

Comparing Vanguard Leaders: Exploring Key Leadership Attributes and Their Links to
Individual, Group, and Societal Outcomes

by

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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Supervisory Committee

Comparing Vanguard Leaders: Behaviours, Traits, Skills, Goals, and Strategies and the Links to
Socio-Political Outcomes

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Abstract

The prevalence of socio-political vanguard groups has grown in contemporary Western society. Although existing research has examined the ideologies, processes, and impacts of these groups, far less attention has been given to the leaders who shape them and to the attributes of vanguard leadership. Addressing this gap, this study compares and contrasts key characteristics of vanguard leadership through comparative case studies of George Lincoln Rockwell, Malcolm X, and Guy Debord. Using a most-similar systems design, the research draws on biographical sources, archival documents, and qualitative and historical content analysis to assess each leader's traits, skills, behaviours, goals, and strategies. The findings show that while all three cases exhibit core attributes from existing theories of vanguard leadership, there is variation in team leadership, team behaviours, establishing vanguard leader credibility, and shaping public influence. These differences affected the outcomes of one of the case studies, including their ability to build committed followings, sustain momentum, and affect cultural or political discourse. This study advances vanguard leadership theory by identifying specific leader attributes that help explain the variation in short- and long-term outcomes. By comparing and contrasting vanguard leader traits, skills, behaviors, goals, and strategies, this research identified similarities and differences in how these leaders operate and how their leadership attributes may relate to their broader socio-political impact.

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Dedication

To my husband, who inspired me to continue my academic journey, and to my children, who patiently tolerated the process.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Across the political spectrum, movements such as Antifa, the Alt Right, Extinction Rebellion, and the Identitarians demonstrate the growing emergence of vanguard groups mobilizing around cultural disruption and ideological change. Despite pursuing very different goals, these groups share a common commitment to challenging dominant norms and shaping public debates. Their influence extends beyond fringe activism, reaching into political parties, media organizations, and other institutions, and shaping discussions on issues such as race, immigration, economics, and identity.

These dynamics matter today because political instability and deep societal divisions have become increasingly common in Western societies, echoing conditions last seen in the 1960s. Such conditions have helped small but highly visible vanguard groups gain attention, challenging the foundations of liberal democracy and capitalism. Vanguard groups—defined as those that introduce new beliefs and norms that directly challenge broader society (Marcy, 2020, p. 11) often rely on strategies such as propaganda and agitation (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 190; Marcy, 2020, p. 2). They typically emerge in response to perceived failures in political structures and societal norms, presenting themselves as alternatives to the status quo.

Despite their growing influence, the leadership of socio-political vanguards remains an understudied area. Limited research has explored how vanguard leaders organize their groups, exercise influence, or demonstrate distinct leadership attributes. This study seeks to address that gap by examining the behaviors, traits, skills, goals, and strategies of three vanguard leaders. By comparing and contrasting vanguard leader attributes, this research aims to identify both the similarities and differences in how these leaders operate and to explore potential links between these leadership attributes and their broader socio-political impact. By doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the characteristics of vanguard leadership and its role in shaping socio-political behaviour change.

Problem Statement and Significance of Contribution

The processes that form vanguard leadership are an emerging area of study in the social sciences (Gray, 2020; Hawley et al., 2023; Marcy, 2020, 2024; Sadeghi Ronizi & Marcy, 2026). Today, multiple vanguard groups compete for public attention, acting as catalysts for cultural disruption and social change. These groups often clash with one another as they work to shape mainstream politics. Their continued growth highlights their role in driving radical ideas and reshaping cultural norms. Studying vanguards is therefore essential for understanding how fringe movements evolve into mainstream influence, how instability creates openings for new ideologies, and how culture and politics interact to shape society.

Although earlier studies have examined vanguard groups (Downton, 1973; Rejai & Phillips, 1979), further research is needed to understand how vanguard leadership operates within these groups and society. This study addressed this gap by exploring the unique behaviors, traits, skills, goals, and strategies exhibited by vanguard leaders through in-depth analyses of historical cases using biographical and historical sources. The research focuses on three vanguard leaders: George Lincoln Rockwell, Malcolm X, and Guy Debord, who led their respective vanguard

groups during the same time period, the 1960s-70s, and within comparable Western socio-political contexts.

Understanding how vanguard leadership works requires deeper insight into the specific attributes vanguard leaders employ. As political spaces in the West continue to fragment and polarize, the number and impact of vanguard groups appear to be increasing, reflecting a trajectory similar to that of the 1960s-70s (another politically tumultuous era). While mainstream media and some academic disciplines have documented the impact of these vanguard groups, far less attention has been given to the leadership processes within and between these leaders, their groups, and society. This gap limits our understanding of how vanguard leaders shape socio-political influence in both the short and long term. In this study, short-term outcomes refer to the period during which the leader is active within their vanguard group.

Other socio-political vanguard studies, such as Gray (2020), Gerbaudo (2017), Rejai & Phillips (1979), and Downton (1973), have focused on the broader framework of how these groups operate in society. In contrast, this research focuses on the leaders of these vanguard groups, comparing and contrasting their key leadership attributes. Additionally, this research contributes to vanguard leadership theory by comparing historical cases of vanguard leaders with known societal outcomes. This study focuses on capturing short-term outcomes of the specific vanguard leadership attributes in the case studies. Some longer-term outcomes may be present in the data sources, depending on when they are written, capturing the influential effects of these leaders in the decades following the dissolution of their groups. Capturing sufficient data for longer-term outcomes would require an additional literature search, which the scope of this study will not cover. Where data on longer-term outcomes are available in the resources being analyzed, the researcher captured them to suggest the longer-term implications of vanguard leadership and to identify further research that may be initiated from this data.

By comparing and contrasting vanguard leader case studies, this research builds on existing knowledge of vanguard leadership by identifying the behaviors, skills, traits, goals, and strategies exhibited by vanguard leaders. Research on vanguard leadership behaviour will contribute to the broader field of leadership studies, a necessary area of human and social development. More specifically, examining leadership in non-formalized or non-profit groups offers insights into community development and into how leaders influence the diffusion and acceptance of ideas within both their movements and the wider public.

Background/Context

The first case study, George Lincoln Rockwell, was the founder of the American Nazi Party (1958) and co-founder of the World Union of National Socialists (WUNS). His ideology promoted that societies should be grouped by race rather than coexist. He facilitated dramatic displays with antisemitic messages and authored several books to promote the Aryan race in America, and later, Europe and Australia. He was uncompromising in his position against Jews and that the holocaust was a fabricated historical event, creating the product *The Diary of Ann Fink* with caricatures capturing this understanding (Jackson, 2019, p. 280; Miller, 2017, para. 2). While some of his ideas and books continue to be discussed in some circles, Rockwell has not had the same success, both in the short and long-term, for leading his vanguard group and shifting his goals to the broader public as the following two cases studies, Malcolm X and Guy Debord.

The second case study, Malcolm X, facilitated a strategic black nationalism framework through the Nation of Islam (NOI), “exposing the racist hypocrisy of American democracy and the contradictions of (white) Christian religions” (Cone, 2001, p. 178). In addition, he harnessed his oratory skills in many public appearances as a minister, even being suspended from the NOI for his statement that President Kennedy’s assassination was a case of the “chickens coming home to roost” (p. 181). His actions and writings inspired several generations to pursue racial equality and the Black Power movement. Other notable outcomes he achieved include influencing party politics in New York City to such an extent that the Freedom Now Party (an independent Black political party) asked him to run for Senator Powell’s seat if he resigned (Smallwood, 2018, p.18). He also influenced Eldrege Cleaver (of the Black Panther Party). Cleaver frequently referenced Malcolm X in his speeches and writings (Harper, 1971, p. 127).

The third case study, Guy Debord, was the principal theorist and leader of the Situationist International (SI). Through his leadership, the SI fused avant-garde art, radical politics, and everyday life to overturn the passivity of modern capitalist society. Debord’s work included the text, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which argued that advanced capitalism had transformed all social relations into mediated images, famously stating that “all that was once directly lived has become mere representation” (Debord, 1967, Thesis 1). As a vanguard leader, Debord sought to disrupt everyday life through practices such as *dérive*, *détournement*, and the construction of “situations,” all intended to provoke authentic experiences. His leadership helped position the SI as a catalyst for political rupture, most notably influencing the May 1968 uprisings in France, where Situationist ideas circulated among students and workers (Lepper, 2012, p. 158; Marcy, 2020, p. 4). Debord’s work continues to shape contemporary scholarship in art, history, and political theory, reflecting the lasting influence of his innovative critiques of capitalism and modern society and having an impact on contemporary activism, media theory, and cultural critique (Matthews, 2021, p. xv; Trier, 2007, p. 3)

Purpose/Scope/Research Questions

The purpose of this research study is to compare and contrast the similarities and differences in vanguard leadership behaviours, skills, traits, goals, and strategies across three vanguard leader case studies that varied in short- and long-term outcomes as leaders of vanguard groups.

The research questions ask:

- What similar and different behaviours, traits, skills, goals, and strategies have past vanguard leaders exhibited?
- What can be learned about vanguard leadership attributes by comparing and contrasting case studies with varying socio-political outcomes against existing theories of vanguard leadership?

Studying the skills, traits, behaviours, goals, and strategies of leaders provides a comprehensive view of how leadership functions in practice. According to Yukl (2013), effective leadership arises from the interaction of personal characteristics, abilities, and behaviors with situational demands. Traits such as intelligence, self-confidence, and resilience shape how leaders respond to challenges, while skills, technical, human, and conceptual, enable them to solve problems, influence followers, and coordinate actions (Yukl, 2013, pp. 20–24). Observable behaviors,

including task-oriented or relationship-oriented actions, reveal how leaders translate traits and skills into practice. Clear goals and deliberate strategies further guide a leader's influence, linking intentions to measurable outcomes (Yukl, 2013, pp. 15–20). By examining all these dimensions together, it can be better understood how vanguard leaders mobilize followers, challenge dominant norms, and aim to achieve their socio-political objectives.

The following section explains the criteria for defining a vanguard leader, as will be further explored in the literature review (Downton, 1973; Gray, 2020; Hawley et al., 2023; Marcy, 2020; Rejai & Phillips, 1979; Weaver, 2022). Vanguard leaders can be identified by these broader characteristics for which they are:

- Challenging an existing norm or belief.
- Introducing a new extreme ideology or belief and making attempts to explain why society should align with their position.
- Making attempts to show how their position/idea works using their vanguard group as a demonstration project.
- Making attempts to disrupt and agitate formal power holders and institutions.
- Using provocative yet non-violent strategies and displays to gain the public's attention.
- Uncompromising on positions.
- Creating cultural products to communicate ideas.
- Drawing attention towards 'an enemy category' in society.
- Attempting to occupy attention and resources from 'the enemy,' the media, and the public.

The following criteria were also considered when selecting cases to use in the study, informed by the methodological approach and controlling for various environmental factors:

- The leaders were active in the same decade (the 1960s and 1970s).
- They vary in their short- and long-term outcomes. Short-term outcomes refer to the impacts that occurred while the vanguard group was still active. These include immediate or near-immediate reactions such as mainstream press coverage, public ridicule, or other groups adopting or responding to their ideas. Long-term outcomes refer to the impacts that emerged after the vanguard group dissolved. These include broader or lasting influences such as theoretical extensions of their ideas, changes in social or political behavior inspired by their work, or later republications and reinterpretations of their materials.

Using historical case studies, this research examined past vanguard leaders, providing insight into how these individuals first emerged, organized and mobilized their groups, and had their strategies evolve in response to social and political conditions. Historical research also revealed what happened after these vanguard groups dissolved and whether the vanguard leader's influences were adopted, rejected or reinterpreted by other actors and groups, suggesting how their influence persisted or faded in the decades that followed. Studying past vanguard leaders

therefore allowed this research to explore the full cycle of vanguard leadership from the initial formation of the group to its short-term impacts, and where found, the longer-term legacy of their influence (noting that the longer-term impacts were not comprehensively sought out, but would make for a furthermore fulsome research study). Historical analysis of the vanguard leaders' behaviours, traits, skills, goals, and strategies, spanning the group's initial formation through its peak influence and eventual dissolution, is critical for comparing and contrasting vanguard leadership dynamics over time, revealing both their similarities and differences in leadership outcomes.

Positionality Statement

My research question is focused on aspects of vanguard leadership. It relates to broader questions about how informal leaders can organize, mobilize, and influence various facets of social and political ideologies. My chosen area of study for my Bachelor of Arts degree was in Political Science, which, at its core, is understanding power relations, or how actor A can influence actor B to do something they would not normally do. Further courses deepened my understanding and interest in this fundamental element of human nature, particularly in what motivates, influences, and changes human behavior. A minor in Public Administration introduced me to leadership and management courses that further analyzed the sources of power for leaders and the attributes that make leaders effective in their roles. As a public servant and policy analyst, I analyze issues affecting citizen trust in government. Why some of these groups become a 'threat' to existing structures and status quo norms, and whether they elicit a response from societal and government actors, are areas of interest to me.

By placing a critical political lens on issues that affect my community, my opinions on what makes certain leaders and groups more influential than others are shaped by this background. Knowing this, I set out to research case studies for which I had no prior knowledge, to avoid preconceived biases about their attributes as vanguard leaders. This study helped further my understanding of the unique behaviors, skills, and strategies that vanguard leaders employ to influence society, which are distinct from other theories of leadership in human and social development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews the emerging literature on socio-political vanguard groups and their leadership. A few studies have examined vanguard groups (Gerbaudo, 2017a; Gray, 2020; Shukaitis, 2014; Weaver, 2022), but relatively few offer direct analyses of vanguard leadership itself as a process. To address this gap, notable studies on social movement, rebel, and revolutionary leadership (Barker, Johnston & Lavette, 2001; Downton, 1973; Rejai & Phillips, 1979; Haslam, Reitcher & Platow, 2020) are reviewed to identify possible similarities and differences in understanding vanguard leadership.

This chapter begins by outlining definitions of vanguards, vanguardism, and vanguard leadership across historical and contemporary social and political contexts. It then discusses vanguard leadership in relation to individual, group, and societal-level behaviours, traits, skills, goals, and strategies, drawing on social movement, rebel, and revolutionary leadership studies. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an overview of the variables from the literature that are used in this research study of vanguard leader behaviors, traits, skills, goals, and strategies.

Defining Vanguardism and Vanguard Leadership

Several past and emerging studies have defined "vanguardism" and its characteristics. The term "vanguard," derived from the French 'avant-garde,' originally described a military unit that advanced ahead of the main army to disrupt an enemy and secure ground (Marcy, 2020, p. 2). Vladimir Lenin, was one of the earliest leaders to apply the term to a political context (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 190; Marcy, 2020, p. 2), proposing that the vanguard party is the "pivot of a successful revolutionary strategy" or a "highly structured and hierarchical organization capable of instigating revolutionary mass mobilization by means of propaganda and agitation" (Gerbaudo, 2017, p.190). Lenin applied the term vanguard as a "party (*en avant*) comprised of dedicated members – often intellectuals and activists – whose primary purpose was to spread Marxist concepts and educate the proletariat in Marxism, while disrupting the status quo" (Lenin (1973) as cited in Marcy, 2020, p. 2).

Contemporary definitions have expanded beyond Marxist-Leninist politics. Weaver (2022) frames vanguardism as a Leninist approach that mobilizes mass constituencies through universalizable grievances, though modern applications include alt-right groups (Hawley et al., 2023; Marcy, 2020), digital activism, anti-authoritarian organizations, and anti-activist formations (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 387). Gray (2020) defines vanguardism as a political phenomenon rooted in the intermeshing of ideology and organizational form (p. 1), noting that vanguard groups in general challenge prevailing norms and have no intention of aligning with them.

Vanguards introduce new beliefs and norms that directly challenge broader society (Marcy, 2020, p. 11), using propaganda and agitation as central strategies (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 190; Marcy, 2020, p. 2). Their ideological foundation presumes that only certain "advanced" individuals can perceive the true dynamics of social and historical conditions (Gray, 2020, p. 2). Within this advanced population exists an "advanced wing" capable of mobilizing others. This 'advanced wing' serves as the basis for the group that will mobilize, activate, and coordinate the advanced

population into action at the right moment (p. 2). This 'advanced wing' within the advanced population (for which 'advanced' can be defined as "ahead of the characteristic beliefs and norms of the wider society" (Wood, 2007, p.226) becomes the vanguard group. Their innovations have included the development of social and political theory related to ideological consciousness, party organization, mass mobilization, and, in the digital era, the use of new technologies for unification and control (Gray, 2020, p. 12). Despite ideological variations, vanguards typically share one primary goal: "to gain and then shift the public's consciousness to the socio-political worldview of the vanguard" (Marcy, 2020, p.4; Sadeghi Ronizi & Marcy, 2026, p.1).

Why Study Vanguard Leadership

Across the Western world, political instability and polarization, conditions reminiscent of the 1960s, have once again become the "new normal." In this contemporary period of upheaval, a wide range of socio-political groups have emerged both as producers and products of these turbulent conditions. Groups such as Antifa and the Alt-Right, which first captured significant public attention following the 2008 global financial crisis, grew further in visibility during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by intensified activism, counter-mobilization, and widespread civic unrest. Within this environment, small but highly visible vanguard groups have been growing across the political spectrum, each claiming to expose and confront what they view as the structural weaknesses of modern liberal democratic and capitalist systems (Judis & Teixeira, 2023; Teitelbaum, 2020). Here, "vanguard" is understood broadly as a group of actors seeking to advance radically new socio-political ideas and disrupt the status quo.

Although they waned in prominence and impact since the early 1970s, vanguards have recently experienced a resurgence in Western countries today (Hawley et al., 2023; Sadeghi Ronizi & Marcy, 2026). Today's vanguards have adapted their strategies and tactics and now have access to new technologies for communicating and networking across time and space. For example, current internet tools have enabled vanguard leaders to reach larger populations, disseminate their ideologies, and share innovative displays and tactics to a broader audience. Furthermore, new forms of vanguardism have emerged in other contexts, such as "eco-vanguardism," which focuses on environmental ideologies, and "vanguards of God," which relate to religious foundations. Technology has enabled the ability of vanguard leaders and groups to connect with, mobilize, and share ideas with larger networks, having their presence become further "mainstreamed," affecting present and future social and political developments (Gray, 2019, p. 7). The prominent presence of far-right vanguards, such as the Alt Right and the Identitarians, across North America and Europe underscores this development. Another example is the international presence of Extinction Rebellion, an eco-vanguardist group mobilized by Roger Hallam, who has used social media platforms and YouTube to share organizational tactics, ideologies, and strategies for disrupting institutions and gaining global attention (Extinction Rebellion UK, 2021).

Recent scholarship and journalistic analysis demonstrate that such vanguards are exerting increasing influence on mainstream politics. In *Where Have All the Democrats Gone? The Soul of the Party in the Age of Extremes*, Judis and Teixeira (2023) argue that "shadow parties" composed of highly ideological, college-educated professionals have pushed Democratic leaders toward more radical positions. These actors, while unrepresentative of the broader public, operate as a "dense network of righteousness" within influential institutions, shaping political narratives and policy preferences from within (Judis & Teixeira, 2023, p.129). The authors

explicitly describe these networks as a vanguard of activists and intellectuals seeking to steer societal development from the front.

Parallel dynamics are visible on the political right. In the United States, Green's *Devil's Bargain* (2017) and Teitelbaum's *War for Eternity* (2020) highlight the direct links between far-right vanguards, such as the Alt-Right, and high-level actors within the Republican Party (Green, 2017; Teitelbaum, 2020). In Europe, major media outlets have documented how identitarian movements, especially those led by figures such as Martin Sellner, have shaped political discourse and influenced party strategies in countries such as Germany and Austria (Marcy, 2024, p. 2). These examples illustrate a broader trend: vanguards across the ideological spectrum are increasingly interacting with, infiltrating, or pressuring institutional centers of power.

Vanguard leaders organize and lead groups to "influence ideas and shift public consciousness to create the socio-political conditions for actors and groups to better effect political change" (Marcy, 2020, p. 11). To achieve their goal of socio-political behavior change, they gather attention from the media, elites, and the mainstream public by employing agitation and disruption strategies that target elites at both the national and international levels, often with a utopian vision of how society should be (Lindholm & Zuquete, 2010, p. 41). Operating with a macro-scale worldview, vanguards tend to be far more extreme or confrontational than social movements, often employing direct contestation as a tactic to achieve their goals (Marcy, 2020, p. 2).

In the present, vanguard groups have been gaining more attention, including those on both ends of the political spectrum, such as the Alt-right and Antifa, a far-left group. Another of these, Extinction Rebellion (XR), has been recognized as a new form of vanguardist organization, eco-vanguardism (P. W. Gray, 2020), and uses modern technology tools, such as social media, to spread its message and empower populations through propaganda and agitation. Weaver (2022) terms this the 'greening' of vanguardism, but likewise draws out common vanguard attributes as Gray (2020) and Marcy (2020) do: disrupting orthodoxies, propagating mass uprisings, and 'live-out' dissent. XR calls for systems change, arguing that the political regime (capitalist governments that support economies causing climate destruction) can be overthrown by awakening society to what can be achieved through total revolt (Weaver, 2022, p. 2). Using new technologies as a tool for vanguards is a relatively new area of study, marked by the re-emergence of mass collective action groups in the digital era (Gerbaudo, 2012, 2017a, 2017b, 2019).

Vanguard leaders often differ from social movements and revolutionary leaders. Both have different goals and employ various strategies to achieve these goals. For example, revolutionary leaders often differ from vanguard leaders in the way that they generally use "illegal mass violence aimed at the overthrow of a political regime as a step toward overall social change" (Rejai & Phillips, 1979, p. 12), while social movement leaders often aim to collaborate with power holders to achieve their goals directly. For vanguard leaders, their goal is typically not to directly acquire formal institutionalized positions of power but rather to create the conditions for political change that will allow other actors to further their agendas (Marcy, 2020, p. 11). The mission, strategies, and tactics employed by vanguard leaders differ from those of social movements, which often have large followings. Vanguards often refrain from outright promoting violence, (although in some cases they do incite it), but instead typically focus on shifting public

opinion to accept their social and political propositions through non-violent forms of provocation, leading to a vision that will either fall into obscurity (if they are unsuccessful) or have their agenda accepted and/or partially co-opted by other groups and movements (if they are successful). In summary, to be successful as a vanguard leader, they must insert their ideas into mainstream social and political debates and create strategies, such as demonstrations and protests, that disrupt social expectations.

Vanguard leaders are also more likely to be motivated to directly confront and conflict with 'the enemy' and to go to great lengths to maintain loyalty within their vanguard group. They do not make exceptions for deviations or co-opting from the leader's agenda, sometimes even preferring expulsion from the group for minor infractions. This behavior differs from that of social movement leaders, who are typically concerned with maintaining as many members as possible, often at the expense of making concessions. Vanguard leaders are usually less concerned with obtaining formal positions of power in political parties and institutions. For the vanguard leader, collaboration is unlikely and more likely to result in dissensus, as related to Specht's taxonomy of social change (Marcy, 2020, p. 4).

Table 1: Taxonomy of Social Change – adapted from Specht (1975)

Perceptions of social change, elite/challenger response, and mode of intervention.

	When change is perceived as:	The response is often:	The mode of intervention is:
1	Rearrangement of resources	Consensus	Collaborative
2	Redistribution of resources	Difference	Campaign
3	Change in status relationships	Dissensus	Contest or disruption
4	Reconstruction of the entire system	Insurrection	Violence

Vanguard groups are not intended to continue over the longer term, as social groups often do. As vanguards oppose society's core values, symbols, rituals, beliefs, and principles, their goal is always to put their ideas at the forefront of people's minds, leading the process of change to be taken over by other groups, movements, and players. They work to gain public attention, but not to become an institutionalized group or political party. Their overall goal is to shift cultural and political norms and, at a larger scale, the general public's worldview, with the intention that other groups and movements will continue their work and that their success will therefore depend in part on whether larger movements pick up their ideas.

The role of leadership as a coordinating structure in social systems is crucial to understand, particularly in relation to the vanguard leader's ability to influence followers. Leadership success will depend on the leader's capacity to influence others, especially for vanguard leaders whose goals are so significant that success cannot be achieved without a dedicated group of followers. Followers come to the leader because they believe in the leader's vision or goals, and that the leader has the resources, skills, and abilities to change the social or political system (Downton, 1973, pp. 14-15).

The core purpose of vanguard groups is to subvert elite and mainstream worldviews by disrupting the public's "false consciousness" and replacing it with an alternative sociopolitical vision (Sadeghi Ronizi & Marcy, 2026, p. 2). Unlike social movements, which seek broad acceptance and work within mainstream norms, vanguards intentionally challenge and destabilize those norms. Their work centers on three leadership-driven tasks: sense-breaking, sense-giving, and sense-locking, which together form the mechanism through which they attempt to shift public consciousness. Sense-breaking involves provocative assaults on the status quo; sense-giving involves articulating an alternative worldview through texts, art, and discourse; and sense-locking involves attempts to institutionalize the new meaning system (Sadeghi Ronizi & Marcy, 2026, p. 2).

