained and managed, conducted 228 valid face-to-face surveys. The nine neighborhoods were purposely selected based on three criteria. Since the goal of the survey is to distinguish participants from potential participants, I restricted the survey to Protestant neighborhoods. I wanted to maximize the likelihood of sampling parade participants, so I selected neighborhoods with high concentrations of participants.15 Participants primarily come from working class neighborhoods, so that is where the surveys focused, but I also surveyed two middle class neighborhoods.

14 Housing segregation means that almost every neighborhood in Belfast is considered either Protestant or Catholic. See Shirlow and Murtagh 2006.
15 I based these decisions on conversations with academic experts and parading leaders, as well as my own observations. This criterion also furthered the goal of sampling nonparticipants who could potentially participate.
neighborhoods to increase the survey’s representativeness. I also sought geographic diversity, so I choose three neighborhoods each in East, West, and South Belfast.

The neighborhoods in which I sought to conduct surveys are highly insular. I was told repeatedly by local academics, activists, and residents that respondents would be very suspicious of interviewers they did not recognize and unlikely to complete the questionnaire. Therefore, to ensure that respondents would open the door and comfortably speak with an interviewer, I trained interviewers who were from each neighborhood or had connections there. Although this may have caused problems regarding respondents’ willingness to divulge personal information to people they recognize, I concluded that this problem was less severe than the likelihood of having too few respondents.\(^{16}\)

Although the nine enumeration areas were selected purposively, within each neighborhood I selected respondents randomly. I used detailed maps to generate a list of each address in a Small Area, the smallest geographic unit in the census. Then, using a random number generator, I selected one-quarter of the houses in each Small Area for the survey. To be eligible for the survey, a household needed to have a male, 18 years old or older, from a Protestant background, who usually lives there. Although women do march in parades, they are a small minority and to include females in the sample would have reduced the number of participants surveyed.\(^{17}\) If the house had more than one eligible subject, the man with the most recent birthday was selected. If the household did not have an eligible subject, then the address was replaced using the original randomization. I did the same if the respondent refused to

\(^{16}\) Additionally, several people I trusted independently mentioned that they thought that sending a team of unknown interviewers into some neighborhoods could put them at risk. Residents suspicious of outsiders traipsing the neighborhood with clipboards could warn the interviewers to leave or even call the local paramilitary.

\(^{17}\) On the role of women, see Racioppi and See 2000 and Radford 2001.
participate in the survey. If the respondent was not home, interviewers were to try to make an appointment, or, if that was not possible, to return to the house until he was home (up to four times). Once the interviewer identified and reached the selected respondent, they conducted the interview in person, recording the responses on paper.

Studying the processes of mobilization into parades also requires data with more nuance than a close-ended survey could provide. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 82 participants and nonparticipants between 2012 and 2014. Interviewees were selected both purposely and using snowball sampling. The majority of interviewees lived in greater Belfast, though I also sought the views of some people from the rest of the province. I also interviewed several women, in contrast to the survey. Nearly all interviews were recorded and transcribed in full; all were analyzed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software.

Semi-structured interviews provide two specific advantages.\(^{18}\) First, the variation in many of the variables of interest, such as the nature and meanings of ethnic and religious identities, is too diverse and/or subtle to measure accurately and reliably with close-ended survey questions. The open-ended questions of a semi-structured interview allowed me to capture importance nuance in these variables while remaining focused and ensuring that I asked all the necessary questions. Second, the broad questions I asked allowed respondents to help direct the course of the interview toward the topics they found important and meaningful. What people say and the way they say it—including non-verbal communication such as hand gestures and tone of voice—can reveal a lot about what is on their mind (see Fujii 2010).

\(^{18}\) On the advantages and limitations of semi-structured interviews, see Mosley 2013 and Leech 2002.
I begin with an analysis of the quantitative data, which were collected more systematically and provide the cleanest tests of the alternative hypotheses. Testing the ritual hypothesis, however, requires a multi-methods approach. I conduct a first cut using quantitative data on participants’ views on the purpose of parades. I then analyze the qualitative interview data, looking for how participants conceive of and discuss parades. Since the ritual approach offers predictions about the characteristics of participants and about how they think about their actions, both methods are necessary.

