

# Rationalising 'Irrational' Support for Political Violence

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- Fearon (*Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, 2006) in a review of ethnic violence made the following observation  
*'violence is a tool by which political elites maintain or increase their political support', but that the 'central theoretical puzzle for such 'diversionary' arguments is why publics would increase their support for a leader who takes actions, such as provoking ethnic violence, that by hypothesis makes them worse off'.*
- This paper will make an attempt to provide a rationale

# Rational Conflict

How is the approach here different to existing approaches?

- A puzzle because conflict is inefficient
- Why does it occur? Fearon (IO,1995) outlined 3 general reasons
  - 1 Private information and bargaining failure
  - 2 Commitment problems
  - 3 Issue indivisibilities
- Intra-group competition (e.g. Hamlin & Jennings (JEBO, 2007)) emphasises trade-off between peace and material goals. Kydd and Walter (IO, 2002) emphasise opportunities for hawks if there is a lack of trust in doves.
- Conflict is a Nash equilibrium of a material game

- The approach here will be different because conflict will not be the Nash equilibrium of the material game
- Conflict rationalised in the approach here by incorporating emotions and expressive choice by applying Rabin's (AER, 1993) theory of fairness.
- Horowitz (*Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 1985),  
'A bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory'.

- Sambanis (PoP, 2004) – emotional and economic theories of civil war can be combined with emotional explanations focusing on the demand side and economic explanations focusing on supply side.
- This paper aims at dealing with the emotional demand side

- Papers that endogenise group approval for violence (Bueno de Mesquita (AJPS, 05), Siqueira & Sandler (JCR, 06), Bueno de Mesquita & Dickson (AJPS, 07)).
- Crackdowns against violence reduce support by weakening opposition - but increase support by reducing opportunity cost of supporting violence and increasing ideological fomentation.
- Ideological fomentation is not endogenised – this paper aims to do that

- Empirical work (Gordon & Arian (JCR, 01), Halperin (JCR, 08), Maoz & McCauley (JCR, 08)) find emotions are central to conflict
- Expressive choice (Brennan & Lomasky (93), Hamlin & Jennings (BJPS,11))
- Heavy emphasis on low probability of individual decisiveness in this paper

# The Game

		Strong Group	
		agg	pass
Weak Group	agg	$-c_{aw}, (R - c_{as})$	$(R - c_{dw}), 0$
	pass	$0, (R - c_{ds})$	$\bar{\alpha}R, (1 - \bar{\alpha})R$

		Strong Group	
		agg	pass
Weak Group	agg	4, 3	1 or 2, 4
	pass	3, 1	1 or 2, 2



Players maximise the following utility function containing material and psychological payoffs

$$U_W(a_W, b_S, c_W) = \pi_W(a_W, b_S) + \tilde{f}_S(b_S, c_W) [1 + f_W(a_W, b_S)]$$

where

$$f_W(a_W, b_S) = \frac{\pi_S(a_W, b_S) - \pi_S^{fair}(b_S)}{\pi_S^{max}(b_S) - \pi_S^{min}(b_S)}$$

and

$$\tilde{f}_S(b_S, c_W) = \frac{\pi_W(c_W, b_S) - \pi_W^{fair}(c_W)}{\pi_W^{max}(c_W) - \pi_W^{min}(c_W)}$$

# Case 1: passivity a dominant strategy for weak group

one member

(agg,agg) is a unique fairness equilibrium.

$$\tilde{f}_s = \frac{-c_{aw} - \frac{1}{2}(R - c_{dw} - c_{aw})}{(R - c_{dw}) + c_{aw}} = -\frac{1}{2}$$

if weak is aggressive,  $f_w = \frac{(R - c_{as}) - (R - c_{ds})}{(R - c_{ds}) - (R - c_{as})} = -1$

if weak is passive,  $f_w = \frac{(R - c_{ds}) - (R - c_{ds})}{(R - c_{ds}) - (R - c_{as})} = 0$

so in a 2 player game weak choose aggression if

$$-c_{aw} - \frac{1}{2}[1 - 1] > 0 - \frac{1}{2}[1 - 0]$$

or

$$\frac{1}{2c_{aw}} > 1$$

- (pass, pass) cannot be a fairness equilibrium
- If the strong group held the belief that the weak group believes that they will play passive then  $\tilde{f}_w = 0$
- This means psychological payoffs drop out – so best response to passivity by the weak group is aggression by the strong group
- So for the strong group - passivity by the weak group does not provide an incentive for reciprocation