Vanguard groups operating in Western contexts face a sociopolitical environment that sharply limits their ability to disrupt dominant meaning systems. As Western societies are characterized by a hegemonic state in which the public widely internalizes elite values, it is difficult for vanguards to persuade people that the status quo is fundamentally flawed (Sadeghi Ronizi & Marcy, 2026). This environment complicates the core vanguard task of sense-breaking, because leaders must first unsettle deeply embedded assumptions before they can introduce an alternative worldview. Compounding this challenge, Western parliamentary parties often assimilate or co-opt vanguard ideas once they gain visibility, absorbing radical themes into mainstream agendas and neutralizing the vanguard's disruptive potential. Yet these contextual pressures do not alter the underlying leadership repertoire itself. The core behaviours, provocative norm disruption, construction of alternative meaning systems, and attempts to institutionalize new ideological frames, remain consistent across cases and across time. This reinforces the central argument of this thesis. While context shapes the difficulty of vanguard work, it does not fundamentally change the leadership model that drives vanguard outcomes. Whether operating under hegemonic consent in the West or fragile hegemony elsewhere, vanguard leaders rely on the same constellation of traits, skills, behaviours, goals, and strategies. The persistence of this leadership repertoire across decades and political environments supports the claim that leadership is a key explanatory factor in understanding why vanguards succeed, fail, or leave enduring legacies.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the selection of case studies in this thesis is designed to illuminate how the vanguard leadership repertoire operates across different ideological orientations while remaining structurally consistent. Because the argument advanced here is that leadership, in addition to decade, ideology, or national context, is a fundamental explanatory factor shaping vanguard outcomes, the cases were chosen to maximize variation in worldview while holding the leadership model constant. Each leader represents a distinct ideological project, yet all exhibit the core vanguard tasks described in the literature. This design allows the analysis to trace how similar and different leadership attributes generate comparable patterns of group formation, peak influence, decline, and long-term legacy, even when their ideologies differ. By examining leaders who operated in the same decade but pursued divergent ideological goals, this study isolated the dynamics of vanguard leadership from temporal effects. This comparative structure provides the basis for evaluating vanguard leadership through case studies, for which the outcomes would be similar across decades when the same vanguard leadership behaviours, traits, skills, goals, and strategies are consistent.

This research is important because vanguard leadership has not yet received the attention it deserves in the broader field of leadership studies. Early work on socio-political vanguards

emerged in the 1970s to 80s, when several of these fringe political groups were more active and present in society. Since then, few studies have been conducted to further understand the vanguard leadership phenomenon as a core leadership framework. With vanguard groups re-emerging over the past decade and gaining greater influence in media, mainstream political parties, and governments, understanding how vanguard leadership operates warrants a more central place in the leadership field. New research on vanguard leadership is emerging and gaining prominence in its understanding, including a recent entry in the Palgrave Encyclopedia of Leadership and Organizational Change (Sadeghi Ronizi & Marcy, 2026), signaling that vanguard leadership is gaining recognition as a meaningful subfield in leadership research. Vanguard leadership theory is therefore an emergent, developing stream in the field of leadership. This study also contributes to it, offering important insights into how fringe actors shape collective meaning, disrupt dominant norms, and influence socio-political trajectories over time.

The following definitions of leadership behaviours, traits, skills, goals, and strategies as they relate to this research are presented in the table below (Table 1: Leadership Attributes).

Table 2: Leadership Attributes

Attribute	Definitions	Examples
Behaviours	<p>“What leaders do when they are in a leadership role; how they act”. These are observable by others (Northouse, 2012, p.5).</p> <p>“Leadership behavior refers to the specific actions by leaders to influence the performance and satisfaction of followers”(Yukl & Gardner, 2019, p.233).</p>	<p>Types of behaviours (Northouse, 2012, p.5):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task behaviors: used by leaders to get the job done • Process behaviors: help people feel comfortable with other group members, ease situations <p>Types of behaviours (Yukl & Gardner, 2019, pp. 234-236):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task-oriented behaviors (e.g., clarifying roles, setting goals, monitoring performance) • Relations-oriented behaviors (e.g., supporting, developing, recognizing, building trust) • Change-oriented behaviors (e.g., advocating innovation, explaining vision, taking risks)

<p>Traits</p>	<p>“A distinguishing quality of an individual, which is often inherited”; innate qualities and characteristics (Northouse, 2012, pp.2-3; 27-33).</p> <p>“Traits are relatively stable attributes such as personality, motives, values, and cognitive abilities that influence a person’s behavior across situations” (Yukl & Gardner, 2019, p.229).</p>	<p>Types of traits (Northouse, 2012, pp.27-33):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence - having good language skills, perceptual skills, and reasoning ability • Confidence - self-assurance, positive feelings about oneself, and the ability to succeed • Charisma - charm and appeal • Determination – focus, and attentiveness to tasks • Sociability - the ability to establish pleasant social relationships • Integrity - can establish honesty and trustworthiness <p>Types of traits (Yukl & Gardner, 2019, pp. 229-231):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality traits (e.g., extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness) • Temperament (e.g., energy level, emotional reactivity) • Needs and motives (e.g., need for power, achievement, affiliation) • Values (e.g., integrity, altruism, collectivism vs. individualism) • Cognitive abilities (e.g., intelligence, analytical capacity, creativity)
<p>Skills</p>	<p>Skills are the learned competencies that leaders demonstrate and perform (Northouse, 2012, pp.85-86).</p>	<p>Types of skills (Northouse, 2012, pp.85-86):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative (managing people, managing resources, showing technical competence)

	<p>“Skills are learned competencies that enable a person to carry out specific types of activities effectively” (Yukl & Gardner, 2019, p.229).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive / Conceptual (creating visions, strategic planning, problem-solving) • Interpersonal (being socially perceptive, showing emotional intelligence, managing interpersonal conflict) <p>Types of skills (Yukl and Gardner, pp.229-230):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical skills: specialized knowledge of methods, processes, and equipment. • Interpersonal skills: communication, conflict resolution, motivating, and influencing others. • Conceptual skills: strategic thinking, problem-solving, recognizing patterns in complex events. • Administrative skills: planning, organizing, and coordinating activities
<p>Goals</p>	<p>Relate to the leadership process whereby “an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2012, p.6).</p> <p>“the desired outcomes or results that leaders and organizations strive to achieve” (Yukl & Gardner, 2019, p.8)</p>	<p>Types of goals (Northouse, 2019, p.6):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision: creating mental models of a future better than the status quo • The leader directs their energy towards influencing followers to achieve something together, “common goals.” • The leader articulates a mental model of an ideal future state. <p>Types of goals (Yukl & Gardner, 2019, p.9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational goals: building party strength, expanding membership. • Movement goals: advancing ideology, achieving social or political change.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal goals: recognition, influence, legacy.
Strategies	<p>Plans, tactics, methods, utilization of people and resources, maneuvers, and timing designed to meet short- and long-term goals (Moyer et al., 2001, p.12).</p> <p>“A deliberate pattern of actions designed to achieve important objectives for the organization or group” (Yukl & Gardner, 2019, p.246).</p>	<p>Types of strategies (Moyer et al., 2001, p.12):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tactics – activities to achieve smaller goals within a specific strategy <p>Types of strategies (Yukl & Gardner, 2019, pp. 248-250):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Strategies: setting clear objectives, allocating resources, and monitoring progress. • Relations Strategies: building trust, empowering followers, fostering collaboration. • Change Strategies: promoting innovation, articulating vision, managing resistance. • External Strategies: scanning the environment, forming alliances, responding to external threats.

Traits, Skills, and Behaviours – Individual Level

Early Life Experiences

Reflecting on individual-level attributes includes analyses of a person’s developmental years to suggest what experiences may have led them to develop certain behaviours and understandings. In Rajah and Philips (1979), the authors point to ‘relative deprivation and status inconsistency’ or to being introduced to challenging life events in the early years. Events that may call for instability and can be emotionally and physically damaging fit in this category, which may include such things as the death of close family members, war, and financial hardship. One or more specific catalyst events in early childhood and developmental years are shown to impact

the attitudes, cognitive development, and behavioural skills of those who later become exceptional leaders (Ligon, Hunter & Mumford, 2008).

From studies in other movements that focus on leadership attributes, many characteristics have been analyzed to compare what makes 'extreme' movement leaders exceptional. Rejai and Phillips's (1979) study of revolutionary leaders focuses on the social characteristics and motivations that lead to their emergence. The social characteristics theme compares the development of social awareness and political experiences to identify common variables. Common variables identified included early exposure to urban life, years of foreign travel (exposure to other cultures), educational attainment, and being introduced to the origins of ideology in foreign settings. These variables exposed the leader to more comprehensive ("advanced") understandings of politics and human and social behavior, which the revolutionary leader would adapt to their own social and cultural experience, thus forming the basis for their ideological development (Rejai & Phillips, 1979, p. 207). Relative deprivation and status inconsistencies are also known to have an impact on the leader's formative years, exposing the individual to experiences that build their creative and adaptive capacities. This may suggest that vanguard leaders build resilience in the face of challenging criticisms and have little concern about their own social acceptance (Marcy, 2020, p. 5).

Traits

Vanguard leaders are theorized to exhibit distinctive personality profiles. They would tend not to score highly on Agreeableness within the Big Five personality framework, reflecting the contentious nature of their missions. Compared to social movement leaders, vanguard leaders are often more socially removed and show a lower need for social acceptance, as they seem to embrace conflict rather than avoid it (Marcy, 2020, p. 6). Many vanguard leaders also display what Rejai and Phillips (1979) term an "aesthetic and/or romantic streak." Such artistic leanings suggest that vanguard leaders process information differently, privileging aesthetics and power as lenses for worldview construction (Ansborg & Hill, 2003; Smith, Ward, & Finke, 1995). This orientation may distinguish vanguards from conventional political leaders, granting them deeper perspectives on status, symbolism, and social aesthetics.

Cognitive Skills

To create and implement effective strategies and tactics that shift others' socio-political viewpoints toward those of the vanguard, advanced cognitive skills such as creativity, social innovation, effective forecasting, problem identification, and expertise are part of the mental skill set needed for the vanguard leader (Marcy, 2020, p. 5). However, expert knowledge and solutions alone do not necessarily make a person a leader worth following; certain behaviors and traits may also be needed to be convincing. For example, the vanguard leader must have a great deal of resilience, as they will face widespread public criticism and therefore have less concern with seeking social acceptance, offering concessions, or avoiding conflict (p. 7). Other skills include creativity to capture attention and to identify the right tools to compete with other information channels (Marcy, 2020, p. 9). Vanguard leaders must demonstrate resilience in the face of mass social rejection, while maintaining self-esteem and cultivating positive social approval (Marcy, 2020, p. 9). Traits such as contrarianism, non-conformity, and a lack of need for social acceptance are frequently observed among these leaders. Cognitive skills such as scanning and forecasting are particularly important, enabling leaders to anticipate challenges and identify opportunities to introduce their ideas (Marcy, 2020, p. 10).

Background experiences and personality traits can provide vanguard leaders with multiple, complex mental models of society, enabling them to draw on and combine diverse perspectives (Scott, Lonergan, & Mumford, 2005). Such experiences of status inconsistency may allow the leader to develop more nuanced heuristics for problem identification (Marcy, 2020, p. 7). Research on sensemaking suggests that actors whose cultural capital aligns with dominant organizational schemata are more likely to reinforce existing structures. In contrast, outsiders may generate disruptive alternatives (Lockett, Currie, Finn, Martin, & Waring, 2014). Studies on marginalization and deviance further support the idea that outsider experiences cultivate alternative mental models and heuristics (Förster, Friedman, Butterback, & Sassenberg, 2005; Kim, Vincent, & Goncalo, 2013; Runco, 1999; D.K. Simonton, 1994; Dean Keith Simonton & Song, 2009). These developmental trajectories also contribute to coping skills and resilience, enabling vanguard leaders to confront rejection and adaptively navigate challenges. As Leary and Terdal (1995) note, facing rejection directly is a formidable task. Yet, the ability to do so strengthens leaders' capacity to persist in the face of opposition from the status quo.

Traits, Skills, and Behaviours – Group Level

Team Leadership

Some social movement studies have employed identity leadership theories to argue that "leadership effectiveness derives from a potential leader's perceived ability to create, embody, promote, and embed a shared group identity" (Sewell, Ballard, & Steffens, 2022, p. 222). For the vanguard leader to be successful, they must have the skills to effectively gather a following to carry out their tasks. Still, unlike social movement leaders, they tend not to compromise their positions to gather more followers. Also, unlike social movement leaders, they are often combative internally and externally, sowing acrimony and distancing group members. They therefore must find alternative methods to influence, maintain, and build loyalty within a group to accomplish their goals and tasks.

The vanguard leader will then need the skills to manage, coordinate, and influence individuals in their group toward a common understanding, especially as individuals with varied skill sets and talents may be highly competitive with one another and often need significant autonomy to complete their tasks (Marcy, 2020, p. 7). Vanguard leaders may employ pragmatic or ideological strategies to influence followers (Mumford, Licuanan, Marcy, Dailey, & Blair, 2006). This often involves delineating category boundaries that distinguish the vanguard's interests from those of the status quo, reinforcing an "us versus them" dynamic. Leaders present visions that reflect collective social identity and articulate alternative realities, simultaneously marginalizing proponents of the status quo while aligning followers with a change agenda (Subašić, Reynolds, Reicher, & Klandermans, 2012; Haslam et al., 2010; Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008 as cited in Subašić et al., 2012).

Managing the stress of group deviance is another critical leadership function. Leaders must navigate the challenges of being outsiders while leveraging the creative advantages of social rejection (Kim et al., 2013). Such rejection can foster group cohesion and respect for leaders (Linden & Klandermans, 2006). Still, it also necessitates the provision of emotional and financial resources to sustain followers during periods of heightened disapproval (Bader & Baker, 2019; Chang, Turan, & Chow, 2015; Plucker & Runco, 1999; Williams, 2011). Critical analyses of vanguards, such as those by Gramsci (1971), underscore the importance of this dynamic.

To create a collective social identity amongst group members, the vanguard leader must delineate category boundaries between the group and the status quo by convincing members of their vision and alternate reality. If successful, the vanguard leader will achieve group cohesiveness by having followers perceive themselves as a collective ("us") against those who uphold a social-political status quo ("them") (Marcy, 2020, p. 10). The delineation of an enemy category in society is an integral part of the vanguard's ideology, which positions the "advanced population" against those who supposedly control the social and political power system (Gray, 2020, p. 10). To create something entirely new, the vanguard leader will need to break previously held understandings and provide an alternative reality to effectively shift and influence the consciousness of a group (and later society) to that of the vanguard leader.

Managing highly intelligent and creative individuals in the vanguard group will be essential for vanguard leaders to be influential, as individuals in group settings can rapidly shift their loyalty when inter-group competitiveness is present (Chang, Turan & Chow, 2015). Understanding individuals' emotional and intellectual needs will be necessary to balance the highly skilled and intelligent members' creative autonomy with their ability to meet the vanguard leader's tasks. Given this understanding, the vanguard leader may similarly possess narcissistic traits, as revolutionary leaders do, as the expulsion of deviants from the group and the limited room for making concessions demonstrate that they do not need others, except when it is beneficial to them (Rejai & Phillips, 1979, p. 89).

The literature suggests that leaders of minority groups can counter external threats by cultivating a close-knit membership and signaling compatibility by excluding incompatible individuals (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Such strategies may strengthen cohesion and, over time, enhance the group's capacity to influence majority beliefs. Scholars argue that this approach can yield greater long-term gains than incremental strategies, facilitating the conversion of dominant logics to minority perspectives (Moscovici, 1980).

Team Behaviour

As an extension of vanguard leadership, the behaviour of the vanguard group reflects how members collectively carry out the leader's influence and help advance new socio-political ideas. Vanguard groups do not simply represent alternative viewpoints; they actively work as agents of change, using coordinated actions to challenge dominant norms and shift public consciousness. The vanguard group will need to be composed of particular types of members, especially those who have cultivated similar 'advanced' skills in creativity and social innovation and can contribute diverse knowledge and skill sets to the group (Marcy, 2020, p. 7).

Through these collective actions, vanguard teams engage in sense-breaking (disrupting existing perceptions) and sense-giving (offering new interpretations and visions of social relationships). In doing so, the team works alongside the leader to "wake people up," reinforcing the group's narrative and advancing the broader goals of the vanguard movement (Marcy, 2020, p. 8).

Interorganizational and Societal-Level Traits, Skills, and Behaviours

Credible Public Figure

Shanteau (1992) and Shanteau, Weiss, Thomas, and Pounds (2000) argue that expertise requires more than knowledge alone; leaders must also embody the appearance and behaviours expected of an expert. In other words, vanguard leaders must demonstrate the cognitive and behavioural

repertoire that signals credibility and authority, thereby positioning themselves as figures worth following. For vanguard leaders, public credibility requires a delicate balance between norm violation and social acceptability. Theories of humor, such as benign violation theory, suggest that humor arises when moral norms are broken in ways that remain acceptable (McGraw & Warren, 2010). Similarly, vanguard leaders must be provocative enough to challenge societal norms while simultaneously maintaining legitimacy as credible public figures. Because vanguard leaders contest the status quo, they lack access to conventional forms of power, such as rewards or coercive authority (Yukl, 2009). Instead, they must cultivate informational and expertise power. Importantly, expertise is not only a matter of possessing knowledge; leaders must also behave and appear in ways that signal expertise to the public (Shanteau, 1992; Shanteau, Weiss, Thomas, & Pounds, 2000). One effective strategy for establishing credibility as a vanguard leader is to publish authoritative texts (Marcy, 2015). Beyond texts, vanguard groups themselves can function as demonstration projects, modeling new norms and behaviours for the public and signaling their potential benefits.

Being a credible public figure in the public eye will be necessary for a vanguard leader to be influential, as they are going entirely against widely held societal norms and need to convince others that, as a leader, they are still socially acceptable. Resources needed will likely come in the form of informational and expertise power (versus coercive or reward power); however, they must also possess traits and behaviors that enable them to be recognized and accepted as experts and leaders (Marcy, 2020, p. 10). One strategy to build credibility is to publish authoritative texts and disseminate manifestos or pamphlets that promote their ideological viewpoints. In addition to being accepted as credible, the vanguard leader must be provocative to capture public attention, often through strategies such as sensational public displays and uncompromising public debates (Marcy, 2020, p. 9). Public engagements need to highlight the problem(s) they see in society (provocative function) and the viable solution or alternative they are suggesting (credibility function). They also need to be contentious and sensational enough to resonate with the public and attract media attention after the event has passed (p. 9). They typically do not shy away from public engagements, interviews, and debates, where existing communication channels, such as media and large audiences, can be utilized.

Provocateur

Vanguard leaders also act as provocateurs, employing uncompromising public debates and sensational displays to capture attention in competitive media environments. Such engagements serve two primary functions: 1) Sense-breaking - defining and exposing status quo approaches as problematic; and 2) Sense-giving - presenting vanguard solutions as credible alternatives (Marcy, 2020, p. 9). Given their oppositional stance, vanguard groups typically favor direct confrontation with elites through mass-market media channels, as collaboration is incompatible with their mission (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

Interorganizational and Societal Level Goals and Strategies

Effective prescriptive change requires leaders to develop a broad understanding of public mental models, including prevailing beliefs, values, and political assumptions (Caughron, Shipman, Beeler, & Mumford, 2009). Vanguard leaders must design and implement strategic approaches that challenge widely accepted norms and render alternative perspectives socially and politically viable. This process demands an awareness of how social and political relationships function, how they can be disrupted, and how leaders can engage in sense-giving to articulate compelling

alternative visions (Foldy, Goldman, & Ospina, 2008; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Pratt, 2000). In practice, this means vanguard leaders must not only highlight social and political problems but also provide alternatives that followers and society at large can accept (Marcy, 2020, p. 4).

At the societal level, vanguard groups have been extensively theorized in critical, artistic, and philosophical studies (Gramsci, 1971; Home, 1991; Wood, 2002), but much less attention has been devoted to the management and leadership of these groups in other disciplines (Ganz & McKenna, 2017; Ganz & McKenna, 2019). Social movement leadership literature—often conflated with vanguard leadership—has tended to emphasize structural constraints over agentic processes (Ganz & McKenna, 2019; Guillén, 2010). This focus has advanced understanding of phenomena such as the role of elites, historical context, and networks (Ganz & McKenna, 2019). Still, it has also resulted in “a scarcity of research into the way in which movement leaders function” (Klandermans, 1997, p. 133).

Works such as Downton’s *Rebel Leadership* (1973) can be considered studies of vanguard leadership under the definitions employed here because they examine the characteristics, beliefs, and motivations of leaders who assume radical roles in contexts of political uncertainty. Research on social change organizations further suggests that prompting cognitive shifts is a key leadership practice (Ospina & Foldy, 2010). This aligns with findings in leader cognition literature, which highlight sensemaking and planning as essential skills for solving complex problems (Marcy, 2015; Mumford, Todd, Higgs, & McIntosh, 2017). Guy Debord exemplifies this dimension of vanguard leadership; for example, he is often described as a strategic thinker whose work integrated artistic critique with political praxis (Shukaitis, 2014).

Taken together, these phenomena underscore the need for a holistic understanding of vanguard leadership that integrates individual traits and skills, group dynamics, and societal-level strategies (Marcy, 2020, p. 11).

Group Level Goals

Because shifting public consciousness is an ambitious undertaking, vanguard leaders rely on dedicated groups of followers to advance their objectives. Achieving this requires high levels of intelligence and creativity to generate effective strategies and tactics, often through collaboration with intellectuals, activists, and artists (Marcy, 2020, p. 4). Leaders must also possess the skills necessary to guide teams with diverse members (Basadur, 2004; Byrne, Mumford, Barrett, & Vessey, 2009; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). Such groups face internal threats, including interpersonal conflict, as well as external pressures, such as attempts to dissuade members from maintaining the vanguard leaders’ commitments (Marcy, 2020, p. 5). To counter these challenges, leaders often need to provide both financial and emotional resources to sustain group cohesion. When leaders model commitment and resilience, followers may emulate these behaviours, enabling the group itself to function as a “demonstration project” for the wider public (Mumford, 2002). Vanguard leadership shares certain features with revolutionary, social movement, and political party leadership, particularly in its reliance on charisma as a mechanism for leader-follower relationships. Followers often seek to identify with and emulate leaders, who in turn leverage this dynamic to achieve group goals (Marcy, 2020, p. 10).

The vanguard leader benefits from other intelligent and creative individuals to carry out tasks and create tools, such as persuasive texts and dis/information campaigns, and to have group

members serve as demonstrations of the norms and behaviors the vanguard leader is suggesting (Marcy, 2020, p. 8). Therefore, the vanguard group is essential to establishing the vanguard leader's credibility with the public and meeting their larger goals. Identifying the group's social and interpersonal needs, fostering a shared collective identity, and allowing individual autonomy in task development are skills the vanguard leader needs to achieve their goals.

Individual Level Goals

At the individual level, vanguard leaders need to develop and implement new strategies to shift public thinking on social and political issues. Doing this depends on a set of cognitive skills that support creativity and problem-solving, such as anticipating future developments, identifying key challenges, and using knowledge to develop fresh ways of understanding and addressing community problems (Marcy, 2020, p. 5). They also need to show, through their own thinking and behavior, why their approach offers something better than what already exists. To attract followers, it is not enough to have expertise; vanguard leaders must also demonstrate it in how they speak, act, and present themselves. As Shanteau (1992) and Shanteau, Weiss, Thomas, and Pounds (2000) point out, people are more likely to trust someone who both knows what they are doing and looks and behaves like an expert. Because vanguard leaders operate outside mainstream politics and culture, they also maintain the integrity of their group's identity, vision, and message amid criticism from major institutions such as the media, political parties, and government agencies. This means they need a certain amount of resilience as they will face widespread condemnation.

Theoretical/Analytical/Conceptual Framework

Drawing from past research (Downton, 1973; Forsyth, 2014; Gray, 2020; Marcy, 2020; Nepstad & Bob, 2006; Rejai & Phillips, 1979; Weaver, 2022), this research study aims to strengthen the scope and theory of vanguard leadership to more fulsomely investigate how past vanguard leaders exercised leadership, as well as how they might be similar and different in their exercising of vanguard leadership, and then ultimately explore potential links between these attributes and their variance with influencing socio-political outcomes. A case study approach was chosen for this study, as it enables the researcher to strengthen existing theory (Klenke et al., 2016, p. 123) regarding vanguard leadership.