The Determinants of Participation in Loyalist Parades

I begin by quantitatively assessing what distinguishes parade participants from those who choose not to march. The dependent variable, Parade Participant, takes a value of 1 if a respondent is currently a member of a Loyal Order or marching band and a value of 0 if he is not.\(^{19}\) Twelve percent of the sample are current parade participants (N=28).\(^{20}\) I estimate the determinants of participation using logistic regression with standard errors clustered by neighborhood and interview fixed effects. To account for deleted observations due to missing data, I reestimate my main model specification using multiple imputation. Except for Model 3, all specifications include six control variables: Marched as Youth, Education, Church Attendance, Children under 18, Full-Time Job, and Age.

\(^{19}\) A benefit of this variable is that it measures participation in a specific, discrete action, rather than general support for a cause or vague “movement participation” (see McAdam 1986). Further, while many quantitative studies of ethnic politics examine preferences or attitudes, this measure captures participation in an ethnic activity.

\(^{20}\) Using existing membership data on the Orange Order, Apprentice Boys, and marching bands, I estimate that 13% to 17% of Protestant men nationwide are current parade participants. Membership data are from McAuley, Tonge, and Mycock 2011, 126; Interview with Apprentice Boys of Derry senior leader, August 3, 2012; and Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure 2012, 6. Population data are from: 2011 Northern Ireland Census, Table DC2115NI: Religion or Religion Brought Up In by Age by Sex, available at http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/Download/Census%202011_Excel/2011/DC2117NI.xls. Accessed 29 October 2013
Testing the Ethnic Rivalry Hypotheses

The ethnic rivalry approach to participation looks to an individual’s attitudes towards the in-group and out-group. The first hypothesis is that people are more likely to participate the more
they identify with their own ethnic group. I measure positive feelings towards the in-group with a measure, *Protestant Identification*, that captures how strongly the respondent identifies with the Protestant community.\(^{21}\) I find that stronger identification with the Protestant community is *not* significantly associated with an increased probability of parade participation. This null finding is highly robust to alternative measures of identification (not shown), including entering each component variable individually or substituting with an indicator for self-description as British (as opposed to Irish, Northern Irish, or Ulster-Scots).

The second ethnic rivalry hypothesis is that people are more likely to participate the more hostility they feel towards the rival out-group. I measure negative feelings towards the out-group with a variable, *Anti-Catholicism*, that captures the degree of anti-Catholic views expressed by the respondent in four survey questions.\(^{22}\) I find that anti-Catholic prejudice is *not* a significant predictor of participation in any of the model specifications. The null finding is robust to alternative measures and specifications (not shown). Importantly, these two attitudinal findings are consistent with the theoretical expectations.

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\(^{21}\) *Protestant Identification* is an additive scale of three survey questions, each with five response categories. Respondents were first asked if they strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree that “I feel strong ties with other Protestants in Northern Ireland” and “In many respects, I am like most other Protestants in Northern Ireland.” Then they were asked “Would you be proud to be called an Ulster Protestant?” on a five-point scale from “not at all” to “very much.” The three responses were summed to produce a 13-point scale ranging with Cronbach’s alpha of 0.7071. For similar measures, see Klandermans, van der Toorn, and van Stekelenburg 2008; and Simon et al. 1998.

\(^{22}\) The questions asked how much the respondent would mind if a close family member married a Roman Catholic; “Do you think that sometimes Catholics need to be reminded that they live in the United Kingdom?”; “How much of the sectarian tension that exists in Northern Ireland today do you think Catholics are responsible for creating?”; “Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree that over the past few years, Catholics have gotten more economically than they deserve.” Each variable was scaled from 0 to 1, with 1 as the most anti-Catholic view, then added together, and then re-scaled from 0 to 1. Cronbach’s alpha is 0.7790. The third and fourth questions, as well as the scaling, are adapted from the Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale developed by Henry and Sears 2002.
meet the expectations of the ritual theory and fail to support a key tenet of the ethnic rivalry approach to conflict.23

Testing the Collective Action Hypotheses

Rather than looking at the respondent’s attitudes, the collective action approach looks to the private costs and benefits of participation. The first hypothesis is that individuals are more likely to participate if they are offered Selective Material Benefits. I measure this variable by asking whether membership in a parading organization ever helped financially, such as with a small loan, job, or promotion. This question was only asked of men who had ever been parade participants, so it is not included in the regression, but the data show that material benefits did not motivate participation. Only one current participant reported that he gained financially from his parading (it increases to three when former participants are included).24 And, when asked for open-ended reasons why they marched last year, not a single person mentioned anything even slightly related to material gain.25 In the semi-structured interviews, nearly every time I asked a parade participant if there were any personal financial benefits the answer was an emphatic “no.”

