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**: $-c_{aw}, (R - c_{as})$, $(R - c_{dw}), 0$
- **pass**: $0, (R - c_{ds})$, $\bar{\alpha}R, (1 - \bar{\alpha})R$

**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

\[ f_w(a_w, b_s) = \frac{\pi_s(a_w, b_s) - \pi_{s, \text{fair}}(b_s)}{\pi_{s, \text{max}}(b_s) - \pi_{s, \text{min}}(b_s)} \]

and

\[ \tilde{f}_s(b_s, c_w) = \frac{\pi_w(c_w, b_s) - \pi_{w, \text{fair}}(c_w)}{\pi_{w, \text{max}}(c_w) - \pi_{w, \text{min}}(c_w)} \]
Case 1: passivity a dominant strategy for weak group
one member

(agg,agg) is a unique fairness equilibrium.

\[ f_s = \frac{-c_{aw} - \frac{1}{2} (R - c_{dw} - c_{aw})}{(R - c_{dw}) + c_{aw}} = -\frac{1}{2} \]

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

\[
- \pi_{aw} c_{aw} + \pi_{pw} 0 - \pi_{dw} c_{aw} + \
\]

\[
+ \pi_{aw} 0 + \pi_{dw} 0 - \pi_{pw} \frac{1}{2} (1 - \theta_{jw}) + \pi_{pw} 0 \theta_{jw} > \
\]

\[
- \pi_{aw} c_{aw} + \pi_{pw} 0 - \pi_{dw} 0 + \
\]

\[
\pi_{aw} 0 (1 - \theta_{jw}) - \pi_{aw} \frac{1}{2} \theta_{jw} - \pi_{dw} \frac{1}{2} - \pi_{pw} \frac{1}{2} \
\]
which reduces to (noting that $1 = π_a + π_p + π_d$)

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

- $θ$ measures extent to which group decision is absorbed psychologically
- if $θ = 0$ fully absorbed (non-expressive)
- if $θ = 1$ not absorbed (fully expressive) - then condition is $\frac{1}{2c_{aw}} > π_{dw}$.
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 $f_w = -1$), 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

\[ \tilde{f}_s = \frac{\alpha R - \frac{1}{2} \alpha R}{\alpha R - 0} = \frac{1}{2} \]

and \( f_w = \frac{1}{2} \) if passive, and if deviate and choose aggression \( f_w = -\frac{1}{2} \)

- weak choose passivity

\[ \theta_{jw} > \frac{\pi_{dw} \left( 2 \left( R \left( 1 - \bar{\alpha} \right) - c_{dw} \right) - 1 \right)}{1 - \pi_{dw}} \]
Strong Group
\[ f_w = \frac{1}{2} \] 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?