Existing vanguard leadership theories served as a guide in developing a list of questions for the data search (Appendix A). An existing model of vanguard leadership proposes that there are two routes of influence that vanguard leaders' attributes can have on socio-political change: the route of leader influence on groups and group membership, which then, in turn, affects mass society norms and values, and the route of leader influence directly affecting mass society. The attributes affiliated with the vanguard leader are suggested in the leader attributes box. The process for vanguard leaders to achieve their goals involves the vanguard leader suggesting why a status quo norm held in the public consciousness is a problem.

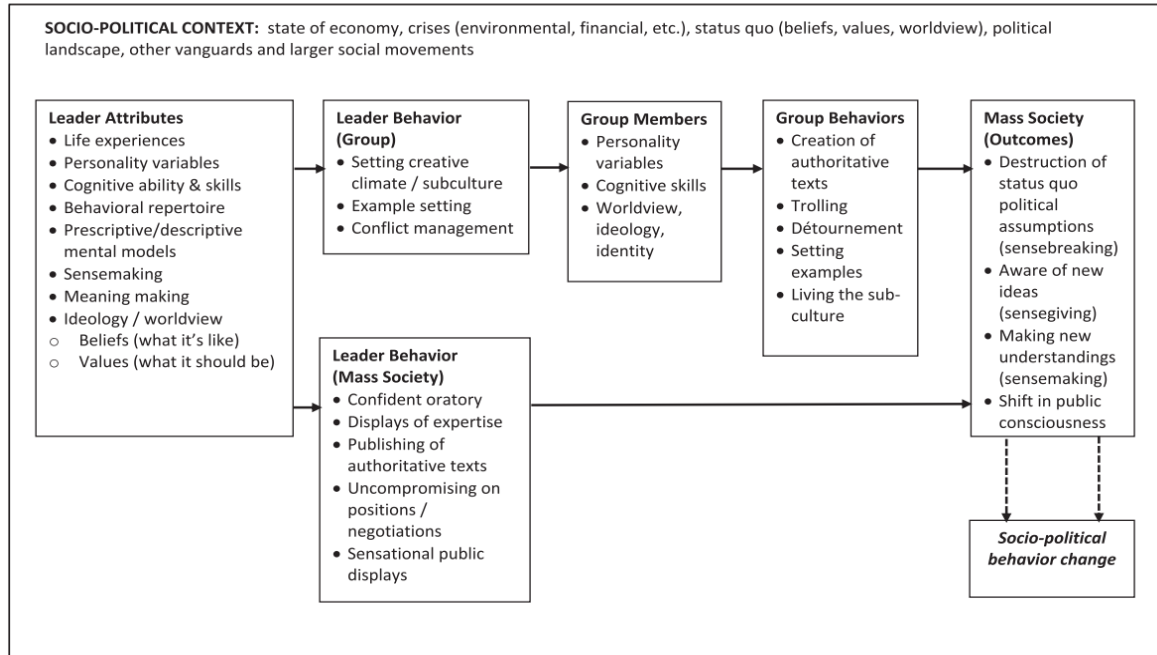


Figure 1- Model of Vanguard Leadership - adapted from Marcy (2020)

Through the *group* route, the vanguard leader mobilizes members to demonstrate and create a new subculture. To influence society, the leader, with the group's help, develops disruptive, attention-grabbing tactics and displays that capture attention through existing communication networks, such as the media. This process involves guiding with tactics such as authoritative publications and demonstrations by the vanguard leader, either directly or through the group. As a result, the vanguard leader and group gain the attention of the attentive public.

Through the *mass society* route, the vanguard leader uses public speaking opportunities, publishes texts, and makes public displays of non-negotiable or conflict interactions, which are captured by the media, in an attempt to garner public attention. The vanguard leader also suggests a solution to the status quo (sense-giving) or provides an alternative to the existing norm. Socio-political behavior change is achieved when new understandings (sense-making) are formed, shifting public consciousness toward accepting society's (new) norms.

This study applied a theoretical approach to analyze attributes in vanguard leader case studies, identifying which attributes were consistently present and any new attributes and patterns that emerged, thereby complementing the theoretical understanding of how vanguard leadership works. Drawing on prior work on vanguard leadership (Downton, 1973; Marcy, 2020; Rejai & Phillips, 1979) as a foundation, the goal was to further contribute to understanding which attributes might explain how vanguard leadership works to achieve socio-political behaviour change and how.

Summary

The literature review covered definitions to understand socio-political vanguards and their characteristics. It then examined theories of vanguard leadership, combining insights into leadership and influence with understandings of social movement, rebel, and revolutionary leadership. Finally, some behaviors, skills, traits, goals, and strategies are identified as a starting

point for the case study analyses, providing examples of some key attributes vanguard leaders have exhibited. These identified attributes guided the selection of questions for the case study analyses (Appendix A).

Some gaps in the literature include that few studies have examined the particular leadership behind social political vanguards, the attributes of these leaders, how they manage their groups, and the strategies that enable them to gain greater significance and influence in society. Given the limited research on vanguard leadership attributes, it is necessary to further examine how vanguard leaders influence followers and change status quo beliefs. As such, prominent leadership literature from social movements and revolutionaries was also reviewed to provide insights into vanguard leadership. A closer examination, through additional case studies of what makes vanguard leaders similar and different, would further inform how this form of leadership works and what behaviors, skills, traits, goals, and strategies make vanguard leadership influential in changing socio-political understandings.

A study of vanguard leadership is important because these leaders are central to how vanguard groups attempt to influence wider social and political environments. While the groups themselves are often small, their leaders work to shift public consciousness, challenge established norms, and introduce ideas they hope will be taken up by later movements. Their approaches frequently involve tactics such as agitation, propaganda, and public confrontation, placing them at the outer edges of conventional political activity. Examining vanguard leadership helps explain how these tactics are chosen, how legitimacy is contrasted for both the leader and the group, and how their ideas gain visibility and credibility. Existing research on vanguard leadership and how it operates is limited; focusing on leaders directly helps fill this gap by providing a better understanding of how these actors position themselves within broader socio-political contexts.

Given their proliferation and the high degree of political instability in which they operate, it is likely that vanguard dynamics will continue to shape political life in the coming decades. Although initially associated with Marxist movements, the notion of a vanguard has long since expanded beyond left-wing politics. Modern vanguards span a wide range of ideologies and methods. Still, they share a commitment to subverting dominant cultural norms through communication, propaganda, agitation, and aesthetic or intellectual innovation (Marcy, 2020). Many of these groups draw inspiration from earlier cultural-political avant-gardes such as the Futurists, who influenced Italian Fascism (Griffin, 2007), or the Situationist International, which helped catalyze the French uprisings of May 1968 (Matthews, 2021; Marcy, 2020).

Given the growing visibility and impact of these movements, scholarly attention to vanguards and the leaders who guide them is increasingly necessary. Some past research has examined vanguards in earlier historical periods, albeit in limited ways (Downton, 1973; Rejai & Phillips, 1979), but we still do not know much about how vanguard leadership operates or what vanguard leaders actually do to influence group and societal outcomes. Understanding how some past leaders have exercised leadership, mobilized followers, and influenced mainstream politics is therefore crucial for interpreting current patterns of polarization and anticipating the potential future impacts of socio-political vanguards. This thesis contributes to that understanding by examining the behaviours, traits, skills, goals, and strategies of three past vanguard leaders and tracing their outcomes in society to understand their impact as vanguard leaders. Through this investigation, the study analyzes the ideas, strategies, leadership practices, and societal effects of

three past vanguard leaders. By situating these groups within broader theoretical frameworks and historical case study analysis, the research offers insight into how past vanguards have shaped social and political culture.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology and methods employed in this study. It explains the rationale for the research design, including the use of the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), a comparative case study approach, biographical methods for data collection, and historical content analysis for data analysis. It also describes the criteria for case selection, the formulation of preliminary data-collection questions, and the procedures used to ensure reliability and validity.

Methodology

Comparative Case Study

This study employs a qualitative research approach to gather detailed, rich data that capture the highly personal and individualistic nuances of leader behavior (Insch, Moore, & Murphy, 1997, p. 97). It employs a comparative case study methodology, a method that seeks to obtain cases of a real-world phenomenon in its natural context without intervening in the phenomenon or its context (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999, p. 372). This research approach is an intensive, systematic comparison of comparable cases matched on many variables (Collier, 1993, p.106). The comparative case study component uses a “systematic comparison of two or more data points (“cases”), which are highly useful for examining similar attributes, but have a fewer number of cases to examine (Collier, 1993, p.105; Steinmetz, 2021, p.173).

The comparative case study process involved the following steps:

1. Identifying a research question for focused comparison. The research question seeks to explain which variables across the case studies examined were similar and different, and which may have contributed to their outcomes as vanguard leaders. The research question guiding the comparison asks how key variables across the case studies' behaviours, traits, skills, goals, and strategies were similar or different, and how these similarities or differences may have contributed to each leader's outcomes as a vanguard figure.

2. Identify the Variables from Existing Theory. This step involves gathering the data to explain or answer the criteria developed. The variables are derived from the existing theories of vanguard leadership (Marcy, 2020; Rejai & Philips, 1979; Downton, 1973) and further informed by other literature (the literature review) and the data obtained through this investigation. In this phase, comparing and contrasting examples of behaviors, skills, traits, goals, and outcomes can begin with the intent to isolate variables in behaviors, skills, traits, goals, and strategies that are similar and different across the studies.

3. a) Choose cases that are compared using the “Most Similar Systems Design.” The researcher selected the cases of Guy Debord, George Lincoln Rockwell, and Malcolm X and matched them against the criteria for vanguard leadership. The vanguard leaders were also chosen because they were active during the same period, reducing the possibility that outcomes would be affected by societal norms at different times. The case studies needed to be well-known

enough that authors, academic works, biographies, and other materials were written for efficient data collection.

3. b) Choose cases with variation in the values of the dependent variable. The case studies vary in their long-term influence on socio-political outcomes, including theoretical extensions of their ideas, behavioral changes, and acceptance of values and norms. Although the cases are similar on key background variables, they differ significantly in their long-term influence, including the durability of their ideas, the behavioural and ideological shifts they produced, and the degree to which their values were later institutionalized or widely adopted. This variation is essential for MSSD, which relies on cases that are similar in most respects but differ in outcomes to isolate explanatory variables.

4. Operationalize variables and construct a case codebook. This step guides how evidence is collected for variables in the study, involving recording and reporting how the data is collected. This is done by standardizing questions to ensure comparable data is selected from the cases. The questions in the Excel spreadsheet (Appendix A) are designed to guide the researcher in collecting data on the cases. This process aims to “see the evidence to code a variable in a particular way, to make a judgment of its value” (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999, p. 383). The researcher uses questions under behaviors, traits, skills, goals, and strategies at the individual, group, and societal levels.

5. Code-Write Cases. Once the data is collected, a narrative about the variables and coded values is constructed. The case study database remains separate from the report (Appendix A). A narrative case study is preferred for coding data and presenting variables in their context (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999, p. 385). The coding will be a mix of inductive and deductive approaches, drawing on close readings of the texts. Deductive analysis drew from the previous research on vanguard leadership and formed the questions in Appendix A. The research also sought new patterns that emerged in the case studies to inductively generate new suggestions for vanguard leadership theory. This approach was interpretative, aimed at uncovering themes from the data, creating additional categories, and adding to existing theories (Sun, 2017, p. 4).

6. Comparison and Implications for Theory. The researcher will look for patterns across the cases and identify which individual variables differ across the dependent variable outcomes. In other words, which vanguard leadership behaviors, traits, skills, goals, and strategies were similar across the cases, and which were different. The final stage involved identifying patterns across cases, specifically determining which traits, behaviours, skills, goals, and strategies appeared consistently across leaders and which differed in ways that may help explain different outcomes. This comparison informs a theoretical understanding of vanguard leadership that refines and extends beyond existing theories of vanguard leadership.

The design of this study, using a comparative case study approach, was useful for examining the leadership of the three historical vanguard leaders. The focus on case studies is well-suited to answering the “how” and “why” questions central to this research, such as how vanguard leaders exercise influence, organize their followers, and achieve socio-political goals (Yin, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989), identifying three case studies allowed for an in-depth exploration of their behaviors, traits, skills, goals, and strategies, and how these attributes contributed to their impact on society and against vanguard leadership theories.

By situating vanguard leaders within this comparative case study design, the research provides a systematic and rigorous approach to understanding how traits, skills, behaviors, goals, and strategies shape vanguard leadership. This approach not only clarifies the characteristics of historical vanguard leadership but also offers a lens for examining the potential impact of contemporary vanguard groups in Western democracies.

Most Similar Systems Design

The Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) method originates from Mill's methods of difference and agreement. In (MSSD), independent and dependent variables are identified for analysis. The central feature when applying MSSD is the ambition to isolate the explanatory value of the independent variable as much as possible. This is done by choosing cases as similar as possible with respect to the background variables, and selection is made only in accordance with these principles (Anckar, 2008, p. 399).

Another way that MSSD can be explained is as a form of investigation as 'most similar cases with a different outcome' (De Meur & Berg-Schlosser, 1996, p. 425). In an inductive approach, the researcher begins the study without knowing which extraneous variables to keep constant. Since similarities cannot explain the differences, the goal is to find variables that differ:

“When applying the method of agreement, our ambition is only to identify necessary causes of the dependent variables. If we succeed in identifying a single necessary condition for the outcome, then it follows logically that this variable in itself is necessary for generating the outcome regardless of how it interacts with the control variables” (Ragin, 1998, pp.100-101).

In this study, the independent variables are the behaviours, traits, skills, goals, and strategies explored in each case study. The dependent variable is the difference in short-term outcomes, with the researcher aiming to determine which attributes were present or absent, and, in some cases, to what degree, among the vanguard leader case studies. It is expected that several independent variables will be present in the case studies, namely those that define the leaders as vanguard leaders. Using the MSSD method, the researcher aims to identify, from the case studies, which variables and attributes (behaviors, skills, traits, goals, and strategies) were similar, and which were different and therefore may have contributed to different outcomes for these vanguard leaders and their groups. The short-term outcomes consider what happened during the vanguard group's active period (for example, being captured in the mainstream press, public ridicule, and other groups adopting their ideas). Any longer-term outcomes noted occur after the dissolution of the vanguard group (for example, theoretical extensions of their ideas, behavioural changes, republications of their materials).

Methods

Biographical Method

As this study relies on historical cases to examine the research questions, the biographical method was employed to analyze leadership dynamics over a specific period. Biographical methods use a variety of approaches for gathering data, including self-narratives, autobiographies, and historical biographies that explore individual life stories and are useful for uncovering the leadership traits, motivations, behaviours, attitudes, roles, relationships, thoughts, and emotions, and how these develop and unfold over time (Pina e Cunha et al., 2017, p. 373).

The authors note that extracting data involves drawing on sources such as autobiographies, interviews, and narratives to capture experiences and how the leader interprets them (pp. 397-398). As a secondary analysis study, the researcher focused on the use of published biographies, autobiographies, and interviews as data sources, which were present in all three case studies and referenced by most other secondary sources on the case studies.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision-making (not just what, where, and when). Smaller, focused samples are most needed. Qualitative methods produce information on the particular cases studied, and any more general conclusions are only hypotheses (informative guesses). This research study employed hypotheses about vanguard leader skills, traits, behaviors, goals, and strategies from the literature as a starting point to identify attributes across the case studies that were similar or different, and to add to existing understandings of vanguard leadership.

Content analysis does not require collecting data directly from people. Instead, it can be used in documentary research that examines recorded information found within texts, media, or physical items. It relies on objective and systematic coding and classification procedures. The process involves forming the research questions, selecting the material, developing an initial coding frame, piloting and modifying it, conducting the main coding phase, and presenting the findings. The steps are iterative, moving back and forth between the material and the coding frame until they both align with the research question (Schreier, 2019, p. 5). In this study, the initial coding frame was grounded in existing theories of vanguard leadership and expanded as new categories emerged, allowing the analysis to capture both similarities and differences across the case studies. Qualitative content analysis is instrumental in this method of leadership research because the method allows for uncovering the meanings and connotations of behavior, concepts, and relationships (Schilling, 2017, p. 27).

The coding scheme consists of categories, classification rules, and the words (or units) assigned to each category (Insch et al., 1997, p. 9). To create the coding frame, the researcher conceptualizes and assesses the meanings represented by the categories. The researcher becomes familiar with the material, understands the topics and concepts, and notes any ideas and potential categories to be included in the coding frame, structuring the categories through concept-driven and data-driven procedures. Concept-driven procedures rely on prior knowledge formalized in theoretical terms to structure the material – i.e., to create main categories (themes). This study constructed these as behaviors, skills, traits, goals, and strategies drawn from the theories of vanguard leadership. Data-driven approaches are generated based on the material to fall into categories. The researcher pilots the coding frame by selecting some material, dividing it into units, performing trial coding, and modifying the structure. The results are presented in a narrative format, with quotations and phrases from the material (Insch et al., 1997, p.9).

Historical Content Analysis

Given the historical nature of the case studies, elements of historiometric analysis were also incorporated, particularly to understand how developmental experiences shaped each leader's unique profile of skill sets, traits, and behaviours (Ligon, Harris, & Hunter, 2012; Sanders, 2023). This included examining formative life events, socio-political contexts, and personal

turning points that influenced their leadership trajectories, as suggested by previous similar studies on these attributes, such as Rejai and Phillips (1979) and Downton (1973). Historical analysis is essential to this study because it enables a comprehensive understanding of vanguard leadership across the full lifecycle of a leader and their group.

Reliability and Validity

Commentary from secondary sources is subject to potential author bias. Best efforts were made to minimize bias in the author's work by comparing and contrasting case studies from similar time periods and by matching variables using the Most Similar Systems Design method. The researcher aimed to collect high-quality data on leaders' attributes and behaviors by examining case studies (e.g., autobiographies, rigorous biographies, interviews, and historical records). Additional secondary sources were identified using a systematic scoping method to locate relevant texts across several databases. The systematic search strategy aims to find both published and unpublished studies (grey literature) on the case studies, as the case studies being researched seek data on leadership behaviors, traits, skills, goals, and strategies. Examples of these included research reports, dissertations, and internal reports. Gathering materials for the case studies involved a search of databases with a keyword string: ("Guy Debord" OR "George Lincoln Rockwell" OR "Malcolm X") AND ("leadership style" OR "leadership trait" OR "leadership traits" OR "leadership approach") AND ("behaviour" OR "behavior" OR "trait" OR "traits" OR "skill" OR "skills" OR "goal" OR "goals" OR "strategy" OR "strategies"). The researcher then used the abstracts of these search results to filter out sources that contributed to understanding the case studies' traits, behaviours, skills, goals, and strategies, and also used additional sources from the reference lists of articles.

Strengths and Limitations

The study's strength lies in capturing and comparing the behaviors, skills, traits, goals, and strategies of vanguard leaders within the same era to identify similarities and differences. It also compares the case study leadership attributes to investigate how these varying leadership approaches might have impacted their vanguard's influence on society in the short and long term. Vanguard leader agency in socio-political change has received less attention in the literature; this study adds to that body of knowledge, particularly for vanguard leaders. The comparative case study method allows the researcher to select cases where fewer examples exist to examine. A strength of the research approach (comparative case study) is that more detail and information can be obtained from the individual cases reviewed, enabling more detailed conclusions. In addition, historical cases provide data collected within a similar timeframe and context, for which some outcomes are already known.

The study relies on past writings, articulations, and reports of the leaders under investigation, limiting what materials are available and the ability of the researcher to completely understand what author or commentator bias may be present in the materials during the era they were written or published (i.e., socio-political context, editor and publication standards, author viewpoints). To mitigate limitations in data-collection sources, the researcher chose case studies that were historically notable enough for documenters to have written about, including publications of richly textured autobiographies and biographies, which served as critical sources for understanding leadership attributes and behaviors in each of the three case studies. Author and commentator bias is further mitigated by seeking multiple sources to validate a data point,

including the most recent publications on the case studies, and by conducting a systematic review to identify sources over several decades.

An additional limitation of the research is the context and political environment in which the vanguard leader operates, which impacts the vanguard leader's effectiveness in achieving outcomes, regardless of the vanguard leader's behaviors, traits, skills, and strategies. This may limit understanding of how effective a vanguard leader is because outcomes can be influenced by context and socio-political environment at different times. The researcher minimizes this limitation by choosing cases from similar periods and democratic societies.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings from the case study research. The relevant findings include descriptions, documentation, or quotes to support a comparable discussion of the similarities and differences in the traits, behaviours, skills, goals, and strategies of the vanguard leaders.

Traits, Skills, and Behaviours – Individual Level

The first section discusses early life experiences in each case study to understand their formative years and the events that may have contributed to their development as vanguard leaders. This is followed by findings related to traits, skills, and behaviours, indicated by the vanguard leader's own comments or observations by others who knew them. Related to vanguard attributes, several of these findings suggest the vanguard leaders had contentious personalities (i.e., were not highly agreeable) and were not seeking social acceptance. Examples of how they responded to social rejection and criticism were important, as well as being energized when they were challenged or faced conflicts (low in conflict avoidance). Exposure to different forms of information related to power, including various locations and cultural experiences, was included to suggest what may have provided alternative perspectives on status and social aesthetics. The leader's behaviour in public space included speeches, displays of expertise, the publication of authoritative texts, and an unyielding, uncompromising stance on issues. Official displays of commitment and sensational public displays that challenge the status quo public behaviours are also noted.

Early Life Experiences

Case Study 1 – George Lincoln Rockwell. George Lincoln Rockwell had an unstable family life. After his parents' divorce, he moved back and forth between his mother in rural Illinois and his father in various locations, including Maine, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. He later moved in with an Aunt, where he was abused and bullied, and ridiculed by classmates at school (Griffin, 2001, p.104; Schmaltz, 1999, p.12; Simonelli, 1999, p.11). In 1938, Rockwell enrolled at Brown University and focused on philosophy, social science, and practical joking (Griffin, 2001, p. 104). He did not graduate, dropping out after his sophomore year. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served as a naval aviator during WWII. Rockwell commanded the naval air support at the invasion of Guam in the South Pacific in August of 1944 (Griffin, p.105). After leaving the service in 1945, he moved to Maine. He attempted to make a living as a sign painter and freelance photographer. He then moved to New York City to study at the Pratt Institute of Design, enrolling in the commercial arts program, with aspirations of working in publishing and public relations. During his program, he was recognized for his talent, receiving a major award for an ad he signed for the American Cancer Society. He later returns to Maine to start his own advertising agency, which goes bankrupt (Griffin, 2001, p.107).

Case Study 2 – Malcolm X. Malcom X was born as Malcolm Little in 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska. His father, Earl, was a Baptist preacher and follower of the black nationalist Marcus Garvey. After the family moved to Lansing, Michigan, white terrorists burned the Littles' home, and his father shot at the arsonists as they got away. In 1931, Malcolm's father was found dead. His family suspected the white vigilantes had murdered him. Malcolm's mother battled mental

illness and struggled to care for her eight children following her husband's death. She was committed to a state mental institution when Malcolm was 12. Malcolm and his siblings were then scattered among foster families. After completing the eighth grade, Malcolm Little dropped out when a teacher told him that his dream of becoming a lawyer was unrealistic for a "nigger" and that he should pursue a career more suited to his position, like carpentry (Haley & X, 1965; Simon, 2005; Smallwood et al., 2022).

Malcolm X's formal education ended after Grade 8. He later became dedicated to self-education during his time served in prison:

“Malcolm would take to reading everything from the classics of Shakespeare to Aesop's fables, reportedly his favorite for the varieties of interpretations he could apply to life, family, personal conflicts, and everyday human beings, including guards at the prison, thugs on the streets, and government officials on the take. His pursuit of language proficiency over the next few years in prison was doubtlessly keyed by a recently published scholarly primer that methodically walked readers through the origins and connectedness of languages. The 1944 book that Malcolm later touted to Alex Haley, the coauthor of the *Autobiography*, was *The Loom of Language* by Frederick Bodmer. He prized Bodmer's work not as a guide to learning foreign languages but as a Rosetta stone for mastering his own language, English. And, as suggested, he started anew by building a vocabulary from “alpha” in the dictionary and working his way to “zebra” (Lester, 1966, p.225).

In his autobiography, Malcolm X stated that:

“A prisoner has time that he can put to good use. I'd put prison second to college as the best place for a man to go if he needs to do some thinking. If he's *motivated*, in prison, he can change his life” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 399).

Case Study 3 – Guy Debord. Guy Debord was born on Dec. 28, 1931. His father died of illness when he was four years old, and his mother then returned to school, leaving Guy to be raised by his grandmother (Hussey, 2001; Merrifield, 2004). When World War II began, his family moved from Paris to Nice. Guy experienced firsthand how France was ‘carved up’ and viewed ‘Vichy propaganda newsreels’ where heroic French forces fought against the ‘Boches’, or “bullies and murderers”. When Guy's mother remarried, she invited her new husband's children to live in their home, sending Guy and his grandmother to a separate, smaller apartment (Hussey, 2001, pp. 16-19). Debord often mentioned in his work that he had seen “nothing but troubled times and immense destruction” (Debord, 2004; Kaufmann, 2006, as cited in Marcy, 2020, p. 4).