23 Both identification with the in-group and hostility toward the out-group are likely endogenous to parade participation, since participation could increase one’s attachment to the Protestant community and prejudice towards the Catholic community. But, collecting a valid retrospective measure of these attitudes from before a respondent joined would be near impossible. Thus, we cannot attribute any causality and must settle for association. Although extreme sectarian attitudes do not motivate participation, using generalized ordered logit models (not shown) I find that especially low sectarian attitudes do dissuade marching in (or even attending) parades.

24 Supporting this claim is evidence from those who have not paraded. They were asked if they thought that being in a band or lodge helps people financially, and only 11% think that it does. While paraders might not want to admit that they have benefitted financially, non-paraders have little reason to hide knowledge of material transfers.

25 My survey enumerators protested that even looking for financial benefits to parading was a fool’s errand. The survey instrument included the open-ended question “What attracted you to the specific lodge/band that you joined first?” Interviewers were to mark any of the fourteen listed items that the respondent mentioned. One of them was “financial/employment,” and on several occasions when going over the survey with the interviewers during training, they laughed or told me bluntly that there was no reason to have it as an option. I would insist that though it might be unlikely, I really wanted to know if anyone mentioned it as a reason. In the end, my interviewers were of course correct: in all of the surveys that they administered the box was never ticked.
Then, without skipping a beat, most would continue by saying that parading actually costs considerable money. Further, 70% of current paraders in the survey said that they would not put a parading leadership position on a resume or job application, for fear of discrimination—a fear expressed in the interviews as well.

The second hypothesis from collective action theory is that people are more likely to participate if they expect to pay a social cost for not participating. I measure this variable, Social Pressure, by summing the level of sanctioning expected from two sources: family and community. Pressure from the family is measured by how much the respondent believes his Family Expected Participation. Pressure from the community is measured by whether the respondent believes that his Community Thinks Less of Nonparticipants. Each component part is measured from 0 indicating no pressure to 3 indicating most pressure, and the sum, Social Pressure, ranges from 0 to 6. I find that my measure of social sanctions is positively and significantly associated with participation in loyalist parades. The effect, however, is small. If all other variables in Model 1 are held at their median value, changing Social Pressure from its minimum to maximum only increases the probability of participating 10%. In Model 3, I disaggregate social pressure into its two components. The results show that the correlation is substantively and statistically stronger with the measure of community-based social pressure. Men who believe that their community thinks less of nonparticipants are more likely to parade.

26 “Do you think that your family expected you to join a Loyal Order or band? Would you say definitely, somewhat, not really, or definitely not?”

27 “Do people in this community think less of people who choose not to join Loyal Orders or bands? Would you say definitely, somewhat, not really, or definitely not?”

28 Calculated using Clarify for Stata 10. The standard errors could not be clustered in the simulated model.
The semi-structured interviews, however, tell a different story about social sanctioning. Bar several exceptions, the men I interviewed recall experiencing no social pressure to participate in parades. Even between fathers and sons, the relationship where we would most expect direct social pressure, I found little evidence. Many men were asked by their fathers to follow in their footsteps and join them in a parading organization, but they say that they felt no pressure from it. Several interviewees recall that, in fact, it was their father not asking them or pressuring them to join that inspired their decision. Alexander states that “what impressed me was I asked my dad, ‘Should I join?’ And he says, ‘It’s your decision, you decide.’ That encouraged me to join more, because I didn’t feel like I was being forced to join.” The fact that his father made clear that the decision was one that he had to make for himself left a lasting impression on Alexander and encouraged his membership.

Regarding the role of social sanctioning, then, the quantitative and qualitative evidence diverge. The statistical analysis suggests that men who report social pressure are somewhat more likely to participate. The semi-structured interviews, conversely, suggest that social pressure plays little role in actually motivating participation. The data is inconclusive, but provides some support for the second collective action hypothesis.

