Coordination: Constitutions and Revolutions

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LSE

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Introduction

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Goal: Understand the role of coordination in maintenance and dissolution of public order (rule of law and revolutions)

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- models of revolution that extends the logic of coordination games to explain their "predictable unpredictability" (Kuran)

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Applications:

- Why is democracy very stable in some places and not in others?
- Why Arab Spring (Occupy Wall St, London Riots) so surprising?
- What do leaders do?

Coordination games

Stag hunt

		Player 2	
		Stag	Hare
Player 1	Stag	2,2	0,1
	Hare	1,0	1,1

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Battle of the sexes

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Distinctive feature: No dominant strategy for either player; rather, rewards for matching counterpart's strategy.

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- **Multiple equilibria**: i.e. more than one self-sustaining situation
- **Unpredictability**:
  - we don't know what the outcome will be
  - outcomes depend on expectations
  - expectations (and thus outcomes) could change!
- **Coordination devices**: some external factor (a leader, the weather, current events) could affect people's expectations (and thus outcomes)

Weingast (1997) overview: Policing the state

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But constitutions can be coordinating devices.

Simplified version of Weingast (1997)'s pure coordination model

		Group A: Acquiesce	Group A: Challenge
Group B	Acquiesce	2,2	1,1
	Challenge	1,2	7,7