In school accounts, Guy was known to be extremely well-read and to devise games that disrupted the orderly running of work, such as switching signs to disorient people and traffic. From the constant moving across the countryside, due to war and financial hardship, “the frequent changes of scene meant that Guy had, through necessity, grown into something of a solitary adolescent who did not seem to need many friends” (Hussey, 2001, p.25).

This excerpt from Hussey's (2001) biography of Guy Debord further notes that:

“His chief pleasures were reading and study, at which he excelled – although by his own admission, he was given to periods of ‘great laziness’, and he gave little outward display to his teachers or his school comrades at the prestigious Lycée Carnot in Cannes of either

pleasure or pride in his achievements. He reserved a particular anger and contempt for his mother, who he felt had abandoned him, and he saw no reason why he should try to please anyone else, either in school or out of it. ‘Guy was very like his mother,’ comments Patrick [his half-brother], explaining Guy’s ability to disregard the opinions of others. ‘He got from her his courage, his foolhardiness’ (Hussey, 2001, p. 25).

He pursued a law degree at the University of Paris but did not complete it (Jappe, 1999; Hussey, 2001).

Summary. Early life experiences were found to be a similarity across the case studies. George Lincoln Rockwell, Malcolm X, and Guy Debord all experienced difficult childhoods. None finished their formal education – Guy Debord and Rockwell both pursued higher education but eventually dropped out. Malcolm X did not receive any formal education after the 8th grade. An interesting development for all three is the intensity and dedication with which they pursued self-education, avidly read, and became experts on the topics that later informed their vanguard ideology and goals.

Traits and Behaviours

Case Study 1 – George Lincoln Rockwell. Several descriptions by people who knew George Lincoln Rockwell personally or professionally offered insights into his personality and demeanor. A neighbor who knew him from the local laundromat stated that he was “a very charming man” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 324), His childhood friend, Stanley Tupper, likewise said he remembered Rockwell as “charming, witty, and candid” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 302), and a local Rabbi further described him as “fair, honourable, courageous and intelligent” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 24). William Pierce, a comrade of Rockwell’s and a dedicated member of the ANP, said that: “Rockwell had an assertive and brash public persona, affected a dashing, rakish image with his corn-cob pipe, and tended to approach things with a showbiz touch” (Pierce in Griffin, p. 104). Another insight into his character comes from a letter written by his Commanding Officer in the Naval Forces, which praised Rockwell’s performance:

“Rockwell has performed his duty...in an outstanding manner. He is very energetic, dynamic, and persevering in whatever task he is assigned or undertakes. He is well-liked and highly respected by both officers and enlisted men....He knows how to lead men” (Schmaltz, 1999, p.24)

When facing social rejection and criticism, or in situations where he had significant isolation, a few excerpts pointed to Rockwell being socially removed and disengaged, for a short time, where he directs his thoughts and energy toward developing his skills, ideology, and eventual strategy, as the leader of the ANP:

“While on a naval assignment in Iceland, relatively isolated from the modern world, social customs centered around cheap liquor and carnal delights. Rockwell remarked that he “rejected the debauchery and free-for-all atmosphere for asceticism, preferring to devote his time to exercise, study, and writing” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 23).

“After his first marriage ends, Rockwell redirects his energies to study and writing. He reread *Mein Kampf* a dozen times, annotating and indexing the themes of the book. He wrote endless business plans for fictitious political organizations, along with propaganda and cartoons designed for mass consumption” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 23).

During the time that Rockwell “buried himself in reading and studying” *Mein Kampf*, he stated in his memoir that “reading it was like finding part of me” (George Lincoln Rockwell, 1961, p. 38; Simonelli, 1999, p. 23). In his memoir, he further wrote that: “At once, a great weight lifted off my soul. I knew that I had found my way to the sun at last and the days of mental darkness, searching and endless frustration were over” (p. 38).

Case Study 2 – Malcolm X. In Malcolm X’s autobiography, as told to Alex Haley (1965), there were several instances of Malcolm behaving angrily and agitated, and an awareness of his temperament. For example:

“When appearing before a Philadelphia Convention Hall on the radio station WCAU, Ed Harvey, Ed Harvey, program host, asked MX “you are the man who has said ‘All negroes are angry, and I am the angriest of all’; is that correct?” and Malcom X said crisply, “That quote is correct!” the gathering crowd of bystanders stared at him, riveted” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 404).

“With the 1964 long, hot summer steadily producing new incidents, I [Malcolm X] was constantly accused of “stirring up Negroes”. Every time I had another radio or television microphone at my mouth, when I was asked about “stirring up Negroes” or “inciting violence”, “I’d get hot. . .” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 373).

“They called me [Malcolm X] the angriest Negro in America. I wouldn’t deny that charge. I spoke exactly as I felt.” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 373).

When Alex Haley was first introduced to Malcolm X to write an article about him, Malcolm told him: “You’re another one of the white man’s tools sent to spy!” and “no white man’s promise was worth the paper it was on; he would need time to decide if he would cooperate or not” (Haley, 1965, p.391). Haley further observed that: “...he [Malcolm X] always arrived around nine or ten at night carrying his flat tan leather briefcase, which, along with his scholarly look, gave him a resemblance to a hard-working lawyer...” (Haley & X, 1965, p.395).

Case Study 3 – Guy Debord. Guy Debord spent long hours alone, engaged in solitary pursuits such as playing the piano, reading adventure stories, and orchestrating complex scenarios with toy soldiers (Hussey, 2001, p. 21). In his early years, he was described as “shy of boys his own age” and “wary of the boisterous, rough and tumble of playground games” (Hussey, 2001, p. 22) and that he “deliberately chose to remain outside the regime of visibility he called ‘the Spectacle’” (Noronha, 2020, p. 178), After his death, neighbors remarked that “it wasn’t normal the way he hid himself away” (Hussey, 2001, p.1). Guy Debord refused interviews and media appearances, choosing instead to “live off the grid”. He eventually dissolved the Situationists in 1971 to prevent its institutional stagnation (Byrd, 2014, para. 14). A comment by Hussey (2001) is that “Guy found it difficult to listen to or respect any form of male authority...deciding to reject all forms of authority but his own” (Hussey, 2001, p. 22). Byrd (2014) comments that:

“Despite a surge in interest in the S.I., Debord chose to live off the grid. He didn’t submit to interviews or make television appearances. Remaining true to his high valuation of flux and transience, he dissolved the S.I. in 1971. He was wary of seeing the movement grow complacent or predictable. And as the editor of the group’s magazine, he was frustrated at having to wrangle contributions from the half-dozen or so members who

hadn't been expelled by the '70s. "And now that we can flatter ourselves on having acquired the most revolting celebrity status among this rabble [the left]," he noted in 1972, "we will become even more inaccessible and clandestine. The more famous our theses become, the more obscure we ourselves will be." (Byrd, 2014, para. 14).

Isou Isadore (a mentor and leader of the Letterists, a former group that Guy belonged to) described his friendship with Debord:

"Like a brother. Then an enemy, like a Nazi, and [having formed the Situationists later] that "Debord himself, as a perverted leader and betrayer, was no better than the blackest Nazi war criminal" (Hussey, 2001, p. 37).

There were several more excerpts or comments on Guy Debord's characteristics, narcissistic tendencies, and personality. For example, Guy describes his birth as a great coming in the world: "Hegel's owl of Minerva spread its wings to announce the arrival of wisdom in the world" (Hussey, 2001, p.13). He also remarks, "I wonder if even one other person has dared to behave like me in this era" (Debord writes in one of his final books, Hussey, 2001, p. 8). Some further excerpts in his biography (Hussey, 2001) describe his traits and behaviours:

"As he drew nearer to school-leaving age, Debord had also decided that work was a contemptible activity and that he too would launch a permanent general strike against a society whose laws he refused to understand. Debord devoted himself to reading, drinking, and going to the cinema. He wore expensive casual clothes, ordered freely from the family tailor, silk ties, and highly polished Italian shoes" (p. 31). [anti-establishment/anti-authority]

"He styled himself as an intellectual and sartorial dandy and declared his hero to be the 'literary bandit' Lacenaire, [from Marcel Carne's film *Les enfants du Paradis*] who says that as an aesthete he is above all moral law" (p. 31). [narcist]

"Conversation was nonetheless dominated by Debord, who, although quietly spoken, even at this early stage demonstrated a gift for controlling and manipulating a social situation. Debord was shy about his lack of formal education and tended to fall silent if the conversation turned to authors or thinkers he had not encountered in his own reading. He professed relentless scorn for the courses which Michele Bernstein was following at the Sorbonne, but he nevertheless kept abreast of the theories and ideas then current" (p. 72). [introverted]

"Despite Debord's best attempts to preserve his nominal position as a student of law, after seven years, the University had had enough of his phantom presence and revoked his status. He was then looking at a call-up [to war], which might even be, worst fate of all, to Algeria. He then claimed physical (genuine asthma and myopia) and mental (an invented 'neurotic anguish') disability. He gained a reputation as an expert draft dodger to whom comrades could turn if and when the call-up came" (p. 118). [anti-establishment/anti-authority]

Summary. Individual traits and behaviours were similar across the case studies. All three case studies exhibited common vanguard leader attributes, such as being disagreeable and welcoming conflict. They had high levels of self-esteem and narcissistic tendencies, with Guy Debord and Malcolm X exhibiting these behaviours with most who knew them. Rockwell

seemed to have more positive characteristics among people who knew him outside his vanguard pursuits.

Cognitive Skills

This section presents findings that demonstrate skills in cognitive thinking, such as problem-solving and forecasting, as well as advanced heuristics and artistic abilities. A key finding was that none of the case studies turned away from their goals despite experiencing social rejection. Resilience was demonstrated by how the case studies managed setbacks and maintained unwavering confidence in achieving their goals. Examples of perseverance are reflected in narratives related to self-esteem and in articulating, writing, or speaking about their belief in the validity of their visions, even when facing widespread criticism and rejection. Signs of cognitive and behavioural expertise were also evident, as were skills in creativity and social innovation.

Case Study 1 – George Lincoln Rockwell. A writing from George Lincoln Rockwell’s commander at the U.S. naval forces in Iceland wrote an endorsement for Rockwell that stated:

“Rockwell is a writer of considerable ability. He is an outstanding caricature artist. He is a keen-witted ‘idea-man’ with the capability of turning out a compellingly worded pamphlet, complete with illustrations, in the shortest reasonable period” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 25).

George Lincoln Rockwell wrote the “tenets” for the American Nazi Party (ANP) and later “Ten Points of American National Socialism” for the National Socialist White People’s Party (Schmaltz, 1999, p.305). He focused on reading and studying Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, reading it “a dozen times” while on naval assignment in Iceland. He said that “reading [*Mein Kampf*] was like finding a part of me” (Simonelli, 1999, p.23). An excerpt in his yearbook suggested Rockwell developed skills in creativity, was artistic, and had an admirable personality:

“Without question, Lincoln is the loudest talker on the campus, the originator of more weird theories than anyone else, and the Academy’s outstanding artist.... We have every assurance of his being successful because of his incomparable personality and originality” (Green Parrot ’38 Yearbook, Hebron Academy, Maine, as cited in Schmaltz, 1999, p.5).

Rockwell confided that “a genius leader reduces many enemies to one in followers” (Simonelli, 1999, p.72). And he wrote in letters to his mother that he believed he was a patriot, even though others ignored him. Further descriptions of Rockwell’s thinking, in relation to his ideas and formation of his worldviews, included:

George Lincoln Rockwell described National Socialism as “the doctrine of scientific, racial idealism.” He referred to it as a “new ‘religion’ for our times.” His readings included works by Gerald L.K. Smith, Conde McGinley, and *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (Simonelli, 1999, p.23). He stated that *Mein Kampf* provided “abundant ‘mental sunshine,’” and described the reading as a clarifying experience:

[In *Mein Kampf*] “I found abundant ‘mental sunshine,’ which bathed all the gray world suddenly in the clear light of reason and understanding. Word after word, sentence after sentence stabbed into the darkness like thunderclaps and lightning bolts of revelation, tearing and ripping away the cobwebs of more than thirty years of darkness, brilliantly

illuminating the mysteries of the heretofore impenetrable murk in a world gone mad. I was transfixed, hypnotized.... I wondered at the utter, indescribable genius of it.” (Pierce quoting Rockwell in Griffin, 2001, p. 106).

William Luther Pierce remarked on Rockwell’s response to reading *Mein Kampf*, stating:

"Rockwell himself was certain that something was off kilter in society and that there was some funny business going on, but what really put it all into focus for him, he later recalled, was when he bought a copy of Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* at a second-hand bookstore and found himself "transfixed" and "hypnotized" (Griffin, 2001, p. 105).

Rockwell also believed that most contemporary right-wing groups were too timid to appeal to the public. He viewed right-wing leaders and segregationist politicians as secretly aligned with his views but unwilling to speak out due to fear of retribution. He believed that by openly challenging what he called a ‘Jewish conspiracy’, he would represent a silent segment of the political right (Simonelli, 1999, pp. 25–26). A description of Rockwell’s response to a reporter’s questions about his beliefs further added to this finding:

“In 1966, a reporter asked Rockwell, “Do you believe all of this you preach?” Astonished by the man’s query, Rockwell took his corncob pipe from his mouth and explained very slowly, in a low voice, “This has cost me the most beautiful wife in the world. Seven kids. All my relatives. I was a commander in the Navy and a half-year away from a pension. Certainly, I believe all of this.” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 301).

In the biographies of George Lincoln Rockwell, several passages suggested his psychological and mental state concerning his family, and dealing with rejection:

“In words that jump off the page with anger, Rockwell shouts at his family that his command of a powerful global movement is proof that he is neither a failure nor insane. Still smarting from Bobby’s [his brother] suggestion in 1958 that his behavior was abnormal and that he should seek psychiatric care, Rockwell closed the letter with a defiance that may have masked a subliminal plea for help, taunting Bobby and the family to dispute his “facts” and disprove the logic of his arguments (Simonelli, 1999, p. 49).

“He wrote to Clare [his mother] of the physical pain caused by the loss of Thora and their children... declaring he had nothing worth living for and threatening suicide...[then] the tone of Link’s [Rockwell’s] letters changed dramatically. What he called his ‘fight’ would sustain him, he assured her, and would absorb the pain he felt, converting it into anger against his enemies.... His pain turned outward, Rockwell would make his enemies pay for all that had gone so wrong in his life” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 32).

He realized that he could no longer believe anyone just because they “loved” him or “promised” him something. He realized that Thora, by throwing him out of her life, had given him a “priceless armor of fearlessness, “which he could carry forward into future battles” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 57).

A few quotes directly from Rockwell on his ideas and worldviews are shown below:

“The crusade I plan to lead will be much broader in scope than that. In Germany, Hitler produced a local “lab experiment”; he provided me with an ideology in the same way that

Marx provided one for Lenin. My task is to turn this ideology into a world movement. And I'll never be able to accomplish that by preaching pure Aryanism as Hitler did—by glorifying the Nordic-Germanic people as a “master race.” There is an easily identifiable master race, however: the white race. You can find it all over the world. This is what I'm fighting for—not Aryanism, but white Christian solidarity. In the long run, I intend to win over the people of Greece, of Germany, of Italy, of England, of Canada, of France, of Spain, of Latin America, of Rhodesia, of South Africa—the people of every white Christian country in the world. All the white Christian countries of the earth, I would try to mold into one racial, religious, political, and military entity. I want them eventually to have hegemony” (Haley, 1966, para. 15).

“I knew I would not live to see the victory which I would make possible. But I would not die before I had made that victory certain” (Simonelli, 1999, p.1).

Case Study 2 – Malcolm X. Malcolm X gained much of his understanding through the *Muhammad Speaks Newspaper*, which he established for the Nation of Islam (NOI) to promote the movement's message. He used this as both a recruiting and a fundraising tool. He gave several public speeches, reaching college students at prestigious universities such as Stanford, Berkley, Harvard, and Yale (Harper, 1971, p. 394). His expertise is displayed in his public speeches and arguments, often citing historical facts and drawing correlations to real-world phenomena, like in his *Message to the Grassroots* speech (Breitman, 1989), which compares the American, French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions, making the comparison to describe what African Americans should do.

Some excerpts relating to Malcolm X's cognitive skills and thought processes included:

“Two areas of experience which have been extremely formative in my life since prison were first opened to me in the Norfolk Prison Colony. For one thing, I had my first experiences in opening the eyes of my brainwashed black brethren to some truths about the black race. And the other: when I had read enough to know something, I began to enter the Prison Colony's weekly debating program – my baptism into public speaking” (MX in Haley, 1965, p.185). [Self-awareness]

“I had built up subconscious defenses. The white man does this. He shuts out of his mind, and he builds up subconscious defenses against anything he doesn't want to face up to. I've just become aware of how closed my mind was now that I've opened it up again. That's one of the characteristics I don't like about myself. If I meet a problem I feel I can't solve, I shut it out. I make believe that it doesn't exist. But it exists” (Haley, 1965, pp.400 - 401). [Cognitive Skills]

“My thinking had been opened up wide in Mecca. In the long letters I wrote to friends, I tried to convey to them my new insights into the American black man's struggle and his problems, as well as the depths of my search for truth and justice. “I've had enough of someone else's propaganda,” I had written to these friends. “I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who is for or against. I'm a human being first and foremost, and as such I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity *as a whole*” (Haley, 1965, p.373). [Exposure to different cultures]

“Capitalism is like a chicken that can’t lay a duck egg because the system of the chicken isn’t constructed in a way to produce a duck egg; and the political and economic system of this country is absolutely incapable of producing freedom and justice (Warren, 1965, as cited in Harper, 1971, p. 396). [Heuristics]

“And you and I are in a double trap because not only do we [African Americans] lose by taking our money someplace else and spending it, when we try and spend it in our own community we're trapped because we haven't had sense enough to set up stores and control the businesses of our community. The man who is controlling the stores in our community is a man who doesn't look like we do. He's a man who doesn't even live in the community. So, you and I, even when we try and spend our money on the block where we live or the area where we live, we're spending it with a man who, when the sun goes down, takes that basket full of money in another part of the town” (Malcolm X in *The Ballot or the Bullet* speech, 1964). [Cognitive Skills]

“Once you change your philosophy, you change your thought pattern. Once you change your thought pattern you change your attitude. Once you change your attitude it changes your behavior pattern. And then you go on into some action. As long as you got a sit-down philosophy, you'll have a sit-down thought pattern. And as long as you think that old sit-down thought, you'll be in some kind of sit-down action. They'll have you sitting in everywhere” (Malcolm X as cited in Andrews, 1992, para. 24). [Worldviews]

While in prison, he became completely isolated from his family and friends, using the opportunity of social rejection and isolation to improve his knowledge and expertise. He learned how to debate, developed skills as an effective orator, and taught himself language, history, different religions, and any other topic he could find. Some examples from his autobiography were:

“Malcolm set out to pursue education this time around not in a way to seek the approval of teachers, or even family, but rather as a way to distinguish himself and wield power among the hardened convicts on the tier” (Haley & X, 1965, p.225).

“Malcolm would take to reading everything from the classics of Shakespeare to Aesop’s fables, reportedly his favorite for the varieties of interpretations he could apply to life, family, personal conflicts, and everyday human beings, including guards at the prison, thugs on the streets, and government officials on the take” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 225).

“His verbal dexterity, long a staple of Malcolm’s limited street rap, would be upgraded with metaphors, similes, and poetry into a veritable dynamo of persuasion. Within a few weeks, Malcolm enrolled in a Latin course and subsequently, using his photographic memory, devoted himself to studying Bodmer’s *Loom of Language*. This didactic pursuit of linguistics, together with his street-tested argumentative style, eventually would arm Malcolm with a terrible swift literacy sword that could slay just about any dragon in a debate on the prison yard or in a lecture hall” (Haley & X, pp. 225-226).

There were also several findings related to Malcolm X’s personality and self-esteem:

“Tense incidents occurred...Malcolm X sat haranguing me [Alex Haley] about the glories of the Muslim organization, he was gesturing with his passport in his hand; he saw that I was trying to read its perforated number and suddenly he thrust the passport toward me,

his neck flushed reddish: “Get the number straight, but it won’t be anything the white devil doesn’t already know. He issued me the passport” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 395).

“MX would make a great point of stressing to me: “Now, I don’t want anything in this book to make it sound that I think I’m somebody important” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 399).

“I don’t *completely* trust anyone...not even myself. I have seen too many men destroy themselves” (Haley & X, p. 396).

Malcolm X described to Haley (1965): “I would keep close watch on how each one reacted ...in the prison, debating, speaking to a crowd, was as exhilarating to me as the discovery of knowledge through reading had been” (p.187). He also tells him:

“When I was in prison, I used to lie on my cell bunk – this would be especially when I was in solitary...and I would picture myself talking to large crowds. I don’t have any idea why such provisions came to me. But they did” (Haley & X, 1965, p.372).

“I’ve always been blessed in that if I can once watch something being done, generally I can catch on to how to do it myself. Quick “picking up” was probably the number one survival rule when I’d been out there in the streets as a hustler” (Haley & X, 1965, p.241).

Case Study 3 – Guy Debord. The following all relate to Guy’s particular cognitive skills, creativity, and innovation:

“The technique of inserting a personal detail, impossible for an impersonal audience to know, into the body of a text would become a hallmark technique of Debord’s art” (Hussey, p.62). [Creativity]

“I have studied the logic of war. Moreover, I succeeded, a long time ago, in representing the basics of its movement on a rather simple board game: the forces in contention and the contradictory necessities imposed on the operations of each of the two parties. I have played the game, and, in the often-difficult conduct of my life, I have drawn a few lessons from it. I also set myself rules of the game for this life, and I have followed them. The surprises of this Krieg spiel [war game] seem inexhaustible, and I fear that this may well be the only of my works that anyone will dare acknowledge as having some value. (Debord, 1991, pp 63-64). [Heuristics and problem-solving]

Guy produced several documents and publications about his ideas:

“Debord made the scope of the SI’s political project quite clear in an important 1957 text that can be considered the organization’s founding document titled “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organization and Action” (Hindley, C., Knowles, D., Ruth, 2015). [Innovation and problem solving]

In a 1955 issue of Potlatch, the journal of the LI, he wrote that “insofar as these movements relied on the destruction of art to make a living, their contempt for bourgeois values was a “tainted position, requiring submission to the indefinite prolongation of aesthetic death composed merely of formal repetitions that win over no more than a backward part of college-aged youth”. He went on to argue that instead of pure negation (Dada) or the pursuit of unconscious desires (Surrealism), what was needed was the

"conscious construction of new emotional states" (Penner, 2015, p.53).[Innovation and problem solving]

Summary. Similarities were found in cognitive skills: the three case studies showed high intelligence, were well-read, and each had some form of artistic skill. Guy Debord and George Lincoln Rockwell were both artists and writers, while Malcolm X developed exceptional oratory and debating skills. Each had conviction in their beliefs, never changing their own ideas even in the face of rejection and setbacks.

Traits, Skills, and Behaviours – Group level

Team Leadership

Vanguard leaders need dedicated members with diverse skill sets and knowledge structures, such as creative intellectuals and artists, to help them accomplish their tasks. Vanguard leaders need to manage group members who do not deliver on tasks, including deciding when and how to expel them from the group. Examples of group identity and cohesion were found, as well as how the vanguard group differentiated itself from the status quo. The skills the vanguard leaders had to guide, form, and cohere their team were also explored. Other team leadership examples included the creation of useful alliances, the distribution of emotional and financial support to members, and the vanguard leader's ability to lead creative team members.

Case Study 1 – George Lincoln Rockwell. Some author commentary pointed to Rockwell being "too extreme" due to his use of Nazi symbols and demonstrations (Saleam, 1985; Simonelli, 1999). It was also noted that he was frequently heckled and sometimes embarrassed his own group by reacting angrily and defensively to challenges: Rockwell's followers often lacked a clear purpose, with many treating their participation as a casual or weekend activity rather than a dedicated mission. He positioned himself as a commander and used his members in demonstrations as if they were soldiers (Obermayer, 1997; Simonelli, 1999). An example is demonstrated in this excerpt:

“Rockwell spent the majority of his efforts recruiting what he hoped would be the “officer corps” of WUFENS [World Union of Free Enterprise National Socialists]. By April, nine members had been initiated, and twelve others were waiting for the ritual. Promotion to an officer's rank was at Rockwell's discretion. The initiation ceremony consisted of dripping blood from the cheek with a razor onto the swastika flag and swearing allegiance to the party with the ‘Troopers Oath’. Troopers were required to have code names; they had to have some relation to their real names, and they had to sound tough” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 47).