A second major approach to participation in collective action focuses on social ties. The general hypothesis is that people are more likely to participate if members of their social network participate. I measure two specific social ties for each respondent: Family Marched measures whether family members were paraders and Close Friends (Age 16) measures how many of their

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29 Quantitatively, there is no relationship between being asked to join by one’s father and participation.
close friends at age 16 were paraders. Third, I measure whether a respondent has personally Been Asked to join a parading organization (see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Schussman and Soule 2005). None of these measures are statistically associated with parade participation.

This is a striking finding, given the robustness of the result across a range of studies on mobilization (for reviews, see Kitts 2000; Krinsky and Crossley 2014). I believe it reflects how deeply parading organizations are embedded in Protestant communities. It is hard not to know a member of a loyal order or band. Even among nonparticipants, 69% have family who march, 62% have current friends who march, and 22% have been personally asked to march. These figures are even higher in working class neighborhoods, where parading organizations are stronger (77%, 78%, and 28%, respectively).

Multiple Imputations

To account for the loss of observations due to missing data, in Model 4 I reestimate the main model using the AMELIA II program (Honaker, King, and Blackwell 2012). The program imputed values for missing data in the independent variables, but I deleted the one observation that was missing the dependent variable. I then used the new imputed datasets to estimate the logit regressions (to conserve space, only the results of the main model are shown). Model 4 shows that the results with the five new datasets are similar to the original results, increasing confidence in the initial estimation. Participants remain undistinguished by their ethnic attitudes and social ties, but do report greater social pressure.

\textsuperscript{30} Family Marched takes the value of 0 if no family marched, 1 if either the father or other family members marched, and 2 if both the father and other family members marched. Close Friends (Age 16) ranges from 0 for none or almost none to 4 for all or almost all. It is measured retrospectively since current friends are clearly endogenous to parade participation.
Testing the Ritual Hypothesis

Recall that if the ritual approach explains participation, we can expect the data to show: (1) no material rewards or social sanctions; (2) no difference in participation by levels of anti-Catholicism; and (3) that participants view parades non-instrumentally, and that when talking about parades, they will focus on the process rather than the outcomes. The previous section demonstrated that selective material benefits play no role in parade participation, that the evidence for social sanctions is inconclusive but possible, and that participants are not distinguished by their anti-Catholic attitudes. The following pages will demonstrate that participants understand parades as non-instrumental action.

As a first cut, I use a survey question—“In your opinion, what is the purpose of parades?”—to test whether participants are more likely to attribute intrinsic, rather than instrumental, purposes to parades. Each response was coded with at least one of ten purposes, with some responses receiving multiple codes. The codes were developed inductively to accurately capture the concepts conveyed by respondents (Table A1 in the Appendix defines each code). I then grouped the purposes into two general categories based on their orientation: Intrinsic and Instrumental. Intrinsic purposes (culture, tradition, celebration, commemoration, social, and carnival) are internally-oriented and achieved simply by doing the act. For example, successfully continuing a tradition is accomplished simply by performing the traditional act. Instrumental purposes (taking a stand, displaying loyalty, promoting, and causing a negative outcome) are externally-oriented and only achieved if they accomplish something external to the

31 For a similar empirical approach, see Peterson et al. 2012.
act itself. For example, successfully promoting Protestant culture requires a response from someone else at the receiving end.

Simple two-tailed t-tests (Table 3) show that participants are significantly more likely to mention intrinsic purposes than instrumental purposes. The first column in Table 3 displays the results for current participants (92% intrinsic vs. 13% instrumental; p = 0.00) and the second column shows the results for respondents who have ever paraded since age 16 (88% intrinsic vs. 14% instrumental; p = 0.00). Interestingly, current paraders are also more likely to cite intrinsic purposes than nonparticipants (92% vs. 73%; p = 0.04).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current Participants</th>
<th>Ever Participated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intrinsic Purpose</strong></td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commemoration</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Carnival</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental Purpose</strong></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a Stand</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display Loyalty</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Promote</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intrinsic-Instrumental Difference</strong></td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-Value (Two-Tailed)</td>
<td><strong>0.00</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.00</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (N)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each response could take multiple codes, so columns do not sum to 100%.

