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How Ideology Channels Indeterminate Emotions into Armed Mobilization

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Scholars have pointed to the importance of resentment (Petersen 2002), hatred (Kaufman 2001), fear (McDoom 2012), and moral outrage (Wood 2003) to explain the emergence of civil war and the participation of individuals in violent groups. These qualitative analyses have been complemented by aggregate-level studies about grievances and indignation (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013; Costalli and Ruggeri 2015). Broadly speaking, emotions[1] act as mechanisms in a causal chain, according to this literature. They are the result of a shock or changed structural condition and can then contribute to certain action tendencies associated with behavioral manifestations, including armed mobilization.[2]

In this article, I synthesize and develop existing literature by using a dialectical approach. Initially, I adopt the thesis that emotions, understood as individually held mental states, contribute to armed mobilization. According to this individual-level perspective, we should observe that the connection between shocks and emotions, and between emotions and action tendencies, have a certain regularity across individuals. However, in reality both connections are indeterminate and volatile.

This brings me to a second thesis: group-based emotions contribute to armed mobilization. On a group level, ideology as a specific kind of collective frame can act as the connecting piece that channels meandering emotions into a given direction and prescribes a corresponding behavioral response. However, individuals within groups can still have a multitude of mixed emotions even while this group process is taking place.

Synthesizing these two theses, I argue that group-based emotions contribute to armed mobilization, but that their effect across individuals remains indeterminate. As a result of this reasoning, one could empirically observe whether a "net effect" of shocks on emotions and ensuing action tendencies are associated with armed mobilization. This conceptual innovation encompasses both the notion of indeterminacy, based on an individual level understanding of emotion, and the concept of collective frames, necessary for group-based emotions.

AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL PERSPECTIVE ON EMOTIONS

If we conceptualize emotions as emerging within and essentially held by individuals, then we need to subscribe to two assumptions to be able to connect emotions with armed mobilization. First, we have to assume that certain objective events, or shocks, produce specific emotional reactions across individuals with certain regularity. We must also assume that certain emotions prompt specific action tendencies, leading up to armed mobilization, with certain regularity. In order to assess the accuracy of these two assumptions, I first introduce the main components of existing theoretical models.

As a starting point, most authors resort to exogenous shocks or conditions. Petersen (2002) talks about "structural changes"—for example, a change in regimes or a drift into anarchy. Costalli and Ruggeri (2015) speak of "emotional shocks," provoked by massive, indiscriminate violence that can be experienced either individually or as a collective (see also McDoom 2012). Theories related to grievances see the starting point in changes in structural conditions leading to rising expectations or reversals of political status (Gurr 1970; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013). Subsequently, the perception or belief-formation related to these events or conditions would then lead to certain dominant emotional reactions. For example, resentment could be the result of a change in ethnic status hierarchies (Petersen 2002), and indignation could be the result of a perceived wrong done to a third party (Costalli and Ruggeri 2015). Other typical emotional reactions include anger, used in the frustration-aggression model of relative deprivation theory (Gurr 1970), or hatred, as used in Kaufman's (2001) symbolic politics theory.

However, if we regard emotions as mental states held individually, the connecting line between shocks and emotions is not straight. Elster (2011) speaks of the "indeterminacy" of emotions; the same interpretation of a structural shock can lead to many different emotional reactions, such as fear *and* hatred or fear *and* anger. Also, different beliefs can lead to the same emotional reaction. For example, anger may be caused both by unjust treatment and by obstacles to the realization of one's goals.

One could also argue, as do Frieze, Hymer, and Greenberg in their study of crime victims (1987), that the psychological reaction to a shock involves a sequence of emotional responses. Immediate reactions to crime victimization, for example, include numbness, disbelief, and loneliness. In the mid-term, this leads to feelings that alternate between fear and anger. Later, this can turn into either growth-promoting sensations if coping worked, or depression and continuous anxiety if it did not.