Rockwell had difficulty acquiring committed, skilled, and intelligent members for his group. He tried different strategies at various times to recruit. Unsuccessful, he resorted to blaming others, confiding that: “I have not been able to find the human material who CAN do what I know needs to be done” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 124). An excerpt from an ANP member described:

“John Patler, one of Rockwell's core members, felt that Rockwell was too controlling and condescending; Rockwell saw Patler as emotionally immature, making intra-Party cliques to further his own ends” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 303). Rockwell expelled John Patler after he abandoned his ANP post in Spotsylvania, returning to Arlington to attend to family matters. When Rockwell learned of the matter, he personally went to Spotsylvania to cut the lock on Patler's room and move his personal effects to Arlington. Rockwell was not

firm in his decision though – behind closed door meetings with members, he attempted secret negotiations to bring Patler back into the group (Schmaltz, 1999, pp. 317 - 320).

Some members left the ANP and formed another group, the White People's Alliance. Some remaining ANP members then convinced Rockwell to invite their group to ally with them. Rockwell met with the group, insulted them for their betrayal, and then walked out, rejecting the alliance. (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 320).

Several excerpts speak to challenges Rockwell had with group membership and recruitment, as well as George Lincoln Rockwell's ability to provide emotional and financial resources to members. Simonelli (1999) noted that there were often feuds with colleagues that Rockwell expelled, which diverted Rockwell's time and resources (p. 47).

“After I became known to most Americans, I published the *Rockwell Report* at a somewhat higher level than my previous material to begin to recruit some of the brains and the funds we needed to proceed” (Rockwell, 1966). [Recruitment]

In 1965, the California Department of Justice investigation into the ANP found that party members were not of high quality, describing them as “the misfits and maladjusted of society” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 35). [Membership]

“By fall of 1966, the ANP had 190 members, but only ten attached to national headquarters; of the ten, half were stationed at Spotsylvania. Rockwell was in dire need of additional men, and he was completely perplexed as to why his success in Chicago had failed to recruit more followers” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 301). [Recruitment]

“Characteristically, Rockwell refused to accept defeat [of not recruiting enough members] and tried new approaches to recruitment: He launched a front organization – the United White Christian Majority – in an attempt to broaden the ANP's appeal and tried to revive an ANP youth auxiliary – the White Youth Corps – to bring new blood into the party. Neither effort succeeded. Only two ANP Chapters, in Texas and southern California, grew appreciably between 1964 and 1966” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 124). [Recruitment]

"Rockwell's following is negligible.... His hardcore of followers consists of some 30 to 50 persons; "Today the American Nazi Party remains the same shabby, small-time enterprise, embracing no more than 50 stormtroopers" (Report by the Jewish Committee Council of Greater Washington, as cited in Simonelli, 1999, p. 35). [Membership]

“Matt Koehl, one of Rockwell's few intimates who met his expectations for efficiency and dedication, often complained to his commander about the lack of discipline in the ANP. Rockwell sympathized with Koehl but tried to get his deputy to accept the limitations confronting them. “I do not believe any machine can do more than the parts which compose it are designed to do,” he wrote. “The ‘parts’ of our ‘machine’ are...PEOPLE, ...not little squares on an organizational chart. Unless the people who are placed in these organization boxes...are made of good quality stuff...the machine will falter and sputter, as ours does.” He concluded: “I have not been able to find the human material who CAN do what I know needs to be done” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 124). [Membership]

“Rockwell viewed appearances before college audiences as an important component of his public strategy. They afforded him access to young, malleable political activists and a public platform conducive to media attention. The returns on this strategy for recruitment purposes were dismal- virtually all students in his audiences regarded him with derision and scorn, but paid handsome dividends in Rockwell’s most coveted commodity, publicity” (Simonelli, p. 128). [Recruitment]

“Rockwell’s 1964-65 recruitment efforts brought to the party a man who would become a major influence on Rockwell’s thinking for the remainder of his career. William Luther Pierce had a Ph.D. degree in physics from the University of Colorado and was the best-educated member of Rockwell’s entourage, quickly assuming the role of house intellectual. As Rockwell’s trusted advisor, Pierce promoted Nordic superiority and his belief that the natural leadership of the party must come from men of “pure Germanic stock”. He created and edited *National Socialist World*, a World Union of National Socialists (WUNS) publication that served as the primary tool for disseminating that ideology internationally. Never doubting the inevitability of Rockwell’s political triumph, Pierce instructed Rockwell in the use of power in a National Socialist America. With time, Pierce believed that America could be conditioned to accept those plans once the ANP fully controlled the media and the apparatus of government. He energized Rockwell and the ANP and was partly responsible for Rockwell’s last major publicity triumph, the Chicago “White Power” marches during the summer of 1966” (Simonelli, 1999, pp. 124-125). [Recruitment]

The American Jewish community and the Anti-Defamation League followed Rockwell throughout his career and provided intelligence reports. In a 1963 report from the Anti-Defamation League, it was said that: “In more than eight years, Rockwell has not succeeded in organizing anything that resembles a movement” (Simonelli, 1995, p. 556). Lee Larson, an ANP stormtrooper from 1964-66, stated that the organization was “under-staffed, under-trained, and under-funded,” with members living in a “residence [that] was in sorry shape” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 39). The next two excerpts further described the behaviour Rockwell had toward his group members:

“Rockwell put the question to Foss, a man seeking to join the ANP: “Lots of men come to talk, but few stay to fight. If you want to fight, this is the place for you”. Foss agreed to move into the barracks as a full-time Nazi. They would pick out bunks in the barracks room. There were no sheets on any of the beds. Foss noticed that Rockwell kept a separate room with the door locked and the air conditioner on high. Since the kitchen stove was broken, troopers cooked French fries and onions in an electric deep-fat fryer with pitch-black grease. They lived as ascetics. Each morning, Rockwell and a trooper, usually National Secretary James Warner, drove to Falls Church to check the party’s post office box. On the way back, they would stop at a diner for bacon and eggs, the best meal of the day for whoever went with Rockwell” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 67).

“Manpower was a scarce commodity. The motley crew that formed his [Rockwell’s] World Union of Free Enterprise National Socialists (WUFENS) membership consisted of racists, thrill seekers, spies, and ex-convicts. None of them knew the first thing about National Socialism, except what Rockwell told them. But his charisma and dedication were enough to string a dozen men along as his foot soldiers” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 48).

Case Study 2 – Malcolm X. Group membership and recruitment efforts grew significantly for the NOI when Malcolm X was a member. However, when Malcolm X split from the group and formed his own, he admitted to some challenges. Some examples of both these points are stated:

“A model organizer, Malcolm X, laid the structural basis for the organizational expansion of the NOI, assisted in training ministers, organized the newspaper *Muhammad Speaks*, and set up functional links with the Black community” (Karenga, 1979, p. 252).
[Recruitment]

“After leaving the NOI [Nation of Islam] to form the OAAU [Organization of African American Unity], Malcolm faced the challenge of attracting new adherents and allies and building a new base of followers and supporters that could offer the skills necessary to launch and prepare new social projects. He constructed an alternative philosophical framework to distinguish his new group from the NOI. He did this by disassociating from the religious aspects of the NOI and having the group be broad and baseless enough to draw a maximum number of allies, using a flexible philosophy for the OAAU” (Karenga, 1979, p. 253). [Recruitment]

“One of the major troubles that I was having in building the organization that I wanted – an all-black organization whose ultimate objective was to help create a society in which there could exist honest white-black brotherhood – was that my earlier public image, my old so-called “Black Muslim” image, kept blocking me. I was trying to gradually reshape that image. Every free moment I could find, I did a lot of talking to key people whom I knew around Harlem, and I made a lot of speeches” (MX in Haley, 1965, p. 382).
[Membership]

Malcolm organized temples in several cities: “After two weeks in Lansing, Malcolm X quickly moved on to Joliet, Illinois, then Cleveland and Dayton, Ohio, and from there to Camden, Paterson, and Jersey City, New Jersey. At each stop, he opened a new temple. By the end of the year, Malcolm X had established more than twenty-seven temples, up from the barely functional seven temples existing when he left prison three years earlier” (Evanzz, 1992, p. 66). [Recruitment]

“[Malcolm’s] ability to “make it plain” to the black masses began to attract the attention of radical Third World political and religious leaders as early as the late 1950s. His association and/or friendships with Ahmad Sukarno of Indonesia, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Gamel Abd al-Nasser and Mahmoud Yousse Shawarbi of Egypt, Patrice Lumumba of the Belgian Congo, and Ben Bella and Mahmoud Boutiba of Algeria gradually exposed him to radical Third World political ideas in the 1960s” (Smallwood, 2018, p.101). [Recruitment]

Malcolm X went on two trips to Africa in 1964 to solicit the support of leaders of several newly independent sub-Saharan African nations (Smallwood, 2018, p. 208).

Case Study 3 – Guy Debord. The core members of the Situationist International (SI) were painters, filmmakers, architects, and political theorists. Members of the SI came from different countries, skill sets, and class backgrounds, with artistic leanings and training in public policy, urban planning, and psychology. Some of these included: Asger Jorn, a Danish artist and theorist who contributed to the early artistic direction of the SI; Raoul Vaneigem, a Belgian writer and philosopher, best known for *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, which complemented Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*; Michèle Bernstein, Debord's first wife, a writer and key figure in the SI's early years; Ralph Rumney, a British artist and founding member of the SI; Mustapha Khayati, author of *On the Poverty of Student Life*, a key Situationist text that influenced the May 1968 protests in France; and Gianfranco Sanguinetti, an Italian Situationist who continued Debord's legacy in political critique. Another member, Lefebvre:

“...was essentially a Romantic, a fact that appealed to Debord, but one who applied his passionate aestheticism in an intellectually rigorous manner. This latter aspect of Lefebvre's thinking was of course to Debord an exemplary form of behaviour” (Hussey, 2001, p.140).

The Situationist International (SI) maintained a highly exclusionary structure, aiming to limit outside influence. Over its fifteen-year existence, the group expelled at least forty-five members out of approximately seventy. Guy Debord played a central role in these expulsions. For instance, shortly before Walter Olmo was expelled in January 1958, Debord criticized him in a letter for “having accepted...several ideas that are stupid” (Penner, 2015, p.49). Another account described how the SI rarely had more than ten members at a time. Several individuals were expelled shortly after joining. Debord's approach was to maintain a small, tightly controlled group. One member was expelled because someone he worked with had built a church in Germany, which was seen as a “disastrous influence” (Ross & Lefebvre, 1997, p.76).

When he first left the Letterists, Debord severed ties with its leader, Jean-Isidore Isou, after reading his comments in *Combat*. Debord responded with a tract titled *Death of a Fellow-Traveller*, accusing Isou of dishonesty and irrelevance. He wrote that Isou was “almost forgotten” and “nothing to us.” Isou later described the experience as a betrayal that was “cold and brutal,” carried out with “military precision” (Hussey, 1999, p.68).

Summary. In summary, the vanguard leaders differed greatly in their approaches to team leadership. Guy Debord was quite selective in his group membership. He would quickly change his mind about members, leading to several expulsions over the years. George Lincoln Rockwell would recruit just about anyone who showed up for his rallies and at his headquarters, paying little to no attention to the skills and abilities of group members to execute his goals. For loyal members, he treated them as his military unit, for which he was the ‘Commander’ giving little respect to their status in the group and providing few resources. For Malcolm X, during his time with the NOI, he served under another leader while at the same time reaching out to and recruiting members from all walks of life, having the experience of being a member of a street gang before his incarceration and of a respected Muslim thereafter. However, after his split with the NOI, he admits he has difficulty knowing how to lead a group or recruit.

Team Behaviour

Team behaviour findings examined the group's social and cultural engagements and tactics, and how they attempted to convey their message and vision for how their new social ideas or

relationships might work. It also examined how the group served as a tool for executing tasks for the vanguard leader. Vanguard groups use manifestos, pamphlets, journals, and other types of publications to develop and disseminate coherent social theories, aiming to break 'false consciousness' among groups of people, as the 'false consciousness' is a "way of thinking that prevents a person from perceiving the true nature of their social or economic situation" (Gramsci, 1971; Stevenson, 2010 as cited in Marcy, 2015, p.374).

Case Study 1 – George Lincoln Rockwell. There were several depictions of Rockwell's leadership and treatment of members within the ANP. He frequently rehearsed his men and instructed them to provoke Jewish people each week before participating in mall protests (Simonelli, 1999, p.57). Within the group, Schmaltz (1999) commented that:

"Double standards existed for Rockwell, as seen by his group. He frequently had special meals prepared for him by his secretary, while the other troopers ate the slop in the mess hall. A contention among troopers was that Rockwell had squandered party funds for three personal vacations since 1966 – Patler confronted him for this" (Schmaltz, 1999, p.316).

Rockwell shifted his group's strategy from a "Nazi" to a "White Power" emphasis, tapping into the racial discord emerging in American cities during the 1960s. As part of this shift, he altered the party's propaganda by replacing the Swastika with a stylized eagle to Americanize the organization's image and broaden its appeal (Simonelli, 1999, p. 1).

With his group, Rockwell and the ANP aimed to "win over the masses of people who 'read comic books, ...[watch] TV, ...[and] read dime novels and pulp'" (Simonelli, 1999, p. 44). Rockwell believed his followers were "not intelligent and needed simple, easy-to-understand messaging," emphasizing communication that could reach individuals with limited attention spans and frames of reference, "not book readers, not deep-thinkers" (Simonelli, 1999, pp. 44–45). He also recognized the influence of religious belief across social classes. He sought to draw on that power, with several loyal followers becoming Christian Identity ministers whose congregations embraced "the worldly goals of National Socialism" (Simonelli, 1999, p. 115). Ludtke, a loyal member of Rockwell and the ANP, searched Nazi literature for materials Rockwell could use to disseminate Holocaust denial propaganda. In late 1965, he discovered the article "The Lie of the Six Million." His translation supplied Rockwell with data, concepts, and phraseology that expanded his Holocaust denial activities in 1966 (Simonelli, 1999, p. 112).

Case Study 2 – Malcolm X. The Nation of Islam (NOI) functioned as a coordinated organizational tool that helped disseminate and reinforce Malcolm X's ideas through its collective behaviour and structured routines. NOI members actively recruited new participants, circulating Malcolm's teachings through direct outreach in Black urban communities and by bringing newcomers to his temple lectures (Haley & X, 1965, pp. 158-160). Members also distributed *Muhammad Speaks*, the newspaper Malcolm helped develop, which became a mechanism for spreading his interpretations of NOI ideas across cities (Haley & X, 1965, pp. 231-233). Through these coordinated behaviours, recruitment, publication distribution, disciplined collective presentation, and community engagement, the NOI acted as a collective instrument to amplify Malcolm X's ideas and execute many of the organizational tasks necessary to extend his influence.

Case Study 3 – Guy Debord. Guy Debord sought out creative, innovative followers. Debord’s early years in Paris reflected his talent for attracting creative, unconventional, and rebellious individuals who were disillusioned with traditional society. “Debord found a kind of home here [1952 in Morneau] amongst a small group of young people who had dedicated their lives to doing nothing in a grand style. For example, Ralph Rumney, a painter trained at Halifax College of Art, who had fled his native Yorkshire for Paris to avoid a prison sentence for dodging conscription, wrote that:

“When I first met Guy in Moineau’s, I was famously idle, a runaway, a professional layabout, not even an artist. I considered Guy, for a short time, as my best friend, certainly a kindred spirit. Guy Debord was a pioneer in drinking, in art, in thought. But the real question I thought then, and I think it is even more important now, is how did he become “Guy Debord,” this figure whose comportment, style, and politics were absolutely, unassailably, intact from the moment I knew him” (Hussey, 2001, p.48).

For Debord, the disaffected youths who gathered and drank at Moineau’s carried a political meaning, representing more than mere rebellion (Hussey, 2001, p. 51). According to Piero Simondo, even at this early stage, Debord was already demonstrating leadership tendencies, despite Asger Jorn being the most senior and influential member of the group:

“Debord drank a great deal,” Simondo recalled decades later, “but it was also Debord who reminded us that what we were trying to achieve was political as well as aesthetic. In fact, our aesthetic philosophy came out of our political positions. It was Debord’s idea to name the new organization the Situationist International, pre-empting Jorn’s suggestion that the smaller Letterist International should be subsumed into the Imaginist Bauhaus” (Hussey, 2001, p.112).

Attributions to Guy Debord also described his reputation as an agitator. His “nascent reputation with the police as an agitator and manipulator of people and events was further enhanced in Italy . . . by the inevitable scandal which now seemed to be becoming a trademark of Situationist activity” (Hussey, 2001, p.137). When he broke with Isou and the Letterists, several members followed him to start the Situationist International. As described in Hussey (2001):

“The break with Isou soon took on the dimensions of a full-scale war. The immediate impact of the break with Isou was that, despite his lack of physical presence and his slightly withdrawn, aloof manner, Debord had established himself as the intellectual leader of the group in Chez Moineau. ‘With Guy there was this sense of finding an answer, to go further than mere rebellion, and that is what was exciting,’ explained Jean-Michel Mension” (Hussey, 2001, p.71).

The Situationists produced events intended to trigger reflection and emotional engagement among the public, stating in a 1963 article that: We will only organize the detonation: the free explosion must escape us and any other control forever” (Penner, 2015, p. 5).

Debord envisioned the SI as an attempt to realize a transformed society in the ‘here and now’, writing that “the SI was a revolutionary micro-society whose rules and codes of conduct were in constant evolution, whose very way of life was at the heart of their programme.” The group functioned as a small-scale revolutionary community whose norms and internal practices continually shifted, with its mode of daily life forming a central part of its project (Hussey, 1999,

p. 144). The Situationists relied on *détournement*, a practice of altering content from mainstream media by replacing original text or imagery with material shaped by their own political intentions (Marcy, 2020, p. 6).

Summary. Across the three cases, team behaviour reflected how each vanguard group communicated its message and carried out tasks for the leader, though the form this took varied widely. All groups engaged in producing or distributing materials such as propaganda, newspapers, or artistic content to promote the leader’s ideas. Rockwell’s ANP relied on rehearsed provocations and propaganda with members assisting in disseminating Holocaust denial materials and adopting new symbols to broaden the group’s appeal (Schmaltz, 1999; Simonelli, 1999). The Nation of Islam acted as a coordinated organizational tool for Malcolm X, with members recruiting new participants, distributing *Muhammad Speaks*, and supporting temple activities that spread his teachings (Haley, 1965). Debord’s Situationists drew creative, rebellious followers who collaborated to produce public disruptions and provocative works (Hussey, 2001; Marcy, 2020; Penner, 2015).

Traits, Skills, and Behaviours – Societal Level

Credible Public Figure

This section examines how vanguard leaders establish credibility at the societal level through humor, expertise, public performance, and organizational tactics. Key findings included humor and norm-breaking; demonstrations of expertise and authority; public outreach and propaganda; and recruitment and role-modelling. It also contains examples of how vanguard leaders used humor while remaining acceptable to the public, and if they were able to present themselves as culturally or intellectually superior through publications and staged appearances. It also captured displays (speeches, interviews, illustrated literature, films) that broadcast their ideas, and how their groups modeled behavior for followers. Other examples include the vanguard leaders’ resilience in the face of opposition from the media and rivals, and the framing of their actions and messages to suggest that their ideas would produce better outcomes than existing norms.

Case Study 1 - George Lincoln Rockwell. Propaganda and public speeches: For public engagements that provided credibility, Rockwell made headlines in a few notable places; for example, on Sept. 17, 1961, the *Virginian-Pilot* ran a major profile of Rockwell & ANP (Simonelli, 1999, p. 58). Rockwell attended public gatherings every weekend in Washington, D.C., including Arlington school board meetings and civil rights protests (Simonelli, 1999, p. 100). This excerpt describes his approach to propaganda:

“As a talented adapter and pitchman, Rockwell had a knack for coming up with the right phrase, the right slogan, the right image in a well-timed publicity campaign. During a few weeks in the summer of 1966, the “Black Power” slogan was ubiquitous in newspapers, magazines, on radio, and on television; it was accompanied in print and on television by Carmichael’s intense, angular face and his upthrust, clenched fist. This image energized militant blacks and enraged militant whites. In reaction to Carmichael and the Black Power movement polarized along racial lines, Rockwell recognized his opportunity and seized it. He promoted “White Power” as the antidote to black excesses. By midsummer, the “White Power” counter slogan was taken up by whites, both fearful and the hateful, across the country (Simonelli, 1999, p. 100).

In the late 1950s, Rockwell aimed to establish international connections to expand his political network. Between 1958 and 1959, he attempted to establish a transnational network by reaching out to Middle Eastern leaders, including Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. These efforts were aimed at aligning with figures opposed to Israel, reflecting Rockwell's broader geopolitical ambitions (Simonelli, 1999, p. 81). Rockwell produced illustrations for the American Nazi Party's (ANP) literature, producing caricatures and satirical commentaries. These materials were marked by provocative, mocking depictions intended to shock his opponents (Obermayer, 1997). The ADL (Anti-Defamation League) noted, however, that the ANP was statistically insignificant:

"Rockwell--skilled performer though he was in gaining national notoriety - was never more than the commander of a small and tatterdemalion group.... Rockwell had become a national figure, but he was never able to marshal a significant following" (Simonelli, 1999, p.37).

Case Study 2 – Malcolm X. Malcolm X used humor in several satirical quotes like “You and I have never seen democracy; all we’ve seen is its hypocrisy!” (X, 1964, p. 23) and:

“Capitalism is like a chicken can't lay a duck egg because the system of the chicken isn't constructed in a way to produce a duck egg; and the political and economic system of this country is absolutely incapable of producing freedom and justice” (Warren, 2014, p. 396).

“The negro middle class – the Negro “establishment”– abhorred and feared Malcolm as much as he despised it” (Haley & X, 1965, p. xxviii). He states that “I had learned early one important thing, and that was to always teach in terms that the people could understand” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 225).

Malcolm X kept up an image after his prison release. It was noted in his autobiography that:

“After being released from prison, Malcolm first buys three things – a better-looking pair of eyeglasses, a suitcase and a wristwatch. “I have thought since, that without fully knowing it, I was preparing for what my life was about to become. Because those are three things I’ve used more than anything else. My eyeglasses correct the astigmatism that I got from all the reading in prison. I travel so much now that my wife keeps alternate suitcases packed so that, when necessary, I can just grab one. And you won’t find anybody more time conscious than I am. I live by my watch, keeping appointments. Even when I’m using my car, I drive by my watch, not my speedometer. Time is more important to me than distance (Haley & X, 1965, p. 196).

Malcolm's public presence included media appearances, such as an interview on *City Desk* in 1963 and interviews with *Playboy* and *The New York Times*. His visibility and presentation, once he was elevated to the rank of minister in the Nation of Islam (NOI), helped grow the organization from a small sect centered in Chicago and Detroit into a significant national force among urban Black communities in the North (Simon, 2005, p. 27). Malcolm appealed to the depressed masses of the African American community and many African American writers and artists who appeared on the American scene in the past decade. It was found in 1991, that Malcolm X had been developing a 14-point Economic Plan that was part of the unpublished works of Malcolm's autobiography purchased in an auction of Alex Haley's estate, and that showed Malcolm X was working to put his plan for economic development into action: “Best known as a portrait of a Black Leader's life, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was meant to

contain a 14-point economic plan for Black America (Farley, 1993, p. 27). Reverend Albert Cleage's speech, delivered in Detroit, Feb. 24, 1967, stated that:

"I remember him (Malcolm X) at the King Solomon Baptist Church on one of the occasions he spoke there, sort of in concealment backstage, constantly harassed with the danger of assassination. And I can remember the occasion at the King Solomon Baptist Church when he gave the "Message to the Grass Roots," which I think is his best speech, his most typical statement, and which I personally think is his last will and testament. I remember him, I talked to him, I agreed with him. He was a Muslim, I am a Christian, and yet I can think of no basic matter upon which we disagreed." (Clark, 2022, pp.13-14).

Several published books are made of Malcolm X's speeches, e.g., *Malcolm X Speaks* (Breitman, 1999), *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches* (Perry, 1989); *The End of the White World Supremacy: Four Speeches by Malcolm X* (Karim, 1989); *Malcolm X Talks to Young People* (X, 1991) in the year's following Malcolm X's death. Audience reaction and the impact of when Malcolm X was before an audience is demonstrated during an incident in Harlem when Malcolm X led a crowd to the police department after a Muslim brother had been beaten, and hundred of African Americans were angry, but Malcolm held up his hand in gesture to the gathered mass which calmed immediately and drew silent. The precinct chief inspector later commented that "no one man should have that much power" (Haley, 1965, p. 314).

Several of Malcolm X's speeches were reported to correspond with increased political activity and awareness among African Americans. For example, the "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech is associated with increases in voter registration and heightened political mobilization, as documented in records of civil rights demonstrations of the period (Lackey et al., 2022, p. 16).