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
The semi-structured interviews confirm that participants are far more interested in the process than the outcome of participation. In analyzing participants’ stated purposes of their actions, the same two categories emerged: intrinsic and instrumental. But intrinsic purposes were cited most often and with the most vigor. For most, if not all, paraders, the central purpose of a parade is the expression, celebration, and commemoration of a multifaceted Protestant identity. In interview after interview, participants described parades as opportunities to articulate “what I am,” to “show your identity,” and to “express Protestant culture”:

Ours is about going out and showing our cultural identity—not through violence, but through music and through the pageantry of it all. And to show how well and respectful we can be. (Walter, band member, July 31, 2012)

The overarching purpose is to say to the world, “here we are.” Not “here we are as Orange bigots who will continue to cry ‘no surrender!’” but “here we are as members of the Protestant, reformed, evangelical faith. This is our cause and we want the world to know.” I think that’s the purpose. (George, Orange leader, August 14, 2012)

As these quotes demonstrate, participants do not always agree on what the content of the Protestant identity is, but their intention is to parade that identity in public. We all have multiple identities (Barth 1969), and the ambiguity of parades means that people can be motivated to express different dimensions of their Protestant identity while marching behind the same banner (Cohen 1985, 21, 56-7). So while George parades to express his religious identity, Walter parades to articulate his “cultural identity.” Both men, however, are engaging in the basic human act of self-expression.

Though expressing a collective identity can be used instrumentally to effect an external outcome (e.g., Bernstein 1997), parade participants, for the most part, do not act with this

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32 Interview with Mark, July 11, 2013; interview with Albert, August 20, 2012; and interview with Rachel, August 8, 2013.
intention. I asked Albert about the goal of parading and he replied: “Just to show your identity. … We are a parading organization and we parade as and when necessary.” When I asked why, he said, “That’s the thing to do. You show it to your supporters and if your non-supporters object, it’s up to them.” In response to the same question, Robert said that the goal is “to show that we are members of the Protestant community.” Neither Albert nor Robert evince any indication of a goal outside of the parade itself. Their reason for acting is intrinsic of parading; it is not dependent the achievement of a particular result. Expressing a deeply-held identity publicly is a source of process-oriented benefits that participants seek. As Friedman and McAdam (1992, 169) argue, “One of the most powerful motivators of individual action is the desire to confirm through behavior a cherished identity.” Parading is a way for participants to live their Protestant identity and beliefs.

A second major purpose for parades cited by participants is commemoration of the Protestant past. Commemoration also follows a process-oriented logic: the goal of a commemorative act—that the past be appropriately marked—is inseparable from the means of achieving it. Participants are driven to commemorate by a drive to commemorate; they do not see their commemorations as a means for an external end. For example, Albert told me that, “The 1st of July [parade] commemorates the [1916 Battle of the] Somme [and the] 36th (Ulster) Division [in World War I], 12th of July [parade] commemorates Battle of Boyne [in 1690]. They’re all battles we remember.”

“How to continue the memory?” I asked.

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A vast literature from the past several decades has documented beyond question that elites use commemorations for political purposes (e.g., Gillis 1996). Far less is known about the perspectives and motivations of the ordinary people who participate in these events.
“Yes,” he replied, “to continue the tradition.”

Or, take Kenny’s statement: “That to me is all part of my history. People fought and died for that and I want to be part of it to keep it going.” Both Albert and Kenny are motivated to honor the memory of the great victories and sacrifices of Ulster Protestant history. Their comments attest to this intrinsic motivation: the benefit they receive is the satisfaction of joining with friends “to continue the tradition” and “keep it going.” The motive and reward cannot be separated from the act itself.

Though some participants do mention instrumental goals, one that they never so much as hint at is antagonizing Catholics or polarizing society, the expectations of the ethnic conflict approaches. On the contrary, they forcefully distance themselves from the negative outcomes of parades. In interview after interview, paraders emphasized that their actions are not intended to offend anyone. Isaac, to take but one example, told me earnestly, “I don’t think we’re going out to make an offensive statement. Certainly, anything that ever I have been personally involved in, I haven’t seen any particularly offensive actions or anything that anybody could take as offensive.”