# Case 1: n members

Emotional member will choose aggression if

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{material payoffs from aggression} \\ -\pi_{aw}c_{aw} + \pi_{pw}0 - \pi_{dw}c_{aw} + \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{emotional payoffs from aggression} \\ +\pi_{aw}0 + \pi_{dw}0 - \pi_{pw}\frac{1}{2}(1 - \theta_{jw}) + \pi_{pw}0\theta_{jw} > \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{material payoffs from passivity} \\ -\pi_{aw}c_{aw} + \pi_{pw}0 - \pi_{dw}0 + \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{emotional payoffs from passivity} \\ \pi_{aw}0(1 - \theta_{jw}) - \pi_{aw}\frac{1}{2}\theta_{jw} - \pi_{dw}\frac{1}{2} - \pi_{pw}\frac{1}{2} \end{array}$$

which reduces to (noting that  $1 = \pi_a + \pi_p + \pi_d$ )

$$\theta_{jw} > \frac{\pi_{dw} (2c_{aw} - 1)}{1 - \pi_{dw}}$$

- $\theta$  measures extent to which group decision is absorbed psychologically
- if  $\theta = 0$  fully absorbed (non-expressive)  
if  $\theta = 1$  not absorbed (fully expressive) - then condition is  $\frac{1}{2c_{aw}} > \pi_{dw}$ .  
Can label this as indignation.

- As group size increases condition for emotional members to choose aggression is more likely to hold so long as their choice is expressive to some extent ( $\theta_j > 0$ ) because  $\pi_d$  gets smaller
- Is minority support sufficient for violence to happen?
- Is  $\theta$  potentially endogenous? Literature on the superiority of emotional over cognitive appeals in politics.
- Strong group chooses agg in response to weak group because (noting that  $\tilde{f}_w = -1$ ), for 2-player case (extends to n-player)

$$(R - c_{as}) - 1 \left[ 1 - \frac{1}{2} \right] > 0 - 1 \left[ 1 + \frac{1}{2} \right]$$

## Case 2: passivity not a dominant strategy for weak group

- Now potentially two fairness equilibria (agg,agg) and (pass,pass)
- same as before for (agg,agg)
- for (pass, pass)
- now

$$\tilde{f}_s = \frac{\bar{\alpha}R - \frac{1}{2}\bar{\alpha}R}{\bar{\alpha}R - 0} = \frac{1}{2}$$

- and  $f_w = \frac{1}{2}$  if passive, and if deviate and choose aggression  $f_w = -\frac{1}{2}$
- weak choose passivity

$$\theta_{jw} > \frac{\pi_{dw} (2(R(1 - \bar{\alpha}) - c_{dw}) - 1)}{1 - \pi_{dw}}$$

- Strong Group

$\tilde{f}_w = \frac{1}{2}$  will choose passivity over aggression if

$$\theta_{js} > \frac{\pi_{ds} (2(\bar{\alpha}R - c_{ds}) - 1)}{1 - \pi_{ds}}$$

- (pass, pass) Pareto superior to (agg, agg)
- Compare with condition for (agg, agg) with (pass, pass).  
Same who support aggression are roughly the same who support passivity (and vice versa).  
Those that feel indignation feel obligation.
- If minority is enough for (agg, agg) then (pass, pass) may not be an equilibrium because it needs a majority.  
In first case, expressiveness causes conflict, in the second a lack of expressiveness causes conflict.



- Focus of Fearon's quote was on members of the weak group.
- This is a focus of this paper – but it also shifts attention to the strong group.
- In case 1, conflict arises partly because the strong group members (correctly) do not see any sacrifice on the part of the weak group if the weak group chooses passivity.
- In case 2 they see sacrifice and may be willing to reciprocate.

- Consider incomplete information

Is passivity the material dominant strategy for the weak group?

Might provide a basis for conflict to emerge as a fairness equilibrium when the weak struggles to convince the strong group that passivity involves sacrifice that merits reciprocation.

- Are reciprocal aggression & passivity symmetric? Social psychology literature suggests negative reciprocity is stronger than positive reciprocity

Baumeister et al *Rev. of General Psychology* (2001) 'Bad is stronger than good' and Offerman (EER, 2002), 'Hurting hurts more than helping helps'.

Indignation does not link with obligation?

- The analysis hinges on  $\theta > 0$ . Is this testable?