Case Study 3 – Guy Debord. Debord was described as a 'chess player, rigorously leading the game whose every move he had foreseen'. Further descriptions of him were:

"His chief obsession was military strategy; his heroes were Clausewitz, Machiavelli, and Sait-Just. His tactics were to play life as a game whose rules he alone had invented; his strategy was to restore real meaning to individual experience. This was, argued Guy Debord in the most urgent and convincing way, the essential aspect of existence which had been lost in the twentieth century" (Hussey, 2001, p. 9).

"A Photograph in the SI journal showed Debord in heroic mode, his face turned upwards, cropped hair worn with a fringe in the 'Roman style' (predating the Beatles' adventures with such radical haircuts in Hamburg by three or so years), a large cigar in his hand, and wearing a duffel coat, the fashionable trademark of the Left bank bohemian dandy" (Hussey, 2001, p. 142).

"He always held himself with an elegant and archly ironic disposition. He was variously 'like a Prince', 'a master of despair', 'the most intelligent man I have ever known', 'somebody from another century' (Hussey, 2001, p. 9).

A close friend and SI member, Ralph Rumney, recalls, "I was allowed to speak, which was an important thing. But Guy was someone who was really quite insecure about his own education, and he would be quiet or sarcastic if you talked about something he didn't know about" (Hussey, 2001, p. 72).

Guy Debord played a central role in publishing key texts that shaped the identity and influence of the Situationist International (SI). Among the most prominent were the *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), the journal *Internationale Situationniste*, and *Potlatch* (the earlier publication of the Letterist International). These platforms served as vehicles for articulating the group's ideas and strategies. One of Debord's most substantial early writings was the keynote report he presented at the 1957 Cosio d'Arroscia conference, titled *Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Conditions of the Organisation and Action of the Situationist International*. This document, approximately twenty pages long, was the most complete text he produced until he began work on *Society of the Spectacle* in the mid-1960s. The report took nearly a year to complete and was reviewed in parts with Gil J. Wolman and Michele Bernstein. When Debord read the report aloud at Cosio, Ralph Rumney observed that "Debord's theoretical framework appeared largely developed at that point" (Hussey, 2001, p. 113).

In January 1977, Debord founded the Society for Strategic and Historical Games. Its immediate purpose was to produce a game he had conceptualized in the 1950s, known as the "Game of War." This two-player strategy game was inspired by the military theories of Carl von Clausewitz and by Napoleon's campaigns. Debord later remarked, "The surprises of this [game] seem to be inexhaustible... It might be the only thing in all my work—I'm afraid to admit—that one might dare say has some value" (Galloway, 2008, para. 5).

Earlier in his career, Debord formed a splinter group from the Letterists with Brau, Berna, and Wolman. This group, described as a "groupuscule," attracted members through social charisma and the appeal of alcohol. Among those drawn in were Michele Bernstein, Patrick Stram, and Jean-Michel Mension. Their involvement was reportedly driven more by a desire for rebellion and disorder than by political or philosophical commitment. Others, such as Fred and Eliane, supported the group from the margins, offering physical and moral backing (Hussey, 2001, p.70).

Although the texts of the SI were not the direct cause of public uprisings, they gained influence once protests began. As Noronha notes, "It was not so much that people took to the streets because they read the texts of the S.I., but rather that, once people took to the streets, the arguments laid out in those texts acquired a far-reaching significance, influencing collective action and setting the tone of the revolt" (Noronha, 2020, p. 178).

Summary. Across the three cases, each vanguard leader engaged in activities that contributed to their public credibility, but with somewhat different methods. Rockwell, Malcolm X, and Debord all used speeches, publications, and public appearances to project authority and disseminate their ideas. Each also relied on distinctive forms of presentation: Rockwell through staged publicity campaigns and provocative imagery, Malcolm X through media interviews, public addresses, and personal discipline in appearance, and Debord through published theoretical works, strategic writings, and visual representations in SI materials. They all engaged in some level of recruitment efforts, but varied in how they approached this.

Some differences are noted in their credibility tactics. Rockwell emphasized publicity-driven propaganda, mass slogans, and attempts to build international connections with figures aligned against Israel. Malcolm X drew on humor, accessible language, and ministerial authority within the Nation of Islam. He later developed economic and political plans for Black communities. Debord's credibility was rooted in theoretical production, strategic thinking, and his role in shaping the Situationist International, including his foundational reports, journals, and work on the "Game of War". Their recruitment efforts also differed: Rockwell attracted small groups

through shock-oriented imagery, Malcolm X appealed to marginalized African American communities and artists, and Debord's early groups were formed through networks centered on rebellion.

Provocateur

Examples in this section point to how vanguard leaders act as provocateurs, employing uncompromising public debates and sensational displays to capture attention in competitive media environments. These engagements define and expose status quo approaches as problematic and, if successful, present the vanguard's solutions as credible alternatives. Confrontations are also noted, as they demonstrate the vanguard leader's provocative tendencies.

Case Study 1 – George Lincoln Rockwell. Rockwell's approach to publicity and agitation provoked outrage and attracted attention. "George Lincoln Rockwell's talent was that he knew what would make people hate him... [He] had an inordinate capacity for finding out what would make people the angriest and exploiting it" (Simonelli, 1999, p. 53). He also "understood that the emerging techniques of advertising and public relations, used to sell products and package ideas, could also be applied to politics and public issues" (Simonelli, 1999, p. 53). Rockwell "had a press agent's knack for sensing the right phrase, the right gesture, the right symbolic action to compel press attention" (Simonelli, 1999, p. 53). In one incident during a New York City courtroom appearance, a rabbi shouted at him. When a reporter asked how he reacted to that kind of treatment, Rockwell replied, "I'm used to it... they never make such a fuss over communists speaking; it's only when someone is an anti-communist" (Schmaltz, p. 2). Another time, he publicly stated that he intended to agitate his enemy enough "to the point where they react irrationally & stupidly" (Simonelli, 1999, p. 58). When giving a speech at Fort Hayes State College in Kansas, Rockwell said to the audience that after he was elected president, he would 'eliminate Chinese communists': "Fifteen or twenty minutes after I'm president, there won't be any Red China. I'm going to be the guy that pushes the button." For which the crowd gasped in disbelief (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 316).

Rockwell's public appearances were intended to draw attention and provoke controversy. One such event was the 'parody of the Freedom Riders' campaign to desegregate public transportation. He sent ANP members on a "hate bus" to New Orleans to protest the premiere of the film *Exodus*. His symbolic gestures included hanging swastikas in shopping malls and dressing both himself and his 'stormtroopers' [ANP members] in Nazi styled uniforms. On September 17, 1961, *The Virginian-Pilot* published a major profile of Rockwell and the American Nazi Party (ANP), elevating his media visibility (Simonelli, 1999, p. 58). In interviews, Rockwell explained his approach to publicity, stating, "You use what brings them in." Drawing from his background in advertising, he compared his tactics to using nude women for attention, saying, "Now I use the swastika and storm troopers." His rally on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., was explicitly designed to provoke conflict and generate media coverage (Simonelli, 1999, p. 75). When Rockwell began speaking at colleges, an invitation from the Bucknell Student Forum was rescinded [at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania] following pressure from local chapters of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). The controversy kept Rockwell's name in the headlines of the region's daily newspapers for nearly a month. (Simonelli, 1999, p. 128).

Case Study 2 – Malcolm X. Malcolm X had several public speeches, including “Democracy is Hypocrisy”, arguing how American democracy does not work for Black people; “Message to the Grassroots” (1963), critiquing integration and calling for African American self-determination; “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964), encouraging African Americans to use their voting power. Published books are made of his speeches, e.g., *Malcom X Speaks* (Breitman, 1999), *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches* (Perry, 1989); *The End of the White World Supremacy: Four Speeches by Malcom X* (Karim, 1989); *Malcolm X Talks to Young People* (X, 1991). Malcolm addressed the role of media for shaping public perception, stating that:

“If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing. The media is the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses” (MX in Haley, p.189).

Case Study 3 – Guy Debord. Guy Debord authored several influential works, most notably *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1967). In this text, Debord critiqued commodity fetishism, mass media, and the “spectacle”—the commodification and domination of social relations by elite-driven media systems, which he argued led to alienation and scripted, meaningless lives (Hussey, 2001; Kaufmann, 2006; Merrifield, 2005). Debord also contributed to the Situationist International’s official journal (Marcy, 2015). Debord and the S.I. influenced students at the University of Paris and the University of Strasbourg, who emulated Situationist praxis by producing the pamphlet *On the Poverty of Student Life*. This publication is credited with disseminating Situationist ideas more broadly and contributing to the crisis of May 1968 (Plant, 1992). Using *détournement*, Debord and the Situationist International disrupted mainstream cultural materials by removing dominant messages and inserting Situationist-oriented alternatives. This technique challenged prevailing assumptions in mass culture and helped open space for shifts in public consciousness (Foldy et al., 2008).

Summary. All three case studies shared similarities in demonstrating provocative tendencies in their approaches to public engagement and media strategy. George Lincoln Rockwell used provocative public appearances, symbolic gestures, and advertising techniques to attract attention, generate controversy, and manipulate public outrage. Malcolm X leveraged speeches and media awareness to critique systemic oppression, advocate for African American self-determination, and highlight the media’s role in shaping public perception. Guy Debord, through his writings and the Situationist International, critiqued mass media and consumer culture, employing techniques such as *détournement* to disrupt dominant narratives and foster shifts in public consciousness. Together, provocative symbols and messaging were used to garner public attention and advance the goals of each case study.

Goals and Strategies – Individual Level

At the individual level, examples and excerpts were gathered about the vanguard leader’s creation of strategies and tactics, their implementation, and instances in which they demonstrated cognitive skills such as creativity and social innovation. Examples included demonstrating effective forecasting and problem identification; experiences that led to their expertise; their approaches to convincing followers; looking and behaving like an expert; showing resilience when faced with mass condemnation; and communicating an enemy category.

Case Study 1 – George Lincoln Rockwell. In 1965, Rockwell published a piece of Holocaust denial propaganda titled *The Diary of Ann Fink*. According to Simonelli, the work was widely circulated and has remained popular within anti-Semitic groups. William F. Buckley Jr. referred to it as an “excrement.” The piece was designed in a comic book format, with illustrations by Rockwell and John Patler. It included photographs of emaciated prisoners and dead bodies from Nazi death camps, arranged in grotesque poses alongside comic-style drawings. Each picture was accompanied by a caption written by Rockwell, intended to be humorous (Simonelli, 1999, p.112). Simonelli (1999) observed that “Rockwell targeted 1972 as the year he and his party would come to power. He accurately predicted the race riots of the mid-1960s. He believed those incidents would intensify until the end of the decade, when economic chaos, fueled by runaway inflation in the early 1970s, would force the American people to turn to a strong leader to restore order. Rockwell believed he would be that leader” (Simonelli, 1999, p.33).

Case Study 2 – Malcolm X. After his release from prison, Malcolm X purchased three items: a new pair of eyeglasses, a suitcase, and a wristwatch. He later reflected on these choices, stating, “I have thought since, that without fully knowing it, I was preparing for what my life was about to become. Because those are three things I’ve used more than anything else. My eyeglasses correct the astigmatism that I got from all the reading in prison. I travel so much now that my wife keeps alternate suitcases packed so that, when necessary, I can just grab one. And you won’t find anybody more time conscious than I am. I live by my watch, keeping appointments. Even when I’m using my car, I drive by my watch, not my speedometer. Time is more important to me than distance” (Haley, 1965, p.196)

Case Study 3 – Guy Debord. Debord drew heavily on Johan Huizinga’s ideas, particularly the contrast between structured, monotonous life and the liberating potential of play. Huizinga argued that spontaneity, games, and festive behavior were not only central to everyday life but also had the power to awaken individuals to the dullness of routine existence. This concept held particular importance for Debord, who saw in it the possibility that playful or improvised actions could serve as experimental models for new social behaviors. Huizinga’s work gave Debord a conceptual language for imagining “situations” that could expose the full scope of daily life (Hussey, 2001, p. 74). In the journal *L’Internationale situationniste*, Debord presented himself with the formal title “G. E. Debord, Director,” signaling his leadership role within the movement. When the journal’s first issue introduced key terms and concepts to a broader audience, Debord finalized and formalized these definitions. These terms, already familiar within the Letterist International, were intended both to clarify the group’s ideas and to serve as a warning to those outside the movement (Hussey, 2001, p. 127). Debord recognized that the rapid economic expansion of the 1950s and 1960s had not weakened capitalism, as some had expected, but instead had reinforced and extended its reach (Penner, 2015, p. 23).

Summary. Across the three case studies, all leaders engaged in public communication and produced or used publications to convey their ideas. Still, they differed in the medium they used to communicate their message. Rockwell through propaganda campaigns and provocative imagery, Malcolm X through speeches, interviews, and personal presentations, and Debord through theoretical writings, journals, and strategic cultural techniques. Their audiences and methods also differed: Rockwell sought attention through mass slogans and media exposure, directed at those he considered not to be very intelligent, Malcolm X appealed to marginalized Black communities and broader cultural figures, including those in high political positions, and

Debord worked within intellectual and artistic circles connected to the Situationist International, targeting a more educated audience.

Goals and Strategies

The primary goals of a vanguard leader are “to gain and then shift the public’s consciousness to the socio-political worldview of the vanguard,” thus allowing the “space for later groups and movements to further particular political agendas” (Marcy, 2020, p. 4). As they have a hostile relationship with elites, some of their tactical approaches will include propaganda and agitation. Because of power imbalances, elites will often try to co-opt vanguard leaders and their ideas, a common hazard for unsuccessful vanguard groups. Strategic approaches for social change need to be devised and implemented. To do this, they must make influence attempts aimed directly at the public, using protest and leveraging institutionalized forms of communication, such as mainstream media channels. The desired outcome is to gain attention, insert their own understanding of politically informed relationships (sense-making), and then provide viable alternatives (sense-breaking). Given this macro-scale understanding, goals and strategies are analyzed at the societal level.

At the societal level, the vanguard leader's goal is to change public mental models of how social and political relationships work and to provide a new model for acceptance. To do this, the vanguard leader needs to target a specific audience with their goals, defining who is “us” and who is “them” (the enemy). They make influence attempts directed at the public, leverage institutionalized forms of communication, call attention to a social or political problem, and provide a viable alternative to the problem they identify. They draw inspiration from historical figures and texts and turn them into actionable tactics to begin shifting public consciousness, enabling other groups and actors to advance their change agenda.

At the task and societal level: “to sense break general public mental models of how social and political relationships work and “to sense give to move the public towards their own prescriptive model” (Marcy, 2020, p.4) through vision creation and implementation. They do this by calling attention to particular social and political problems, making them salient to common people, and, in turn, offering their proposed solution as a viable alternative.

Case Study 1 – George Lincoln Rockwell. Rockwell “used the tactic of overt anti-Semitism—the screaming of insults—to attract attention to the newly revived National Committee to Free America from Jewish Domination” (Simonelli, p. 53). William Luther Pierce commented on Rockwell's style:

“...serious, but still a bit tongue-in-cheek response to the freedom rides, as they were called, in 1961, where civil rights activists rode buses in the South to integrate interstate bus travel, Rockwell had his own "hate bus" which he and some of his members drove through the South. Another example, evidently with reference to the strong Jewish presence among psychoanalysts and therapists, Rockwell put out a pamphlet which he said gave instructions on how to combat "the Jew mental health attack". And then there was his booklet, "The Diary of Ann Fink." (Griffin, 2001, p. 104).

Part of Rockwell’s strategy for growing his following was to keep changing cities for demonstrations (Simonelli, 1999, p. 64). He also comments on his strategy in his memoir:

“The major propaganda of a mass movement, therefore, must be of the elementary, direct, and emotional kind which alone can win honest hearts (and empty heads) – 'boat tickets' and the Stormtrooper. When I began, I purposely made my propaganda as brutal and shockingly rough as I could, simply to force attention. And I have kept everlastingly at the business of building a simple and direct image of all-out hostility to “Jews and niggers” in the mind of millions of Americans, regardless of the costs in other respects. (And when I have the rare opportunity to use some mass medium, as was recently the case when I gave a long interview to Playboy, I am forced to walk a careful line between what I should like to say and what the enemy would like to hear me say” (Rockwell, 1966).

Case Study 2 – Malcolm X. Malcolm X played a key role in building the Nation of Islam’s organizational structure. He helped train ministers, launched the newspaper Muhammad Speaks, and established practical connections with the Black community (Karenga, 1979, p. 252). On signaling a target audience and an ‘enemy’ category (“us” vs. “them” phenomenon), Malcolm X was explicit in stating his position. For example, he said:

“I knew they had just used my name to draw a crowd. The more I thought about it on the way there, the hotter I got. And when I got on the stand, I just told that crowd in the street that I wasn’t really wanted up there, that my name had been used – and I walked off the speaker’s stand (Haley, p. 318).

Case Study 3 – Guy Debord. Guy Debord distributed provocative bulletins through the Letterist International (LI), notably *Potlatch*, which differed significantly from Surrealist publication *La révolution surréaliste*. As Hussey (1999) notes, “La révolution surréaliste... bore no comparison with the scruffy tracts handed out by the International Letterists in the bars of the quartier” (p. 84). Debord and Gil J. Wolman defined the enemy of their work as representational art, which they viewed as a product of an economic system that replaced truth with morality. Their films, *L’Anticoncept* and *Howling in Favour of Sade*, were designed to confront this system. Debord emphasized that “Order reigns but it doesn’t govern,” and described the breach in the enemy’s defenses as emerging from “a science of situations” (Hussey, p. 65).

Debord co-founded the Situationist International (SI) and remained its de facto leader throughout its fifteen-year existence. He served as the primary editor of *Internationale Situationniste*. He actively shaped its content through correspondence with other members, soliciting, revising, and rejecting submissions (Penner, 2015, p. 16). Upon returning to Paris from Cosio, Debord prioritized establishing the SI’s presence in French intellectual circles. He declared *Potlatch* obsolete and reclassified it as an internal document. Although the journal continued to circulate, Debord was displeased that it had been shelved alongside other radical publications at La Joie de Lire, a leftist bookshop on rue Saint-Severin. As explained by Hussey (1999):

“Immediately after his return to Paris from Cosio, despite his uncertainties about his Italian colleagues, Debord’s priority was to establish the newly formed SI as a firmer presence on the French intellectual scene. His first task was to establish in the eyes of his comrades that *Potlatch* had now outlived its usefulness. Much to Debord’s disgust, the journal had been collected and placed amidst other radical publications on the shelves of La Joie de Lire, a radical Leftist bookshop on the rue Saint-Severin. Aware of the impact that *Potlatch* was still making, Debord was reluctant to abandon the journal altogether

and so planned to diminish its importance by relegating it to the status of an internal document circulated within the closed ranks of the SI” (Hussey, 1999, p. 122).

Guy Debord introduced key terms in early *Potlatch* articles, including psychogeography, situations, unitary urbanism, and drift. These concepts reflected a view of cities as spaces where divisions between work and leisure, or between public and private life, could be dissolved (Hussey, 2001, p. 90). Debord began reading Surrealist texts in the 1940s, drawn to their vision of aesthetic and moral transformation (Hussey, 2001, p. 27). He was influenced by Arthur Craven, described as a poet, boxer, adventurer, and “probable suicide” (Hussey, 2001, p. 29), as well as by Arthur Rimbaud, whose rejection of labor and national identity resonated with Debord. Debord also studied Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, as well as Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*. These texts, alongside the Bible, became guiding works for Debord in later years (Hussey, 2001, p. 131).

[In *Potlatch* writings] Debord’s condescending tone was doubly provocative, given that *La revolution surrealiste*, which had been a stylish and expensive publication funded by gallery owners and publishers and which had an immediate international reputation, bore no comparison with the scruffy tracts handed out by the International Lettrists in the bars of the *quartier* (Hussey, 2001, p. 84).

Summary. Similarities for goals and strategies were found in all three vanguard leaders in how they worked to shape public consciousness, identify target audiences, and use communication tools to advance their goals. Each developed tactics to attract attention, define an “enemy,” and shift public understanding of social and political issues.

George Lincoln Rockwell and Guy Debord both used provocation as a central tactic. Rockwell relied on overtly inflammatory actions and language, such as anti-Semitic public displays, traveling demonstrations like the “hate bus,” and shock-oriented pamphlets. Debord circulated provocative bulletins, produced confrontational films, and published materials that opposed representational art and its associated economic system. Rockwell and Debord both made deliberate choices about how their publications would circulate: Rockwell used public demonstrations and media appearances, while Debord edited *Internationale Situationniste Journal*, reclassified *Potlatch Journal*, and managed its distribution. Malcolm X was a key contributor to the NOI’s journal and clearly identified a target enemy audience.

Summary

Across the individual-level findings, all three vanguard leaders, George Lincoln Rockwell, Malcolm X, and Guy Debord, experienced difficult childhoods and did not complete formal education. Yet each pursued intensive self-education and became deeply knowledgeable in the subjects that would shape their later ideologies. The findings show that all three displayed traits commonly associated with vanguard leadership, including disagreeableness, comfort with conflict, high self-esteem, and persistence in the face of social rejection. Each demonstrated cognitive abilities such as intelligence, problem-solving, forecasting, creativity, and artistic or rhetorical skill, and all maintained strong conviction in their beliefs despite opposition.

At the group level, findings highlighted how the leaders recruited members, managed internal dynamics, and guided group activity. The leaders differed notably in their approaches to membership and cohesion: Debord was highly selective and frequently expelled members; Rockwell accepted almost anyone and maintained a rigid, military-style hierarchy; Malcolm X

recruited across diverse social backgrounds while within the Nation of Islam, but later described difficulty in managing a group after his departure. Group-level findings also found that each used publications, demonstrations, pamphlets, and other cultural or artistic materials to express the group and disseminate ideas, with each leader contributing, in large part, to the direction of a journal or publication.

At the societal level, findings showed that all three leaders engaged in public communication through speeches, publications, or staged appearances to establish credibility and promote their viewpoints. Their methods and strategies differed: Rockwell relied on sensational publicity, Malcolm X used speeches and media interviews, and Debord employed theoretical writings, journals, and Situationist cultural techniques. All three used forms of provocation, public debate, and media engagement to gain attention and advance their messages. Each also produced or used distinctive media to convey their ideas: Rockwell through propaganda and slogans, Malcolm X through oratory and interviews, and Debord through theoretical and visual work associated with the Situationist International.

Findings on goals and strategies indicate that all three leaders sought to shift public consciousness toward their respective worldviews. Each identified specific audiences to reach, framed an “enemy” category, and used rhetorical or symbolic methods to challenge dominant social and political relationships. All three employed attention-seeking tactics, propaganda, and strategic communication to highlight problems and present their own alternatives. Rockwell and Debord relied heavily on provocative forms of publication and public display. At the same time, Malcolm X combined public speaking, media engagement, and organizational alliances. Across the cases, each leader used their chosen mediums and tactics to call attention to social or political issues and articulate new models for understanding them.

The three leaders differed in several aspects of background, group leadership practices, and public strategies. Their skill profiles varied, with Rockwell and Debord producing artistic works and written materials. At the same time, Malcolm X became known primarily for his oratory and debating abilities. In group leadership, Debord maintained strict control over membership through frequent expulsions. At the same time, Rockwell recruited broadly with minimal screening and imposed a hierarchical structure modeled on a military organization, offering his recruits limited resources. Malcolm X’s leadership experience shifted after leaving the Nation of Islam, where he later reported challenges in group management. Their preferred means of public communication also differed: Rockwell emphasized staged publicity events and visual propaganda; Malcolm X relied on speeches, interviews, and ministerial presentations; and Debord used theoretical writings, journals, and cultural techniques associated with the Situationist International. Their audiences varied as well, with Rockwell targeting audiences that he thought were not highly intelligent. A large part of his strategy was to attend college circuits, as this provided the financial resources he relied on. By doing so, he also exposed his ideas to educated people who could contradict his assertions. Malcolm X addressed African American communities and international allies, while Debord primarily engaged with artistic and intellectual networks.

Returning to the MSSD approach, there are a few suggestions for the dependent variable that show the most differences across cases: the most definitive differences in the case studies were team leadership, team behaviours, and strategies to gain credibility with the wider public.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

The research aimed to discover, through case studies of vanguard leaders, which behaviours, traits, skills, goals, and strategies were similar, and which were different across the cases. By analyzing biographical materials and applying qualitative comparative analysis with a Most Similar Systems Design and a case study method, the research identified both similar and different trends and patterns, contributing to a deeper understanding of vanguard leadership attributes. The research questions of this study asked:

1. What similar and different behaviors, skills, traits, goals, and strategies have past vanguard leaders exhibited?
2. What can be learned about vanguard leadership attributes and behaviors by comparing and contrasting case studies with varying socio-political outcomes against existing theories of vanguard leadership?