Nash Equilibria: {Acquiesce, Acquiesce} and {Challenge, Challenge}

Weingast (1997): pure coordination model

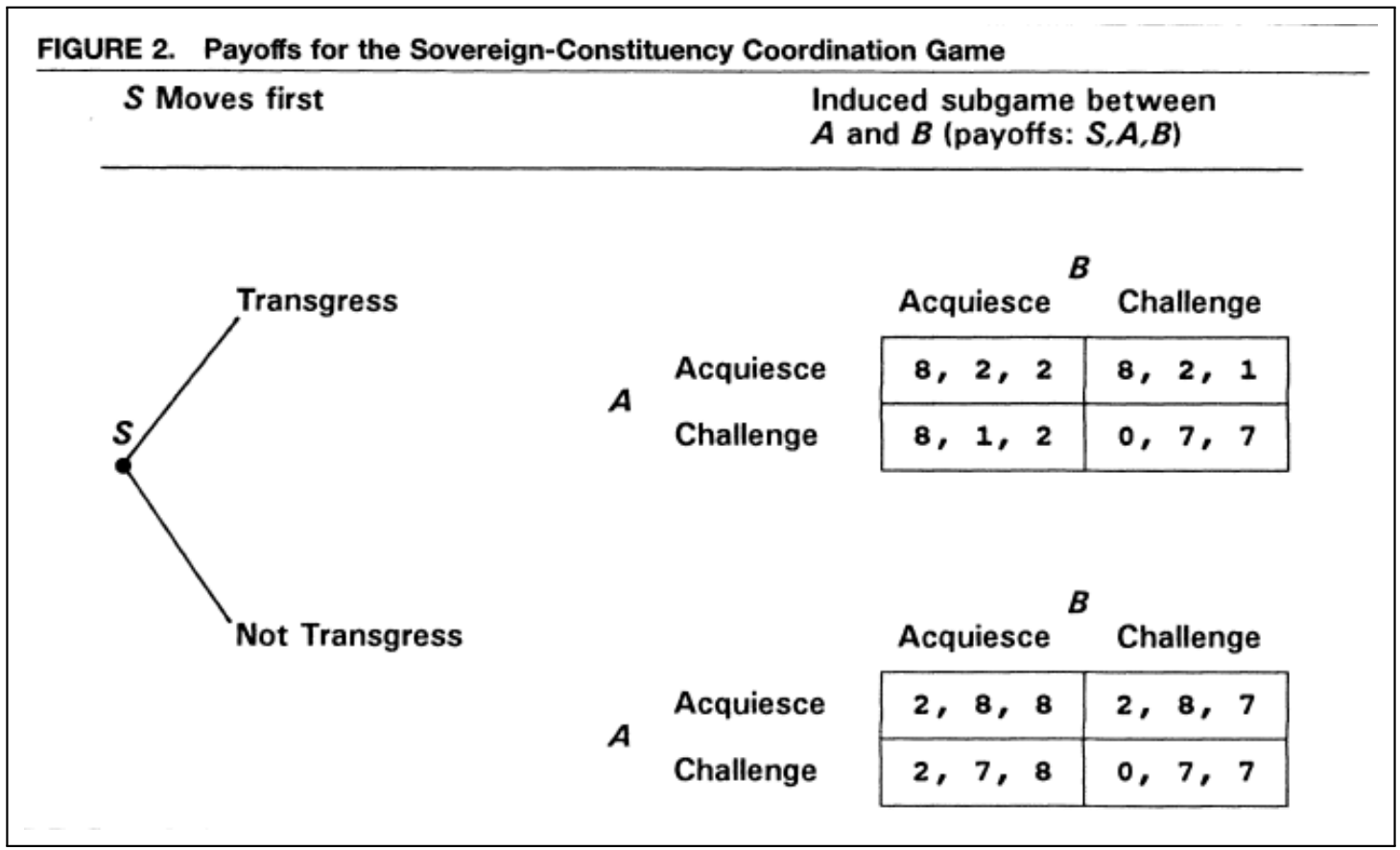

FIGURE 2. Payoffs for the Sovereign-Constituency Coordination Game

S Moves first

Induced subgame between *A* and *B* (payoffs: *S*,*A*,*B*)

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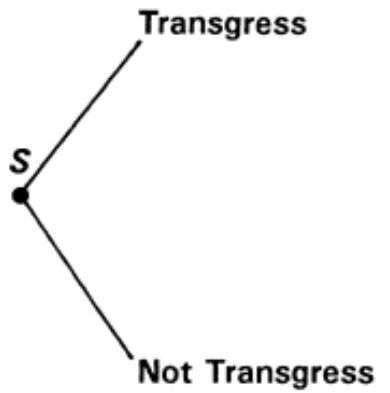

		B: Acquiesce	B: Challenge
A	Acquiesce	8, 2, 2	8, 2, 1
A	Challenge	8, 1, 2	0, 7, 7

		B: Acquiesce	B: Challenge
A	Acquiesce	2, 8, 8	2, 8, 7
A	Challenge	2, 7, 8	0, 7, 7

SPNEs: {T; Acq(T), Acq(NT); Acq(T), Acq(NT)} and {NT; Ch(T), Acq(NT); Ch(T), Acq(NT)}

i.e. there are two SPNEs: 1) the sovereign transgresses and groups A and B both acquiesce regardless of the sovereign's action; 2) the sovereign does not transgress and groups A and B both challenge if the sovereign does transgress and acquiesce if the sovereign does not transgress

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Coordination is the whole problem here. Realistic?

- **Coordination important?** What if only 100 people had protested in Cairo on Police Day (Jan 25) 2011?
- **Coordination difficult?**
  - Communication about illegal actions difficult; communication itself may be difficult
  - Defining transgression may be difficult (goes outside the model)
  - Trust may be a problem, e.g. A uncertain about B's payoffs (goes outside the model)

Constitutions as coordinating devices

Key point: "One does not stop a coup d'état by an article of the constitution", but constitutions may help coordinate expectations in a way that stops a coup:

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They solve coordination problems by telling us what actions will/should be challenged. Other potential coordinating devices:

- Historical events
- Widely-shared values (congruence thesis)
- Views of leaders

Actions on and off the equilibrium path

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- In UK, after an election the sovereign chooses the leader of the leading party as Prime Minister. (What would happen if she didn't?)

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Who is in charge? Our expectations are.

Maintaining and dissolving order

So far, viewing coordination games as a way of understanding **stability**: why sovereign transgresses in some cases and not in others.

Also useful for understanding massive and unpredictable **changes**.

Ceaușescu's last speech

Logic of collective action?

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- Marginal effectiveness that increases with number of participants?

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This week's reading (Kuran, 1991): an account of bandwagon effects (threshold models, Granovetter 1978), with application to 1989.

Bandwagon

Kuran: Basic model

Assumptions:

- Each individual i has private preference x^i , where higher x^i indicates more anti-government feelings
- S is the percent of the population publicly opposing the regime
- Net benefit of publicly expressing opposition depends positively on x^i and S (e.g. oppose if $b(S, x_i) > 0$, where $\frac{\partial b}{\partial S} > 0$ and $\frac{\partial b}{\partial x^i} > 0$)

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(**Note:** Kuran recognizes that honestly expressing opposition itself is rewarding; c.f. Olson)

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Implications:

- Each individual i has threshold level of S, which Kuran calls T^i, at which he or she will publicly oppose regime
- Level of public opposition sensitive to small changes in thresholds

Illustration

Consider threshold sequence* A in a ten-person population:

$$A = \{0, 2, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10\}$$

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Starting from 0, equilibrium level of opposition: 1

Now consider slight variant:

$$A' = \{0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10\}$$

Starting from 0, equilibrium level of opposition: 9.