To explain why so many Catholics appear offended, participants believe that it is all disingenuous cant manufactured by the republican movement. Billy sums up this belief about Catholic anger and protests: “It didn’t happen by accident. It’s all orchestrated. It’s created, deliberately created conflict where there was no conflict.” Paraders make a particular effort to dissociate themselves from the violence that occasionally follows parades. “We’re not causing the trouble,” Sammy stresses. “It’s violent republicans who are causing the trouble.” In fact, participants try to distance themselves so far from these consequences of their actions, that they
make the case that parades are not even political. They construct the claim that parades are actually anti-political—that they exist apart from and in contradistinction to politics. Thus, while politics is quintessentially instrumental behavior, parading is non-instrumental action.

The foundation of this claim that parades are anti-political, and thus non-instrumental, is their ritual nature. As rituals, parades provide participants with alternative, apolitical reasons to participate as well as with symbolic ambiguity that supports multiple and conflicting interpretations of the events. Further, rituals cultivate the notion that within them, the normal connection between means and ends is broken. Finally, the repetitive and formal qualities of rituals give parades a feeling of invariance, feeding the idea that parades never were and are not now political. These features of ritual sustain the paradox of anti-politics, against evidence to the contrary.

Of course, Protestants have strong incentives to say that their actions are apolitical and non-instrumental, and that they do not intend to effect the harmful outcomes of parades, even if it is not true. Nevertheless, my formal interviews and informal conversations with a broad range of participants convinced me that most of them are sincere in their beliefs—even though the reader likely has justifiable doubts. More convincing evidence of the demotion of outcomes is that interviewees also devalued the normatively positive outcomes of parades, such as entertaining the crowd of supporters or uniting the Protestant community. Why would they dismiss these positive outcomes, about which they can be justifiably proud, unless they really do not matter for them? These beneficial outcomes do happen, and they are a satisfying byproduct of parading, but it is not why they act:

It’s our right to do it. It’s our belief to do it. The crowds and the spectators are an added bonus to us. We will walk the streets whether there is one person watching
us or one hundred million people watching us. It’s our right, it’s our identity. It’s our reason we exist. (Michael, Orangeman, August 19, 2013)

[When there is a large crowd] it’s just nicer. But if there wasn’t as many of a crowd there it wouldn’t bother me… I’ve been to parade where there hasn’t been many people watching it, but it’s still an honor and a privilege for me to walk with the Apprentice Boys. (Howie, Apprentice Boy, August 13, 2012)

My field observations confirm their claims: at times, I was the only person out watching the parade. A crowd of cheering supporters certainly makes a livelier atmosphere, but they will parade whether or not there are spectators. As Michael and Howie make clear, entertaining the community is not what drives them. Rather, their motives are internal to the very process of participation: honor, privilege, fulfilling a right, acting on a belief, and living out one’s identity.

More generally, discussions about parades and what they mean to participants center on the pleasures of participation. Most participants I interviewed happily talked on and on about how much they just loved to parade. Their enthusiasm was palpable. The pleasures they discussed were varied, but all of them emerge from the very act of parading, not the consequences. Some came from the opportunity to spend meaningful time with dear friends and articulate shared values together:

[My last parade] was fantastic. You know, it’s always a proud moment to be on parade. … And just being part and just spending the day with people of like-minded views and showing your cultural identity. It makes me very proud. It excites me. (Michael, Orangeman, August 19, 2013)

[When you’re walking up the street in an Orange parade, it would be hard to define what the feeling is… Waving at people you know and being part of something that there’s a sense of belonging and being owned and owning something. It’s so hard to define. It’s part of why it’s so hard to leave. … It’s an undefinable quality of belonging. (Rich, ex-Orangeman, November 20, 2012)
The lasting impact of these pleasures is illustrated by Rich, the second man quoted. Rich quit the Orange Order many years ago because he disagreed with its confrontational, sectarian stances, and he remains critical of parades. But the power of the experience is still unmistakable to him.

Michael and Rich also articulated the emotional benefits of parade participation, something emphasized by others as well. Above all, participants expressed pride in their action: “The Twelfth of July, you feel proud,” says Billy. “You turn out your best to do the organization proud. And it’s just a feeling of [being] so proud of the tradition, the culture.” As Tom describes, “There’s a pride involved in marching. There’s a pride in the crowd cheering and clapping. There’s that pride walking around.”