Traits, Skills, and Behaviours - Individual Level

The findings across the three case studies, George Lincoln Rockwell, Malcolm X, and Guy Debord, reveal several notable similarities, as well as a few important differences in the traits, behaviours, skills, goals, and strategies associated with vanguard leadership. The cases suggest that vanguard leaders tend to emerge from difficult early-life experiences, develop strong tendencies toward conflict engagement rather than avoidance, and exhibit high self-assurance and narcissistic tendencies. These findings suggest that vanguard leaders share similar traits and behaviours, including disagreeableness, resilience, and narcissism, and artistic and aesthetic leanings, as was theorized by Ansborg & Hill (2003), Marcy (2020), Rejai & Philips (1979), and Smith, Ward, & Finke (1995).

A clear commonality amongst the three case studies was their unstable upbringing and early life experiences. Their behaviours and understandings all revealed what Rejai and Philips (1979) referred to as 'relative deprivation and status inconsistency'. However, Malcolm X and Guy Debord's experiences could be said to be far more catalytic, with both of them having fathers who died early in their lives and had to work through several family moves and changes under financial and economic strain. George Lincoln Rockwell's catalyst events emerged later in his life; his low points were his two divorces, during which he faced social rejection and coped by immersing himself in his future vanguard ideologies.

The three vanguard leaders turned to self-education as a mechanism for building their own expertise and worldviews after leaving formal education. Malcolm X's prison readings illustrated an intense intellectual reorientation through self-motivated study. Rockwell likewise immersed himself in texts, claiming that reading *Mein Kampf* was "like finding part of me." Guy Debord also spent long hours reading and intentionally rejecting formal institutional learning. These examples demonstrated that self-directed intellectual development became a foundation for the vanguard leader's ideological positions and the authority and expertise they projected to followers. This finding was not reported in the literature reviewed. It may be concluded that vanguard leaders acquire specialized knowledge on their own, rejecting the formalized education society adheres to, thereby positioning themselves as experts against the status quo. It may also indicate non-adherence to authority, in this case, not viewing formal institutionalized education as a means to reach the goals they wish to achieve, placing vanguard leaders to be among the 'advanced population' who learn how to perceive the true dynamics of their social and historical

conditions, as suggested by Gray (2020), and ‘ahead of the characteristic norms of wider society’ as discussed by Woods (2007).

Across the cases, another core similarity was a low level of agreeableness and a tendency to provoke conflict. Malcolm X embraced the label of the "angriest Negro in America," stating, "I spoke exactly as I felt," demonstrating his willingness to court confrontation publicly. Rockwell similarly perceived conflict as clarifying and energizing; after personal and family crises, he described his pain converting into motivation: "What he called his 'fight' would sustain him."(Simonelli, 1999, p.32). Debord's rejection of authority, summarized by Hussey (2001) as "decided to reject all forms of authority but his own" (Hussey, 2001, p. 22), highlights this tendency.

Further points of comparison lie in the cognitive skills and coping strategies each leader demonstrated. The vanguard leaders showed high levels of ideological creativity, problem-solving ability, and persistence in the face of rejection. Their writings and public performances show evidence of advanced cognitive processing and a capacity to synthesize diverse information sources into coherent ideological frameworks, as demonstrated in Rockwell's and Debord's writings and Malcolm X's speeches.

Where the leaders differed was in how they applied their cognitive skills to reach their followers and larger audiences. Malcolm X used historical comparisons and logical reasoning of facts to expand political consciousness among African Americans. George Lincoln Rockwell used cognitive creativity to simplify complex grievances into conspiracy-oriented narratives, assuming the audience he would be able to connect with were ‘not very intelligent’ and had ‘limited attention spans and frames of reference’. Guy Debord used intellectual critique as a tool for extreme cultural intervention, writing with theory and complexity to reach a more educated audience.

The vanguard leaders' high self-regard and strong sense of personal mission were evident in the case studies. Rockwell believed he was undertaking a world-historical mission, declaring, "My task is to turn this ideology into a world movement." (Haley, 1966, para. 15). Malcolm X declared his position, admitting with certainty that he was the “angriest Negro in America” and spoke exactly as he felt about the truths he saw (Haley, 1965, p. 373). Guy Debord's sense of uniqueness was extreme, describing his own emergence as “Hegel’s owl of Minerva spread its wings to announce the arrival of wisdom in the World” (Hussey, 2001, p. 13). The vanguard leaders' self-concepts were highly narcissistic, and they shared a common belief that they were uniquely positioned to perceive social truth and guide others toward it. This supports Gray's (2020) theory that vanguard leaders consider themselves part of an ‘advanced wing’ of the population, for whom only they can see the truth of social and political circumstances (p. 2).

The cases also reveal important differences in how leaders responded to rejection. George Lincoln Rockwell redirected loss and social rejection into personal resolve, writing that the pain from his failed marriage became "a priceless armor of fearlessness."(Rockwell, 1961, p. 248). Malcolm X's exclusion from pursuing a career as a lawyer and, later, his imprisonment became opportunities for political awakening and intellectual mastery. Debord responded to societal and institutional rejection by deliberately withdrawing from it and reinforcing his belief in his own exceptionalism. These responses reveal that social rejection is reframed as validation and a motive for ideological development, leading to the reinterpretation of social marginalization as a rationale for pursuing goals that run entirely against the status quo. Given that vanguard leaders

close the door to a normal life (like having a career or a stable family), the incentive for vanguard leaders, like George Lincoln Rockwell, Malcolm X, and Guy Debord, to devote themselves to their vanguard missions must be greater than the incentive to have a normal life. They dedicate themselves to their mission and goals at all costs, suggesting that the social rejection they faced has given them the resolve to do so. As made clear in this statement from George Lincoln Rockwell:

“In 1966, a reporter asked Rockwell, “Do you believe all of this you preach?” Astonished by the man’s query, Rockwell took his corncob pipe from his mouth and explained very slowly, in a low voice, “This has cost me the most beautiful wife in the world. Seven kids. All my relatives. I was a commander in the Navy and a half-year away from a pension. Certainly, I believe all of this.” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 301).

Traits, Skills, and Behaviours – Group Level

Across the three case studies, several similarities emerge in how vanguard leaders construct their roles, mobilize followers, and position their groups. All three vanguard leaders defined a distinct ideological mission, asserted control over organizational direction, and differentiated their movements from mainstream institutions and competing organizations. The vanguard groups served as active instruments for the vanguard leader’s ideas and executing tasks that advanced their broader vision. They engaged in coordinated social and cultural activities, such as producing publications, shaping propaganda, and engaging in public provocation, to communicate their message and challenge understandings, consistent with the vanguard aim of breaking “false consciousness” (Gramsci, 1971; Stevenson, 2010 as cited in Marcy, 2015, p. 374). Despite these shared functions, team leadership and team behaviours showed several differences in the case of George Lincoln Rockwell and his group, the ANP.

As a group leader, George Lincoln Rockwell failed in many respects to build cohesion and loyalty. By positioning himself as the ‘commander’ and having his members play the part of uniformed soldiers (i.e., ‘stormtroopers’), he cast his group members as lesser figures than himself, to obey his commands and take orders on his tasks, undermining the creation of an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ belonging. The ANP under Rockwell displayed a highly hierarchical and militarized team environment, with members rehearsing provocative actions and carrying out targeted agitation, including efforts to harass Jewish communities and distribute simplistic propaganda tailored to audiences Rockwell believed were “not deep thinkers” (Simonelli, 1999, pp. 44-45, 57). Internal team behaviour in Rockwell’s ANP reflected inequality and resentment, with members noting Rockwell’s double standards and personal privilege (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 316).

Some ANP members contributed content for propaganda, such as Ludtke’s research for Holocaust denial materials, which directly enabled Rockwell’s ideological campaigns (Simonelli, 1999, p. 112). However, the majority of Rockwell’s core followers often arrived casually on weekends, suggesting they were not solely dedicated to the ANP and its mission. Rockwell himself remarked that the people who responded to his recruitment efforts were not “made of good quality stuff” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 124). The California Department of Justice reported his followers as “the misfits and maladjusted of society” (Simonelli, 1999, p.35). Rockwell provided little to no resources to support his members, neither financially nor emotionally. These understandings of Rockwell’s team leadership suggest the necessity of a vanguard leader who can attract and motivate a dedicated group of similarly advanced individuals to carry out the large tasks required of a vanguard leader. This was supported in the literature that suggested the

leader needs to be able to ‘create, embody and promote, and embed a shared group identity’(Seward, Ballard & Steffens, 2022) and that the contentious nature of the vanguard’s mission requires particular types of members with similar ‘advanced’ skillsets to carry out their tasks (Marcy, 2020, p. 4).

Also said to be quick to anger and temperamental (Schmaltz, p.xiii; Simonelli, p. 4), it was noted that Rockwell used his temper and contentious personality on members of his group, which may have undermined his leadership and further contributed to the types of membership that responded to his recruitment efforts:

"The night before his assassination, Rockwell had an acrimonious showdown with Koehl, Pierce, and Lloyd at ANP headquarters over the direction of the party. According to an eyewitness, an enraged Rockwell locked the three men out of their offices and confided to a stormtrooper on duty that the trio would be expelled from the party by week's end" (Simonelli, 1999, p. 136).

The case studies differed in how the vanguard leaders managed external pressures and public narratives. Guy Debord and Malcolm X both demonstrated resilience by confronting criticism head-on, using public hostility to reinforce group identity and sharpen ideological boundaries. Rockwell was, however, described by his group members as "too controlling" (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 303), highlighting how internal and external perceptions may also have influenced group cohesion and stability.

Traits, Skills, and Behaviours – Societal Level

Across the three cases, all leaders worked to appear credible to the wider public. George Lincoln Rockwell and Malcolm X relied on public communication through speeches, publications, interviews, or staged appearances to project authority and make their ideas visible. They also used humor, performance, and image-building, but with distinct aims and results. Guy Debord was wary of the media and public appearances, preferring writing to reach an educated, literate audience.

Rockwell’s credibility relied on publicity and shock tactics. He treated media attention as a political tool and tried to stay in the headlines. Simonelli noted that he was a “talented adapter and pitchman” who could find “the right phrase, the right slogan, the right image” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 100). His “White Power” slogan is a clear example; he launched it as a direct counter to Black Power, and it spread nationally within weeks. Rockwell also tried to appear internationally connected by contacting Middle Eastern leaders, which he saw as part of his “broader geopolitical ambitions” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 81). Even with these efforts, the ADL described him as “never more than the commander of a small and tatterdemalion group” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 37). While he had high visibility, people often showed up to make derogatory comments at his public speeches. In public, he would frequently become defensive and reactive to the audience he was trying to persuade:

"He lost his composure to hecklers halfway through the speech (speaking to 7,300 people in McArthur Court, 1967) when he tried to explain his theory that white voters cancel each other out...." Senator Eastland and Adam Clayton Powell are both Democrats. You tell me what Adam Clayton Powell and Eastland have in common". As he paused for dramatic effect, a heckler yelled out, "They're both Jews!" The audience roared. It was laughing at Rockwell. Visibly stunned, Rockwell shouted (p. 387): "I'll tell you, peace-

corps and Jew -lovers, you wait until these people get tired of your creepism and communism. They'll get you so bad, you'll wish Hitler would come over here and rescue you!" (Schmaltz, p. 308).

There were several instances in which Rockwell was confident and uncompromising in his positions. Still, the crowd's reactions suggest he was not viewed as a credible public figure. For example, some journalist accounts reported that during his 1964 speech at the University of Michigan, the audience responded with "heckling, laughter and some applause"(Ann Arbor News, 1964) and during a 1965 appearance at Ohio University, met with "derisive laughter" (Jewish Telegraphic Agency,1965) and throughout his speech at Brown University there was "sporadic heckling" and "frequent laughter"(Rosenblatt, 2016).

Malcolm X built his public credibility through humor, clarity, and a disciplined public image. His satire helped him point out contradictions in American society, such as his claim that "You and I have never seen democracy; all we've seen is its hypocrisy!" (X, 1964, p. 23). He said that when he communicated to the public, "I had learned early... to always teach in terms that people could understand" (Haley & X, 1965, p. 225). He reinforced this credibility through his personal presentation after his release from prison, buying eyeglasses, a suitcase, and a watch, explaining, "I live by my watch, keeping appointments... Time is more important to me than distance" (Haley & X, 1965, p. 196). His credibility was further supported by national media interviews, ministerial authority in the NOI, and the broad appeal he developed among "the depressed masses" and Black writers and artists (Simon, 2005, p. 27).

Guy Debord developed his credibility through intellectual authority. He was described as a "chess player, rigorously leading the game," whose heroes were strategists such as Clausewitz and Machiavelli (Hussey, 2001, p. 9). His personal image, which included cigars, a duffel coat, and a "Roman style" haircut, helped cultivate a controlled and deliberate persona (Hussey, 2001, p. 142). His core contributions that supported his credibility came through his writing: the *Society of the Spectacle*, the *Internationale Situationniste* journal, and the foundational report he presented at the 1957 Cosio conference. Rumney recalled that Debord's "theoretical framework appeared largely developed at that point" (Hussey, 2001, p. 113). His later creation of the "Game of War" underscored his interest in strategy; he even remarked that it "might be the only thing... that one might dare say has some value" (Galloway, 2008, para. 5).

When communicating their messages to the public, the vanguard leaders had different target audiences and goals. Rockwell relied on slogans, staged conflict, and mass media exposure; Malcolm X used humor, disciplined presentation, and accessible teaching; Debord relied on written theory, visual symbolism, and intellectual networks. George Lincoln Rockwell did not achieve the notoriety he had hoped. He could in part be attributed to his lack of composure when facing public rejection, making assertions that were easily contradicted in public (his interview with Alex Haley and when he spoke to college students), and also from the behaviour of his vanguard group which did not serve well to a wider audience as a demonstration project to emulate (i.e., as an enticing social alternative). He instead 'outraged' audiences and caused a social disturbance.

Rockwell deliberately used tactics that would provoke and agitate his audience to gain attention. He understood "the emerging techniques of advertising and public relations" and used them to inflame public reaction (Simonelli, 1999, p. 53). Simonelli (1999) wrote that Rockwell "knew what would make people hate him" and exploited it (p. 53). He openly stated that he tried to push

opponents “to the point where they react irrationally & stupidly” (Simonelli, 1999, p. 58). His speeches often included extreme claims, such as saying he would eliminate “Red China... fifteen or twenty minutes after I’m president” (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 316), designed to shock crowds. His “hate bus,” Nazi-style uniforms, and staged rallies all followed this same pattern. The rescinded Bucknell invitation, which kept him in local headlines for a month, shows how even opposition to his provocations drew attention to him (Simonelli, 1999, p. 128). By doing and saying the most extreme things to gain attention, Rockwell compromised his credibility, especially when his statements were fact-checked. In his published interview with Alex Haley, Haley repeatedly points out factual contradictions in Rockwell’s claims, offering clarification for readers after many of Rockwell’s statements (Haley, 1966).

George Lincoln Rockwell’s attempts to present his ideas on university campuses often resulted in public ridicule. During a 1965 appearance at Ohio University before an audience of approximately 2,800 students, Rockwell was met not with agreement but with “derisive laughter” throughout his speech (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 1965). Reports noted that the audience’s response reflected both disbelief and mockery, signaling that many attendees viewed his claims as extreme or unserious. Following the address, a faculty member criticized Rockwell’s “art of vilification and misinterpretation,” further underscoring how his presentation was dismissed as inflammatory rather than persuasive (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 1965).

Similar reactions emerged during Rockwell’s 1964 speech at the University of Michigan, where he faced an audience that responded with “heckling, laughter, and some applause” (Ann Arbor News, 1964). As Rockwell delivered sweeping antisemitic assertions, such as claiming that communism was a Jewish movement or that Jews controlled American entertainment and communications, the crowd frequently broke into scattered laughter (Ann Arbor News, 1964). The report makes clear that audience members did not treat Rockwell as a serious political figure; instead, they often laughed at the exaggeration and implausibility of his claims, framing his appearance more as a spectacle than a legitimate ideological address.

Rockwell’s 1966 speech at Brown University also drew a mixture of shock, amusement, and open mockery. According to a retrospective account, the event featured “sporadic heckling, but also frequent laughter and clapping,” even as Rockwell made racially charged and antisemitic remarks (Rosenblatt, 2016). Audience members reportedly laughed when Rockwell attempted to use humor, such as recounting stories from his college days or making facetious promises to “go to work for Martin Luther King” if his claims were disproven (Rosenblatt, 2016). The laughter did not function as agreement but as a way for students to signal their rejection of his extremism and their refusal to take his arguments seriously.

Malcolm X also provoked, but through critique rather than spectacle. His speeches challenged racial inequality, U.S. democracy, and media power. His statement that “the media is the most powerful entity on earth... because they control the minds of the masses” (Haley, 1965, p. 189) was intended to provoke audiences into questioning information systems. His major speeches: *Democracy is Hypocrisy*, *Message to the Grassroots*, and *The Ballot or the Bullet* were provocative because they confronted racial injustice directly. Unlike Rockwell, Malcolm X’s provocations aimed to clarify power structures and mobilize oppressed communities. Many of these outcomes are apparent in the continued publication of his works, with his speeches and writings on his impact on society published well after his death (see outcomes p. 66).

Debord's provocations emphasised theoretical attacks on culture. Through the *Society of the Spectacle* and the SI journal, he critiqued mass media and capitalist life as forms of domination. Students who distributed *On the Poverty of Student Life* helped popularize these ideas on university campuses, contributing to the atmosphere that led to the May 1968 uprisings. Techniques like *détournement*, which removed dominant messages from cultural materials and replaced them with Situationist alternatives, were intended to disrupt everyday assumptions and expose the workings of "the spectacle." These were intellectual provocations rather than public stunts (Hussey, 2001; Noronha, 2021).

In comparison, Rockwell primarily provoked through shock and confrontation, Malcolm X through political critique and moral challenge, and Debord through theoretical and cultural disruption. While their tactics varied and were intended for different audiences, they also reinforced the provocative strategies used by vanguard leaders to gain attention with mass society.

Goals and Strategies

The goals and strategies for the case studies revealed several commonalities consistent with theoretical understandings of vanguard leadership.

Rockwell used propaganda and prediction to position himself as a visionary. His comic-style Holocaust denial piece, *The Diary of Ann Fink*, combined drawings and photographs in ways meant to be "humorous," which a commentator later called an "excrescence" (Simonelli, 1999, p. 112). He also made specific forecasts. Simonelli noted that Rockwell "accurately predicted the race riots of the mid-1960s" and believed such conflict would escalate until Americans demanded a "strong leader," a role he imagined for himself (p. 33), stepping slightly outside the suggestion that vanguard leaders do not aim to gain political power, and one which Rockwell pursued. It may be suggested that this move toward seeking a political seat undermined Rockwell's credibility, as political aspirations pursued for personal reasons can signal acceptance of established institutions and authority, which contrasts with a vanguard leader's missions and goals.

Rockwell exemplified a strategy built on shock, mobility, and public confrontation. His use of "overt anti-Semitism and "the screaming of insults" was intentionally designed "to attract attention" (Simonelli, 1999, p. 53). He framed provocative public displays as necessary for gaining visibility, as reflected in his own admission: "I purposely made my propaganda as brutal and shockingly rough as I could, simply to force attention" (Rockwell, 1966). His rotation of cities for rallies (Simonelli, 1999, p. 64) showed his attempt to stay unpredictable and continuously reinsert his message into new public arenas. His tactics also relied heavily on visual propaganda and emotionally charged symbolism. Griffin (2001) noted his "hate bus," his pamphlet on "the Jew mental health attack," and the comic-style booklet *The Diary of Ann Fink* (p. 104). These examples show how Rockwell linked emotional provocation with efforts to define the enemy and create a simplified worldview for followers. Strategically, Rockwell sought to dominate public space through volume, spectacle, and continuous agitation.

Malcolm X pursued a different path, emphasizing institution-building and targeted communication inside and outside the Nation of Islam. He played a major role in creating the NOI's organizational infrastructure by training ministers, founding *Muhammad Speaks*, and strengthening the group's ties to Black communities (Karenga, 1979, p. 252). His strategies

combined organizational discipline with public messaging to raise awareness among African Americans. His approach to defining audiences and their enemies was clear and grounded in his political insights. The example where he walked off a speaker's platform after realizing organizers had used his name to draw a crowd illustrates his insistence on controlling the message and addressing audiences on transparent terms: "I wasn't really wanted up there... my name had been used – and I walked off the speaker's stand" (Haley, 1965, p. 318). Malcolm X's strategies focused less on shock for its own sake and more on principled confrontation, clarity of message, and political education. Malcolm X's strategic development is evident in his disciplined habits and the long-term ideas he pursued. His reflection on buying eyeglasses, a suitcase, and a watch after prison highlights how he prepared for a future life of travel and public responsibilities: "I live by my watch... Time is more important to me than distance" (Haley, 1965, p. 196). His focus on clarity, accessibility, and disciplined presentation became part of his strategic approach. His unpublished 14-point economic plan suggests he may have sought concrete solutions.

Debord's strategies focused on theory, play, and cultural analysis. Drawing from Huizinga, he viewed games and spontaneity as ways to reveal the limits of everyday life and inspire new forms of behavior (Hussey, 2001, p. 74). He formalized SI concepts through titles such as "G. E. Debord, Director" in the journal, thereby reinforcing his intellectual leadership (Hussey, 2001, p. 127). His strategic reading of the postwar economy, recognizing that expansion "reinforced" capitalism rather than weakened it (Penner, 2015, p. 23), also influenced the direction of his movement.

Debord's goals and strategies involved intellectual production, cultural disruption, and the creation of new theoretical tools. His early work with the Letterist International included distributing *Potlatch* "scruffy tracts handed out... in the bars of the quartier," which contrasted sharply with the elite, glossy *La révolution surréaliste* (Hussey, 1999, p. 84). This contrast underscores Debord's desire to distance the movement from institutional art culture and define representational art as an enemy. His films, such as *L'Anticoncept* and *Howling in Favour of Sade*, similarly functioned as denunciations of dominant cultural forms. Debord's statement that "Order reigns, but it doesn't govern." His reference to "a breach in the enemy's defenses" emerging from "a science of situations" (Hussey, 1999, p. 65) demonstrates his belief that new forms of consciousness could be produced through disruptive cultural acts. Debord also tightly controlled how the Situationist International operated. He edited *Internationale Situationniste*, solicited and rejected submissions, and reshaped internal publications to influence how members communicated ideas (Penner, 2015, p. 16). His decision to declare *Potlatch* obsolete and reposition it as an internal document (Hussey, 1999, p. 122) shows a deliberate strategy to refine the movement's public face.

Comparing Vanguard Leader Outcomes

Vanguard leaders seek not merely to articulate new worldviews and ideological ideas but to convert them into social, political, and cultural influence (Gray, 2020; Hawley et al., 2023; Sadeghi Ronizi & Marcy, 2026). Short-term outcomes that vanguard leaders can be evaluated on include organizational growth, public visibility, and state or societal reactions (Young, 1980). Longer-term outcomes are reflected in enduring institutions, cultural memory, and intellectual legacy (Gray, 2020; Tandle, 2025). Drawing from these parameters, this section compares the outcomes of the three vanguard leaders' case studies to assess how being leaders of vanguard

groups translated into short- and long-term outcomes and societal impact. Although all three challenged dominant political and cultural systems, their ability to generate durable movements, shape public discourse, and leave historical legacies varied.

Using indicators such as organizational strength, financial stability, and public mobilization, George Lincoln Rockwell's leadership of the American Nazi Party (ANP) was largely ineffective. A 1965 California Department of Justice investigation found that the party remained extremely small, with only 12–24 stormtroopers at its Arlington headquarters and fewer than 150 supporters nationwide (California Department of Justice, 1965). Independent assessments by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington consistently placed Rockwell's active following at 30-50 individuals (American Jewish Committee, 1960, 1962; Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington, 1962). In a 1960 deposition, Rockwell admitted his party was “very small.” By 1962, the AJC reported that the ANP remained a marginal operation with no more than 50 active Stormtroopers (American Jewish Committee, 1962). These figures indicate that Rockwell failed to translate his influence into sustained organizational growth for the American Nazi Party (ANP).

Financially, the ANP was weak. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that the party's annual income did not exceed \$20,000 and that members were required to work outside the organization and contribute their wages to keep it operational (Anti-Defamation League, 1963). Living conditions at party headquarters were described as poor and demoralizing, reflecting the movement's inability to provide even basic material stability. Even with modest income gains, living conditions for ANP members remained poor. Reports described rations as “skimpy, unappetizing, and monotonous” (American Jewish Committee, 1962) with accounts of stormtroopers eating canned hash for days, cat food, and thin stew made from chicken necks. These conditions reflect that George Lincoln Rockwell was unable to provide basic material support and resources to his members, conditions that likely undermined member loyalty and hindered long-term organizational development.