Both the indeterminacy and the volatility of emotional responses make the empirical modeling of emotions in processes of armed mobilization extremely challenging. In the past, authors have grouped emotions under broader categories which reduce their conceptual precision but capture more

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of the actually felt reality, like Pearlman (2013) did using "dispiriting" and "emboldening" emotions, or Gurr (1970) using the broad term of "discontent," for generally negative emotionality.

If we understand emotional processes as essentially individual, we also need to subscribe to a second assumption to connect emotions with armed mobilization—namely, that certain emotions imply specific action tendencies across individuals with some regularity. Anger is one of the most often mentioned examples in this regard. It is a "particularly powerful mobilizing force that motivates people to take and support risky, confrontational and punitive actions" (Brader and Marcus 2013). However, even anger can trigger very different action tendencies.

Elster's indeterminacy thus also applies to the assumed link between emotions and action tendencies. The same emotion might trigger very different action tendencies in different individuals, and the same action tendency might be provoked by different emotions. Just think of fear and the classical fight-or-flight reaction (Cannon 1915). Fear has been identified both as "dispiriting emotion" that inhibits political agency (Pearlman 2013), and as able to activate political participation (Morrison and Rockmore 2016). Criminologists have long debated whether fear mobilizes crime victims into neighborhood watch organizations or not, and the literature has not provided any consensus (Lab 1990). Thus, even a relatively common and recurring shock associated with fear (of crime) does not produce a specific behavioral reaction with any regularity.

To sum up, the thesis that individually held emotions per se contribute to armed mobilization is not tenable. We cannot assume that there is a straight line connecting shocks with emotions, and emotions with action tendencies across individuals. Rather, one shock may lead to multiple emotions, and as many or more different action tendencies. Depending on individual level characteristics, including personality traits, attitudes, and physical capabilities, a large set of behavioral reactions can be expected as a result of one and the same shock.

A GROUP LEVEL PERSPECTIVE ON EMOTIONS

But does it make sense to understand emotions as individually-held mental states in the context of collective action, such as armed mobilization? Social movement researchers have paid particular attention to emotions as ingredients in protest and participation in social organizations. Emotions play a key role in activating citizens, forming group bonds, and keeping members inside the organization. Jasper (2011) stresses the importance of shared and reciprocal emotions. Shared emotions are those that members of a group hold in common against outsiders (e.g., hatred and anger), and reciprocal emotions are those that help establish bonds between group members (e.g., love and trust). Armed groups cultivate shared emotions through activities targeting out-groups, like civilian abuse, and develop reciprocal emotions through in-group oriented military training and related feelings of brotherhood (Nussio and Oppenheim 2014).

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According to this sociological view, we need to understand emotions as cultivated within groups, rather than as spontaneous, individual reactions to shocks. If we accept this interpretation of emotions as group-based, the connection between shocks and emotions, and between emotions and action tendencies, may be much more direct than implied above using an individual level perspective. What is the connecting piece?

Social movement theorists (Benford and Snow 2000), and, recently, conflict scholars (Shesterinina 2016; McDoom 2012) refer to the importance of collective frames for group formation and persistence. Frames can provide people with group identification, help them understand shocks, and guide their emotions into a specific direction. Frames may provide people with guidance for action as well. While the concept of frames can apply broadly to many types of collective action, the specific frame responsible for the case of armed mobilization are frames of ideology. While collective frames can give shape to all kinds of social groups, an ideology is a specific kind of collective frame geared towards political action (Costalli and Ruggeri 2017).

Gutierrez and Wood (2014; see also Ugarriza and Craig 2013) define ideology as "a more or less systematic set of ideas that includes the identification of a referent group (a class, ethnic, or other social group), an enunciation of the grievances or challenges that the group confronts, the identification of objectives on behalf of that group (political change – or defense against its threat), and a (perhaps vaguely defined) program of action." This definition alludes to several aspects in the process of armed mobilization.

After a shock or a change in structural conditions, individuals might be particularly keen on identifying with a larger referent group. "Moral shocks," as Jasper (2011) calls them, produce a sensation that "the world is not as one had thought." During times of moral shock, frames of injustice and grievances that may be associated with anger against the source of injustice—often the government—come in handy for the recruitment of new members. However, while political entrepreneurs may use such frames instrumentally, ideologies often stiffen over time and reduce the margin of maneuver for such entrepreneurs.

