

Protest

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Day 4, Session 2, 9 January 2014

Plan



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- ▶ Public
- ▶ Non-violent (at least to start)
- ▶ Usually costly to participants (dangerous, illegal, uncomfortable, possibility of reprisals)
- ▶ Sometimes very consequential: peaceful regime changes (e.g. Egypt 2011, 2013); policy changes (e.g. Indian independence, U.S. civil rights movement)

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We're going to think about how protests work, and about the future of protest.

Plan (2)

Some questions about protests:

- ▶ Why do participants participate?
- ▶ What do demonstrations demonstrate?
- ▶ Why/when are they effective?



Tahrir Square, 1 Feb 2011 (Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images, via *The Guardian*)

Some interesting examples

Logic of coordination

What do demonstrations demonstrate?

Signaling theory

Protests as costly signals

Values and protests

Conclusion

Ceaușescu's last speech, Dec. 1989



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

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Puzzles of protest

- ▶ Why are mass protests sometimes so surprising?
- ▶ Why do they seem to be contagious?



Puzzles of protest

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- ▶ Why do they seem to be contagious?

Key point: costs/benefits of protest depend on others' participation.

Coordination games

Stag hunt

		Player 2	
		Stag	Hare
Player 1	Stag	2,2	0,1
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Distinctive feature: No dominant strategy for either player; rather, rewards for matching counterpart's strategy.

Coordination in Asmaa Mahfouz video



Fundamental message is: I will be there (with others) and therefore you should also be there.

- ▶ Strongly communicating own plan: “I’m going down on January 25, and from now until then I’m going to distribute fliers in the street every day.”
- ▶ Cleverly highlighting cost of not coordinating: “You’ll be responsible for what happens to us on the street while you sit at home”
- ▶ 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.”

Bandwagon





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- ▶ 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
- ▶ An individual's 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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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

Take a set of 10 individuals, and call A the ordered set of their threshold values T^i :

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

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Now consider slight variant:

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

Starting from 0, equilibrium level of opposition: 9.

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

Olson vs. Kuran



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Typical situation in Kuran: a member of a group deciding whether to join in to a protest. Decision depends on others' participation because the **cost** of participating depends hugely on others' participation – **safety in numbers**.

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Helps explain why decisive protests against Ceaușescu's began at a rally (earlier demonstrations after World Cup victory); why Egyptian demonstrations tended to follow Friday prayers.

Some interesting examples

Logic of coordination

What do demonstrations demonstrate?

- Signaling theory

- Protests as costly signals

- Values and protests

Conclusion

Signaling theory





Key idea of signaling models

When there is information asymmetry (hidden types) and incentives to lie, the informed party can communicate through observable actions if

- ▶ the action is costly
- ▶ the cost depends on the hidden information
- ▶ incentives are such that the types “separate”: “high types” do a lot of the action, “low types” do a little, etc.

Pronking as signaling



Sender	Receiver	Hidden info	Signaling device	If signal is successful, receiver thinks ...
Antelope	Lion	Antelope's speed, fitness	Jumping	"Only a very strong and fast gazelle can (afford to) do that; I won't bother chasing him."
Antelope	Potential mate	Antelope's survival fitness	Jumping	"Only a very strong and fast gazelle can (afford to) do that; I will mate with him."

Job market signaling



Michael Spence

Suppose workers' ability is unobservable, and education is more costly for less able workers. Then it might be an equilibrium for able workers to get a degree and less able workers to not get a degree – *even if education has no other value to anyone.*

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Sender	Receiver	Hidden info	Signaling device	If signal is successful, receiver thinks ...
Worker	Employer	Worker's ability	Education	"Only an able worker finds school tolerable; I will hire him."



Protests as costly signals (1)

Actions taken by protesters can be quite costly:

- ▶ Actions that are risky because they are **illegal** – protest *per se* in repressive regimes; trespassing (“sit-ins”, Occupy)
- ▶ Actions that are intrinsically **uncomfortable or painful** – sleeping out in the cold, hunger strikes, self-immolation

Protests as costly signals (2)



What information is conveyed by protests? (What do demonstrations demonstrate, and to whom?)



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Some ideas, focused on anti-regime protests:

- ▶ Protests convey information about the regime to other citizens (Lohmann 1994)
- ▶ Protests convey information about protestors' preferences to other citizens (Kricheli et al 2011)
- ▶ Protests convey information about citizens' preferences to the regime and to outside observers

Basic idea of Kricheli et al (2011)



Kricheli et al (2011) think of a demonstration as a prelude to a revolution:

- ▶ Participants pay the cost of participating in order to communicate to others their discontent with the regime
- ▶ All citizens observe how many people protest and decide whether to participate in the next, decisive clash (second round)

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Related to models in which citizens participate in elections in order to signal their preferences (not just to determine the winner)

Kricheli et al (2011): Empirics



Predictions:

- ▶ “More repressive autocratic regimes are less likely to experience civil protest.”
- ▶ “The more repressive the regime is, the more dangerous civil protests are once they occur.”

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Findings:

- ▶ Repression negatively correlated with regime breakdown
- ▶ The occurrence of a protest more likely to lead to breakdown in a more repressive regime.

Other messages of protests



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The choice of tactics – e.g. unarmed confrontation with security forces – also suggests a desire to win support by **provoking visible oppression**.

⇒ success of protests depends on media, but also on values: justice, rights, compassion.

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Summing up

- ▶ Importance of coordination in (costly) protest/demonstrations, because usually the cost depends (negatively) on turnout \implies unpredictability, contagion
- ▶ Demonstrations communicate information (to other citizens, to regime, to outsiders) in part because participation is costly for the participants