Rockwell also failed to attract elite supporters. Warner (1963) documented that Rockwell's attempts to solicit funding from wealthy conservative donors were repeatedly rejected, and the ADL (1963) confirmed that no major right-wing benefactors were willing to associate with the ANP. Despite his efforts to align with broader right-wing causes, George Lincoln Rockwell failed to secure support from wealthy industrialists or prominent patrons of conservative extremism. He believed that shared ideological views, particularly antisemitism, would attract financial backing from patriotic millionaires, but this assumption proved false. According to James K. Warner, Rockwell sent letters to major right-wing donors; yet, they refused to associate with him or the American Nazi Party (ANP) (Warner, 1963). By late 1963, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that no known or respected individual supported Rockwell, and key benefactors of right-wing causes such as H. L. Hunt and H. R. Cullen never contributed to the ANP. This persistent lack of elite support frustrated Rockwell throughout his career. Further, it undermined his credibility and organizational viability (Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1963).

Tony Ulasewicz monitored Rockwell's activities for the New York City Police Department from 1958 to 1967. During 1960 and 1961, Rockwell's street demonstrations and violent confrontations with Jewish groups in New York and Washington received constant press

attention and fostered the impression of a large and growing movement. In late 1961, Ulasewicz visited ANP headquarters in Virginia and reported that:

“When I finally moved inside, what greeted me was a grubby haunted house. Clearly, this was no showpiece that would attract membership into Rockwell’s party. His glowing published accounts of his party’s progress had been nothing more than a pack of lies. As I looked around, I noticed that bullet holes punctured all the walls of his house. I also saw a stack of unpaid bills high on a table. Rockwell's electricity had been turned off, and he used kerosene lamps to light the place. Whatever Hitler's ghost had promised Rockwell, it hadn't yet arrived.” (Simonelli et al., 1995, p. 566).

In the long term, Rockwell left no durable institutions, political achievements, or a widely adopted ideology. His influence remained confined to fringe extremist subcultures rather than mainstream political or intellectual life.

In contrast, Malcolm X produced substantial short-term and long-term outcomes. During his leadership in the Nation of Islam, he dramatically expanded membership and established new temples. He strengthened organizational discipline, transforming a small sect into a national movement with thousands of followers (DeCaro, 1996; Marable, 2011). Malcolm X became one of the most visible Black leaders in the United States. He regularly addressed large audiences, appeared in national media, and reshaped public discourse on race, colonialism, and Black self-determination (Cone, 1991; Perry, 1991). His influence was strong enough to prompt extensive FBI surveillance (Marable, 2011), indicating that the state regarded him as a serious political figure rather than a marginal agitator. After leaving the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X rebuilt organizational capacity through the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), further demonstrating his ability to initially mobilize his own core group of followers (Sales, 1994). His assassination in 1965 generated widespread public reaction and intensified interest in his ideas, increasing his short-term impact rather than diminishing it (Marable, 2011).

Malcolm X exerted substantial short-term influence as a vanguard leader through his rapid expansion of the Nation of Islam (NOI), his ability to mobilize followers, and his immediate impact on public discourse during the early 1960s. Malcolm X was directly responsible for transforming the NOI from a small, insular sect into a national movement with a rapidly growing membership base. Marable (2011) documents how Malcolm X established new temples, trained ministers, and dramatically increased recruitment, helping the NOI expand from a few thousand adherents into a mass organization with a national footprint. DeCaro (1996) similarly emphasizes that Malcolm’s organizational discipline, charismatic preaching, and administrative leadership were central to the NOI’s growth during his tenure. His public presence also expanded quickly: Perry (1991) notes that Malcolm X became one of the most visible Black leaders in the United States, drawing large audiences at universities, community events, and public debates, and becoming a frequent subject of national media coverage. This visibility generated intense reactions, including admiration among Black audiences seeking a more militant alternative to mainstream civil rights leadership, and hostility from white political institutions.

Cone (1991) highlights that Malcolm X’s critiques of white supremacy and integrationist strategies provoked strong responses from both supporters and opponents, contributing to his status as a polarizing but influential figure. His growing influence also drew the attention of the U.S. government; Marable (2011) details the extensive FBI surveillance and counterintelligence efforts directed at him, indicating that state institutions viewed him as an immediate political

threat. Even in the short term, Malcolm X's impact extended beyond the NOI. After he departed from the organization in 1964, he quickly attracted new followers through the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), which Sales (1994) describes as gaining momentum despite its brief existence. His assassination in 1965 produced widespread public reaction, significant media attention, and an immediate surge of interest in his speeches and ideas, further amplifying his short-term influence (Marable, 2011). Taken together, these developments demonstrate that Malcolm X's short-term impact was organizationally transformative, culturally disruptive, and politically significant—far exceeding the limited, fringe, and largely stigmatized short-term outcomes associated with George Lincoln Rockwell.

Malcolm X continues to be widely referenced in contemporary political, cultural, and academic discourse, demonstrating his enduring long-term influence as a vanguard leader. For example, the *Harvard Gazette* (2025) noted that his ideas “matter even more 60 years after his killing,” particularly in debates about race, identity, and global justice. Cultural institutions also highlight his ongoing impact. The National Museum of African American History and Culture (2025) recently emphasized that Malcolm X's “image and voice remain almost everywhere,” citing his presence in modern art, music, and political expression. Contemporary social justice movements have similarly drawn on his critiques of racism, colonialism, and state violence, with recent analyses showing that his message continues to shape global activism (Powell, 2025). Popular media and political commentary have also invoked his legacy, with writers arguing that Malcolm X offers “timeless lessons for contemporary struggles” and remains central to modern Black political thought (Subramanian, 2025). Universities continue to host events dedicated to his legacy, such as Michigan State University's recent ‘Malcolm X Muslim Studies Community Forum’, which explicitly connects his ideas to present-day social justice issues (Lee, 2025). Together, these examples demonstrate that Malcolm X remains a living intellectual and cultural force.

Guy Debord, as the leader of the Situationist International, did not build a mass organization. Still, he profoundly shaped political and cultural thought, which extended well past the dissolution of the SI and his death in 1994. Although the Situationist International was small, its ideas were adopted far beyond its formal membership. Through the Situationist International (SI), which was active from 1957 until its dissolution in 1972, Debord developed methods such as *détournement* (the subversive reuse of existing cultural materials) and psychogeography as tools for attacking the ideological power of the spectacle (Debord, 1967/1994). Historians of the SI have shown that Situationist texts circulated among radical students in France during the late 1960s and that Situationist slogans, such as those attacking consumerism and alienation, appeared in Parisian graffiti during the May 1968 uprising (Hayes, 2017; Jappe, 1999). While the SI was numerically small, scholars agree that its language and critique helped shape the framework through which many students interpreted their revolt against consumer capitalism and state authority (Jappe, 1999; Bunyard, 2025).

Reactions to Debord's death in 1994 further reveal the cultural weight of his ideas. Although he remained hostile to mainstream institutions during his lifetime, his death prompted renewed scholarly and journalistic attention to *The Society of the Spectacle* as one of the most influential works of twentieth-century radical theory (Jappe, 1999). This reassessment was later formalized when the French Ministry of Culture classified Debord's personal archives as a national treasure in 2009, preventing their sale abroad and affirming his status as a major intellectual figure in French and European thought (Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2009). Debord's theoretical

framework in the *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) has been widely recognized in cultural and media studies as one of the most important Marxist analyses of modern capitalism's cultural dimension (Bunyard, 2025; Kellner, 1995). Such recognition is particularly significant given Debord's lifelong opposition to institutional power, illustrating how his once-marginal critique became a part of modern intellectual history.

Debord's theoretical writings, his leadership of the Situationist International, the influence of his ideas in May 1968, and the continued academic and institutional engagement with his work demonstrate Guy Debord's success in having a longer-term and ongoing impact. His critique of the spectacle continues to serve as a central analytical tool for scholars examining media, consumer culture, and political imagery, confirming that Debord's influence extends well beyond the historical moment in which it was first articulated (Bunyard, 2025; Kellner, 1995).

Comparing the outcomes of Rockwell, Malcolm X, and Debord shows that vanguard leadership is not defined by radical rhetoric alone but by the ability to translate ideas into lasting organizational, cultural, or intellectual impact. Rockwell generated attention but failed to build a viable movement or leave a meaningful legacy. Malcolm X mobilized mass followings, reshaped political discourse, and remains a central figure in global struggles over race and justice. Debord, though leading a much smaller organization, transformed how scholars and activists understand media, capitalism, and political imagery.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This research set out to deepen the understanding of vanguard leadership by examining the behaviors, traits, skills, goals, and strategies of three historical vanguard leaders, Guy Debord, George Lincoln Rockwell, and Malcolm X, whose objectives, though quite different, shared key characteristics of vanguard attributes. Using a comparative case study and the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), the study traced how these leaders' attributes influenced socio-political culture and compared and contrasted their attributes with existing theories of vanguard leadership. By returning to the larger questions posed in the introduction, namely, (1) what similar and different behaviours, skills, traits, goals, and strategies past vanguard leaders exhibited, and (2) what could be learned about vanguard leadership by comparing cases with varied socio-political outcomes against existing theories of vanguard leadership, the findings contribute several important insights.

Across the individual-level findings, the cases revealed several consistent features. All three leaders experienced early hardship, instability, or personal loss, aligning with the concepts of relative deprivation and status inconsistency, which contributed to their resilience, self-reliance, and a willingness to challenge authority (Marcy, 2020; Rejai & Phillips, 1979). They rejected formal education and pursued intensive self-directed learning, which became central to their ideological development and authority. Shared traits and behaviours included low agreeableness, a willingness to engage in conflict, and high self-regard or narcissistic traits. Much of this aligned with existing theory by Rejai and Philips (1979), which examined individual-level attributes during leaders' developmental years to suggest which experiences may have led them to develop certain behaviours and understandings. They also shared strong ideological creativity and intellectual curiosity (Ansburg & Hill, 2003; Smith, Ward, & Finke, 1995). These similarities in the vanguard leader case studies confirm theoretical understandings that early experiences, such as the death of close family members, exposure to war, financial hardship, or other destabilizing events, create emotional and cognitive disruption and that such conditions, as reported in the literature, can act as catalysts that shape an individual's worldview, cognitive development, and later behavioural tendencies. (Ligon, Hunter & Mumford, 2008, p. 314).

The case studies demonstrated creativity and cognitive skill, consistent with the theoretical propositions, though in different ways. Malcolm X used intellectual and rhetorical skills to deliver persuasive public oratory and to organize communities, successfully embedding his ideas in both the Nation of Islam and broader African American political activism (Cone, 2001, p. 178; Haley & X, 1965, p. 225). Rockwell used extremism and spectacle to gain attention but struggled to achieve lasting influence, in part due to poor group cohesion and a tendency to provoke ridicule (Schmaltz, 1999, p. 308; Simonelli, 1999, pp. 100–101;). Debord leveraged theoretical and cultural interventions to influence intellectual and artistic communities, achieving long-term impact through writings and cultural strategies rather than direct mass mobilization (Hussey, 2001, pp. 65, 127; Marcy, 2020, p. 4).

At the group level, the vanguard leaders showed similarities in controlling group boundaries and defining the groups' missions, but differed sharply in their effectiveness. Rockwell struggled to

build a dedicated or skilled membership base and often undermined cohesion through his treatment of followers. Debord maintained group loyalty through strict exclusion and intellectual demands, and Malcolm X demonstrated an ability to reach wider audiences and influence followers more broadly.

At the societal level, the three vanguard leaders worked to build credibility and shape public acceptance of their ideas. Rockwell relied on spectacle, slogans, and mass media attention but often failed to maintain credibility in public interactions. Malcolm X developed credibility through disciplined communication, humor, accessibility, and ministerial authority, drawing large audiences and significant public influence. Debord's credibility emerged from theoretical production and cultural critique, targeting highly educated audiences through writing, symbolism, and strategic positioning. The vanguard leaders acted as provocateurs, though with different intentions, strategies, and outcomes.

The comparison of goals and strategies further showed that each vanguard leader sought to reshape public consciousness, consistent with theoretical expectations of vanguard leadership. Rockwell's strategy centered on shock, provocative propaganda, mobility, and simplified ideological messages (Hussey, 2001; Jackson, 2019). Malcolm X used disciplined organizational work, targeted communication, and long-term planning to advance political education and group identity. Debord aimed to disrupt dominant cultural structures through theoretical innovation, writing, and organizing his networks. Their differing strategies reflected the audiences they pursued and the forms of influence they sought.

The findings indicated that vanguard leader effectiveness and outcomes vary depending on how these characteristics interact with team leadership skills and societal-level strategies, with differences most evident in group-level leadership capacities and the ability to generate and maintain credibility with wider audiences, as illustrated by the case study of George Lincoln Rockwell. George Lincoln Rockwell believed he would eventually find the right issue or message to win support from both right-wing sympathizers and an uneducated general public. But his use of Nazi symbols and language made him completely unacceptable to almost all conservative extremists in the U.S., who rejected him just as strongly as the general public did. The American Nazi Party (ANP) struggled with money throughout its existence, surviving mostly on small donations and literature sales. It never grew into a real political movement. From beginning to end, the ANP remained a tiny group and served mainly as a personal platform for Rockwell's ideas. Despite years of effort, he failed to build a credible organization or attract serious backing.

Malcolm X's long-term influence has remained remarkably strong. His ideas continue to shape academic scholarship, political movements, and popular culture. He is consistently cited in debates about race, justice, and identity, and his speeches and image remain deeply embedded in global political consciousness. Unlike Rockwell, Malcolm X became a central figure in historical memory and intellectual discourse.

Similarly, Guy Debord succeeded in producing outcomes that extended past the lifespan of the SI and Debord himself. After Debord's death, his work did not fade but became the subject of sustained scholarly, journalistic, and institutional attention, including the recognition of *The*

Society of the Spectacle as a major work of twentieth-century radical theory and the classification of his archives as a French national treasure (Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2009; Bunyard, 2025; Jappe, 1999; Kellner, 1995) outcomes indicate that Debord succeeded as a vanguard leader by producing ideas that entered wider circulation in political, cultural, and academic spheres and continue to shape how modern capitalism and media are understood.

This research contributes to understanding vanguard leadership by demonstrating that vanguard leaders share common individual behaviours, skills, and traits, but that their success depends largely on their ability to attract, recruit, and retain dedicated and skilled members to carry out their tasks and effectively represent the vanguard leader's mission to mass society. The similarities suggested traits, behaviours, and strategies associated with vanguard leadership, but differences in vanguard leader outcomes highlighted the importance of the leader's interactions with group members to achieve their goals. The cases show that the vanguard role is shaped not only by individual attributes but also by the leader's relationship to followers, their groups, and society. The findings also highlighted attributes and processes, such as self-directed intellectual development, and that social rejection served to validate their resolve in pursuing their goals.

In revisiting the broader concerns raised at the start of this thesis, particularly the rise of small but highly visible groups challenging liberal democratic norms, this research highlights the continued relevance of vanguard leadership as a field of inquiry. By examining how past vanguard leaders made sense of their past experiences and environments, mobilized followers, and disrupted the socio-political order, this research provides clearer insight into the mechanisms through which contemporary vanguards attempt to shape public discourse and political behaviour. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to both theoretical and practical understandings of vanguard leadership: refining existing models, offering historically grounded insights into key leadership attributes of influential leaders, and providing a framework for identifying how emerging vanguard groups may influence the future trajectory of democratic societies.

Limitations

This study also has some limitations that shape how its findings should be interpreted. First, as with most qualitative case studies, the research is constrained by its reliance on historical sources that vary in depth, reliability, and perspective. Archival and secondary materials used to reconstruct each leader's actions and decisions may reflect the biases of supporters, critics, or observers, influencing how leadership traits and strategies appear (Yin, 2009). Second, case-study methodology inherently requires bounded case selection, meaning the three leaders examined here cannot capture the full variation of vanguard leadership across social, ideological, or historical contexts (GAO, 1990; Gerring, 2004). These cases were selected for their theoretical relevance rather than representativeness, limiting generalizability. Third, the subjective nature of qualitative interpretation introduces potential researcher bias when coding behaviours, identifying patterns, and drawing theoretical connections. Although established procedures were used to ensure analytic consistency, interpretive work remains influenced by the researcher's perspective (Walsham, 2006). Finally, the study prioritizes depth over breadth. This, of course, is also the study's strength, as close examination of a small number of leaders yields rich insights. Still, it should be noted that this limits the ability to make broader empirical claims. Taken together, these limitations underscore the need for further research using additional cases,

alternative methods, and diverse data sources to refine and expand the emerging theory of vanguard leadership.

Areas for Further Research

Building on the limitations identified above, several avenues for future research emerge. First, expanding the number and diversity of cases would help test and refine the emerging framework of vanguard leadership. Examining leaders from different ideological backgrounds, organizational structures, or historical periods would allow researchers to assess whether the traits and strategies identified here are consistent across contexts or vary according to cultural, political, or technological conditions.

Second, future studies could benefit from incorporating mixed-method or quantitative approaches. Surveys, social network analyses, or computational text analysis of leaders' speeches and publications could complement qualitative interpretation and offer greater empirical precision. Such methods may also help reduce issues associated with subjective interpretation by providing measurable indicators of leadership behaviours, influence patterns, and communication strategies.

Third, additional research using contemporary cases would deepen understanding of how vanguard leadership manifests in the digital age. Modern vanguards often operate through online platforms, decentralized networks, and algorithmic visibility, raising new questions about recruitment, mobilization, and leader-follower dynamics. Comparative analyses between historical and digital-era vanguards could reveal how leadership practices adapt or remain consistent when mediated by new communication technologies.

Fourth, future work could explore follower perspectives in greater depth. While this study focuses primarily on leaders themselves, shifting the emphasis to followers and how they interpret leaders' actions, narratives, and symbolic performances would help further clarify why certain vanguard leaders succeed in mobilizing support while others do not. Interviews, ethnographic observation, or analysis of online communities may provide rich data for this line of inquiry.

Together, these areas for further research offer directions for strengthening and expanding the developing theory of vanguard leadership while contributing to broader discussions of socio-political vanguard groups and their leadership.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Table of Questions

Goals

General: To shift public consciousness by challenging existing socio-political norms and beliefs, provide an alternative, make space for other groups to further change. What is the vanguards broader specific goal?

What groups or organizations does the leader leverage to achieve these goals?

Inter-organizational and societal level goals

Societal level task: to sensebreak a general public mental model of how social and political relationships work, then help move the public towards a prescriptive mental model through sensegiving.

Is the leader targeting a specific audience with their goals? Do they delineate boundaries to their target audience in an attempt to create an "us vs. them" phenomenon?

5. Does the leader make influence attempts aimed directly at the public?

How does the leader leverage institutional forms of communication?

How does the leader gain the public's attention? (sensebreaking) What kinds of tactics are used?

Does the leader provide viable alternatives to the status quo? How do they demonstrate these as viable solutions?

What tools and tactics for novel and sensational displays are used?

Are there examples where the leader demonstrates or articulates understanding of their own mental models for prescriptive change?

Does the leader articulate or demonstrate understanding of the public's beliefs, values, and political assumptions they are targeting?

How does the leader call attention to particular social and political problems?

Does the leader provide solutions to the problems they draw attention to?

Does the leader draw inspiration from previous historical figures ideas?

Group level goals and strategies

Does the leader recruit only dedicated followers that are creative and innovative (intellectuals, activist, artists)?

Can the leader effectively lead other creative people in teams?

Does the leader give some autonomy to group members to exert leadership or implement strategies?

Is the leader able to manages internal threats, like petty bickering, amongst group members?

How does the leader manage external threats, like group members being co-opted by elites?

What emotional resources are provided to group members?

What financial resources are provided to group members?

Is the leader able to establish networks and alliances outside of the group?

Does the leader provide exemplary role modeling of their ideology to the group?

Does the group act as a demonstration project/living embodiment of the views they are promoting?

Does the leader use the group to test and refine approaches?

Does the leader delineate an "us vs. them" phenomenon between the group members and outside "others"?

Individual level goals and strategies

What novel strategies and tactics does the leader create?

How does the leader implement novel strategies and tactics?

Does the leader demonstrate cognitive skills that help with creativity and social innovation, like effective forecasting and problem identification?

What experiences contributed to the leader's foundation of expertise used to build new mental models of, and new approaches to their community's problems?

Does the leader provide, through their own analysis and behavior, a clear example of why their approach to social and political life is superior to existing paradigms? How do they convince followers they are someone worth following?

Does the leader attempt to look and behave like an expert?

Does the leader demonstrate resilience when meeting mass condemnation?

Who/what population is the enemy category for the leader? How do they communicate this?

Traits, Skills, and Behaviours

Individual Level

Early life experience

Did the leader experience and work through deprivation and status inconsistency, hardship, or challenging experiences in their past?

What level of formal education did the leader obtain?

Is the leader an intellectual, artist, or writer?

Has the leader experienced and overcome (unjust) social rejection?

Traits and attributes

Are there occurrences where the leader demonstrates a contentious (not agreeable) personality?

Is the leader described by others as socially removed or disengaged?

How does the leader respond to social rejection and criticism? Are there demonstrated examples that the leader is not motivated by a need for social acceptance?

Is the leader energized by challengers or conflicts? (Low in conflict avoidance)

Does the leader demonstrate aesthetic/artistic leanings in their strategies and tactics?

Is the leader confrontational when challenged?

What examples demonstrate that the leader has awareness and facility with different information related to aesthetics and power (alternative perspectives on status and social aesthetics)?

Cognitive skills

Has the leader developed multiple mental models, articulated in their writings, speeches, or conversations with others, of how society might work to draw from and combine?

How does the leader respond to setbacks in reaching their goals? (Demonstrates enhanced coping skills?)

How does the leader respond to social rejection? Are they resilient to social rejection (Do they have experience with social rejection and were able to continue pursuing their goals?)

How does the leader manage their self-esteem? Do they demonstrate unwavering confidence in reaching their goals?

What examples show the leader has advanced heuristics or problem-solving skills?

What does the leader do that shows understanding of the processes that are needed to change mental models?

Did the leader demonstrate skills in scanning for problems and solutions?

Did the leader demonstrate skills related to forecasting situations and responses?

How does the leader articulate different ways of understanding power?

Are the leader's worldviews and ideologies different?

Does the leader make known other perspectives they hold of status and social aesthetics?

What cognitive and behavioural expertise does the leader possess?

What skills in creativity and social innovation are demonstrated by the leader?

Group level

Team leadership

Is the leader's core group comprised of a few dedicated members with varied skill sets and knowledge structures?

What skills and knowledge sets, like creative/intellectuals/artists, are recruited in the membership?

What skills sets and knowledge structures of the group members complement the vanguard leader in their task development?

Does the leader expell group members that do not deliver on tasks?

How does the leader manage internal group deviances?

How does the leader manage group members' social pressure to conform? Are there any examples of concessions to deviations?

Is the group presented as a strong and unified example to the status quo?

Is a collective identity/cohesion created by differentiating the group from status quo?

What skills does the leader use to form, cohere, and guide their team?

How did the leader respond to petty bickering (internal threats) within the group?

Was the leader able to establish networks linking other groups of like-minded others?

What useful alliances were created?

Does the leader demonstrate effectiveness in leading other creative people in teams?

What emotional and financial supports are distributed to members?

Team Behaviour

What social and cultural engagements and tactics are practiced by the group? What attempts are made to "wake people up" (sense break) and offer them "an enticing vision" (sensegiving) of how new social relationships might work?

How does the group serve as a tool to execute particular leadership tasks?

Societal level

Credible public figure

Does the leader use humor that both breaks moral norms and is acceptable on some level?

What makes the leader somewhat socially acceptable?

What forms of informational/expertise power are leveraged by the leader?

Does the leader attempt to look and behave like an expert?

Does the leader publish authoritative or persuasive texts?

Does the leader associate with socially credible figures?

Is the leader publicly unyielding and uncompromising on their positions?

Do they demonstrate resilience to opposition from media and political parties?

Does the group exemplify role modeling to immediate followers and the general public? Is the group demonstrating to the public on how and why new norms lead to better outcomes?

What examples of prescriptive mental models are created and shown publicly?

Are there official displays of expertise to the society?

Are there propaganda or speeches presented to the public?

Is it publicly known what socially credible people are recruited that support the groups ideology?

What agitation tactics get publicity?

Are interviews with journalists and media widely shared?

What demonstrations serve to influence political ideological viewpoints of the leader/group to others as viable alternatives?

Provocateur

Are public engagements used to provide provocative (sense breaking) functions highlighting status quo approaches as problematic?

Are public engagements used to provide credibility (sensegiving) functions, highlighting the vanguard's solutions as viable alternative to the status quo?

Does the vanguard use sensational public displays and uncompromising public debates that effectively capture public attention?

Does the vanguard make attempts to get events and debates publicised? Do they seek attention with media channels?

Are official displays of commitment to vanguard goals present and frequent?