Positive, satisfying emotions, such as pride, are energizing and encourage sustained participation (Jasper 1997; 1998). “It’s not routine to me,” Craig says. “It’s a totally refreshing day. It’s one of those days when after you’ve walked 22 miles, you finish up with a load of energy. You’re on a high. And it’s thoroughly enjoyed, thoroughly enjoyed.” Craig ends the day full of energy despite being on his feet for many hours and miles. The face-to-face interactions, large cheering crowds, music, and feeling of taking part in something important all contribute to the visceral excitement that Durkheim (1995) calls “collective effervescence” and Collins (2004) identifies as “emotional energy.” Emotional energy, Collins (2004, 38-9) argues, “makes the individual feel not only good, but exalted, with the sense of doing what is most important and most valuable. ... [It] has a powerful motivating effect upon the individual; whoever has experienced this kind of moment wants to repeat it.” Feelings like this make it unsurprising that, despite the lack of personal or collective material gains, participants return time after time.

These pleasurable emotions and energy of parading also explain why Craig feels that
something so often repeated is “not routine.” Conventional outcome-oriented approaches to participation find rituals difficult to explain because they expect that people would get bored or tired of repeating the same action (Tilly 2006, 41), especially when there is no external goal or material rewards. They predict that repeated action would feel “routine” because the sole benefit is received upon its successful completion. Craig rejects this. It does not feel this way because the allure of parading and other rituals is in the action itself. The appeal is the experience: the pride, excitement, and energy; the quality time with friends and family; forging a tangible connection to the past. These are what encourage mobilization and sustained activism in a collective ritual.

This sense of pride and energy, attained in the company of friends and family, is a prime experience of participation. My findings resonate with Ramsey’s (2011, 223) ethnographic conclusion that marching in loyalist bands is in large part motivated by the “emotional rewards of participation.” More generally, they match what Wood (2001, 268) calls “emotional in-process benefits,” the “emotion-laden consequences of action experienced only by those participating in that action.” Feelings like this make it unsurprising that, despite the lack of personal or collective material gains, participants choose to return time after time.

Overall, the interviews demonstrate that parading is itself a benefit for participants. They look forward to parades, talk about them with their friends, and many, if not most, come to structure their lives around them. Some participants even told me about missing family functions and damaging relationships in order to march in parades. Yet they certainly do not view parading as a cost—on the contrary, they actually pay for the privilege to parade their identity with pride and moral vision alongside dear friends and companions. The paraders I spoke with would reject
Olson’s framework out of hand; rather, I believe, they would embrace Hirschman’s (1982, 87; originally italicized) view that free-riders “cheat themselves first of all.” As Billy says of friends who do not parade, “That’s their loss… You know, they’re missing out.”

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of the previous two sections have significant implications for our understanding of political behavior. I showed that participation in conflict-producing parades is not predicted by sectarian attitudes. Further, I demonstrate that this is the case because antagonizing Catholics is not participants’ main intention. In fact, many participants do not have external or instrumental intentions at all. Their motivations are internal to the very act of parading and they, therefore, disregard the outcomes of parades, be they positive or negative. This means that people make decisions to participate without consideration of the profoundly political consequences of their actions.

Most theories of action in political science assume that people pursue a particular behavior in order to attain its consequences. Applied to parades, this suggests that participants intend to heighten ethnic conflict and polarize society, since these are often the effects. I have shown that this is not the case. The ritual nature of their behavior severs the presumed connection between means and ends, thus creating the environment for sustained conflict. The divisive outcomes of parades are a byproduct of action motivated by other ends and desires, and attributing them as motives to paraders “would have produced a very distorted picture of their participation” (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2010, 489).
I have argued that we can best explain participation in loyalist parades, and other similar political behavior, by understanding them as rituals. I showed that the two most plausible existing approaches in the ethnic conflict literature do not explain the variation between participants and nonparticipants and in fact offer erroneous predictions when they try to explain why people choose to participate. Therefore, I developed a more satisfying and empirically accurate explanation for participation that accounts for the unique and anomalous features of ritual. Building on insights from the study of ritual in sociology, anthropology, and religious studies as well as political science and sociology research on participation in collective action and contentious politics, I proposed that rituals provide participants intrinsic, process-oriented benefits and that rituals are inherently ambiguous. These factors, I argued, help explain who participates and why. Using an original survey and semi-structured interviews, I tested the competing explanations and found that the evidence best supports the theory of ritual participation.