Additionally, it is not clear whether certain frames create a moral shock or whether such frames tap into existing discontent. In any case, there is evidence that the frames used

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by armed groups channel emotions into specific directions by resorting to "hostile myths" about opponents (Kaufman 2006) and hate-inciting stories (Sternberg 2003). These frames also promote certain actions through emotions. "When men's ideational systems prove inadequate to their purposes, and particularly when they become intensely and irremediably discontented because goals are unattainable by old norms, they are susceptible to new ideas which justify different courses of action" (Gurr 1970), including the use of violence.

Ideology can channel, reinforce, and sustain emotions for members of the same group. However, not everybody has to feel a certain way just because he or she belongs to a certain class or ethnic group. Furthermore, ideology can channel behavioral reactions of emotions for members of the same group. But not all members of a specific group inevitably engage in armed mobilization. Historical examples show that a relatively modest number of usually young, male recruits, who are most exposed to peer pressure, may suffice.

To sum up, if emotions are understood as group-based, they can contribute to our understanding of armed mobilization through collective frames. However, this group-level view of emotions and their impact on armed mobilization hinges on the availability of an opportunity for action. Without a network or group in the vicinity,[3] different emotional and behavioral reactions may cancel each other out and lead to nothing. Hence, opportunity remains a necessary but insufficient condition for armed mobilization (Costalli and Ruggeri 2015; Wood 2003).

COMBINING INDETERMINACY AND IDEOLOGY

The present theoretical discussion has implications for empirical research. While there is no straight line between shocks, emotions and action tendencies, ideology as a defined set of frames can tie these three elements together to explain armed mobilization. Hence, research should focus more closely on the role of ideology in promoting shocks, cultivating emotions, and shaping action tendencies. This requires more ethnographic research in civil war settings that concentrates on the use of ideology and its interlinkages with the emotional household of communities.

However, even considering the channeling capacity of ideology, we cannot assume that one shock leads to one emotion, and that one emotion leads to one action tendency. Drawing on Elster's (2011) notion of indeterminacy, a behavioral net effect of emotions might be a fruitful conceptual innovation for this field. Individuals have mixed feelings and groups can be exposed to any number of emotions that pull their members into different directions. When understanding emotions as group-based, however, the result of divergent emotions is an overall direction of impact—the behavioral net effect.

Research focusing on the net effect of group-based emotions on armed mobilization might consist of at least three empirical steps. As a first step, group-based emotions could be captured using individual level surveys in different communities. If shocks like indiscriminate violence produce emotional reactions, we should observe different types and intensities of emotions, such as discontent, in communities affected by shocks as compared to similar unaffected communities. As a second step, we would need to estimate the level of armed mobilization across communities. If certain group-based emotions like discontent, hatred or resentment, fomented and sustained by available ideological frames, affect group behavior, we should see higher levels of armed mobilization among communities that show a higher prevalence of such emotions. Finally, a theory of group-based emotions, combining the logic of indeterminacy and the channeling capacity of ideology, would receive support if we observe co-variation between types and intensities of emotions and levels of armed mobilization across communities, when controlling for complementary theories like opportunity to rebel.

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NOTES

1. The field of emotion studies in political psychology is much broader than outlined in this essay, which focuses merely on the effects of emotions on armed mobilization. For a definition of emotions, see the contribution by Costalli and Ruggeri in this symposium.
2. By armed mobilization, I mean both the emergence of non-state armed groups promoted by first moving leaders and the participation of followers in existing groups. While there are important differences between the mobilization of first movers and followers, a discussion of these differences lies beyond the scope of this essay.
3. For the recent phenomenon of "foreign fighters," the self-understanding of community is not bound to physical closeness. This differs from traditional civil wars where territorial presence of an armed organization has been the most important predictor of mobilization, like in Colombia (Ugarriza and Nussio 2015). If ideology detaches people from their physical space, the structural conditions that affect them might also be detached from the physical space they live in.

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