*Each number of the sequence indicates a threshold value T^i, i.e. a number of others who would need to publicly oppose the regime before a given individual i would publicly oppose the regime.

Explaining puzzles of protest

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- **Unpredictability of protest**: Changes in expectations/beliefs, small changes in information/preferences can produce large changes in behavior
- **Contagion of protest**: External events can cause changes in expectations/beliefs and/or information/preferences

Coordination problems (Weingast, Kuran) vs. collective action problems (Olson)

	Coordination problems	**Collective action problems**
Typical attitude:	"I'll do it if you do it"	"It's not worth it for me to contribute no matter what you do"
Typical solution (1):	Change beliefs about others' actions	Change beliefs about cost and benefit of own contribution
Typical solution (2):	Safety in numbers	Selective benefits

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- In Weingast's "pure coordination" model, a leader can convince the citizens to play "challenge" (even just by convincing A that B will play "challenge" and vice versa)

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- In Weingast's "pure coordination" model, a leader can convince the citizens to play "challenge" (even just by convincing A that B will play "challenge" and vice versa)
- In Weingast's "transgression" game, a leader can convince the citizens to play the grim trigger strategy (even just by convincing A that B will play "grim trigger" and vice versa)

What is leadership? (2)

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- In Kuran's model, a leader can initiate a transition simply by openly expressing opposition
- In Kuran's model, a leader can initiate a transition through actions or words that reduce others' fears of persecution, increase their frustration with the regime, increase their frustration with falsifying their preferences, etc.

(For more, see Ahlquist and Levi, 2011).

Egyptian revolution, 2011

Egyptian revolution, 2011 (2)

Key events:

- late-2010, early 2011: Tunisian Revolution
  - 17 Dec 2010: Muhammad Bouazizi self-immolates after fruit cart confiscated
  - 14 Jan 2011: Pres. Ben Ali steps down after escalating protests and military defection
  - Protests in Egypt: "We are next, we are next, Ben Ali tell Mubarak he is next" (LeVine, "Tunisia: How the US got it wrong")

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- 25 Jan 2011 (Police Day holiday): coordinated demonstrations against police brutality (partly organized on Facebook) converge on Tahrir Square (later dispersed)
- 28 Jan 2011 ("Day of Rage"): Tahrir Square recaptured by protestors
- 11 Feb 2011 Mubarak steps down

Asmaa Mahfouz, 18 Jan 2011

Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution

Key messages in Asmaa Mahfouz video

- **Changing beliefs about others' actions**: "I'm going down on January 25, and from now until then I'm going to distribute fliers in the street every day."
- **Changing perceived payoffs of participating**: "You'll be responsible for what happens to us on the street while you sit at home" (i.e. a coordination failure will be costly to you!)
- **Emphasizing potential effectiveness**: "Your presence with us will make a difference, a big difference!" "So long as you come down with us, there will be hope."

How do we explain social outcomes? (1)

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When there are multiple equilibria, what is the cause of one equilibrium being selected rather than another?

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Explanations of *which* equilibrium is chosen tend to be *ex post* rationalizations.

How do we explain social outcomes? (2)

My claim: it is valuable to think clearly about arbitrariness.

- When are there likely to be multiple equilibria?
- Why is it hard to change from one equilibrium to another?
- How do societies move from one equilibrium to another?

Summary

Key points from main readings:

- Weingast:
  - Coordination among citizens is vital for policing the state.
  - Due to multiple equilibria, it is difficult to predict whether/how much the state will be constrained.
  - Constitutions, leaders, galvanizing events may contribute to rule of law, but they may not be sufficient.
  - A mechanism by which civic culture/mass beliefs explain regime types.

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  - Constitutions, leaders, galvanizing events may contribute to rule of law, but they may not be sufficient.
  - A mechanism by which civic culture/mass beliefs explain regime types.
- Kuran:
  - When costs or benefits of participation depend on others' participation, bandwagon effects.
  - Mass action is predictably unpredictable, especially in illiberal regimes.

Next time: conflict and commitment.

Thank you!