The results are surprising from a theoretical, comparative perspective as well as from a local, Northern Irish one. The ethnic rivalry and collective action approaches have proven to be powerful explanatory tools in a wide range of contexts, so the evidence against them is an unexpected challenge. Similarly, the findings question the prevailing beliefs in Northern Ireland. According to most Irish nationalists, as well as many neutral observers, parade participants are simply “sectarian bigots”; meanwhile, many unionists see paraders as “super Prods,” highly committed and enthusiastic Protestants. My statistical analyses do not confirm either characterization: participants do not stand out from their neighbors on either measure. Thus, one of the primary sources of Protestant-Catholic tension, conflict, and violence in contemporary
Northern Ireland is not caused by people motivated by notably extreme ethnic views. Rather, these confrontations are caused by people seeking the pleasures inherent in the collective expression of deeply-held shared identities and moral values—the controversy is at best an afterthought. Some of those pleasures, to be sure, are rooted in the conflictual and zero-sum nature of a divided society, but, fundamentally, paraders are men and women working to create meaning through collective action. For participants, loyalist parades are the premier “opportunity to articulate, elaborate, alter, or affirm one’s moral sensibilities, principles, and allegiances,” which Jasper (1997, 15) considers “the central satisfaction of protest.”

What do Belfast’s paraders teach us about politics generally? First, I provide further evidence that process-benefits are a significant motive for political participation (Wood 2001, 2003; Elster 1989; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1995; Jasper 1997, 1998; Varshney 2003). Much of the important research which supports the role of process-benefits, however, has been conducted on high-risk, violent situations (Wood 2003; Einwohner 2003), circumstances where we would not expect the assumptions of rational choice theories to operate. The stability and predictability of parades, in contrast, actually provides an easy test for the utility of rational choice in explaining mobilization. Its failure to provide a convincing explanation suggests a limit to rational choice’s foray into cultural politics. Conversely, the success of the ritual theory demonstrates the fruitfulness of turning to disciplines besides economics to help explain political phenomena. In particular, by drawing on sociology, anthropology, and religious studies—fields with a more subtle view of the social phenomenon at hand—I was able to suggest conditions in which we can expect intrinsic, expressive motives to matter, rather than simply turning to them when existing economic theories failed.
Second, through my sustained theoretical and empirical treatment of loyalist parades, I present political rituals as an important and feasible topic for political scientists. Political rituals, such as religious processions in India (Wilkinson 2004), public prayer to end abortion in the US (Munson 2008), or commemorative ceremonies in South Africa (Ross 2009), often appear insignificant and illegible to dominant political science approaches. But by folding usable insights from other disciplines into existing political science frameworks, I demonstrate that loyalist parades and other political rituals are accessible to the discipline’s body of theories and help illuminate longstanding questions. Further, though rituals are often analyzed using methods that remain marginal in political science (i.e., ethnography and close readings of texts), this paper provides a methodologically rigorous model for studying them. The leaders who invest great resources in political rituals and the citizens who choose to participate in them have long understood their political value. It is high time political scientists did too.
### Appendix

Table A1. Types of Purposes Attributed to Loyalist Parades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intrinsic Purposes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>It is a tradition to parade; to continue that tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>It is part of our culture to parade; or, parading maintains our culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>To celebrate Protestant culture and people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commemoration</td>
<td>To commemorate, celebrate, or mark the Protestant past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>To bring people together to enjoy each others’ company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Carnival</td>
<td>To create a fun environment for people to enjoy; also to compete musically.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumental Purposes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To Promote</td>
<td>To promote a particular agenda, such as Protestantism or Protestant unity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display Loyalty</td>
<td>To display loyalty to the Protestant group, Northern Ireland, or the UK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a Stand</td>
<td>To show others what one believes in (culture, politics, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>To cause trouble, be provocative or send a message of triumphalism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


