

# Lecture 14: Logic of Collective Action

March 31, 2015

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# Revolution Game

**Objective: choose whether to overthrow the authoritarian regime or accept the status quo**

- 2/3 of the class required to successfully overthrow the regime
- If the revolution is **successful**, everyone receives 2 pts but participants pay a cost of 1pt.
  - Nonparticipants = 2 pts
  - Participants = 1 pt
- If the revolution is **unsuccessful**, participants are repressed
  - Nonparticipants = 0 pts
  - Participants = -3pts

# Revolution Game

Choosing occurs at the same time, no communication with your classmates.

Payoffs:



**If the revolution is successful**

Nonparticipants = 2 pts

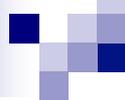
Participants = 1 pt

**If the revolution is unsuccessful**

Nonparticipants = 0 pts

Participants = -3pts

Let's discuss the results, how did you decide?



# Collective Action

Collective Action is valuable/necessary for most political objectives.

Collective action: activity aimed at the provision of a public/collective good.

What do we mean by collective action, and more specifically, political mobilization?









# Logic of Collective Action

Collective Action is valuable/necessary for most political objectives.

- Traditional theories of collective action (e.g. Marxist or social-psychological) assume participation.
- But collective action often fails. Mancur Olson (1971) asks:

Given free-riding, why would anyone rationally participate in collective action?

- Free-riding: problem associated with providing public/collective goods (non-rivalrous and non-excludable) in which people can enjoy them without having to pay for them.

# Logic of Collective Action

Say we need exactly  $k$  number of people to participate for success.

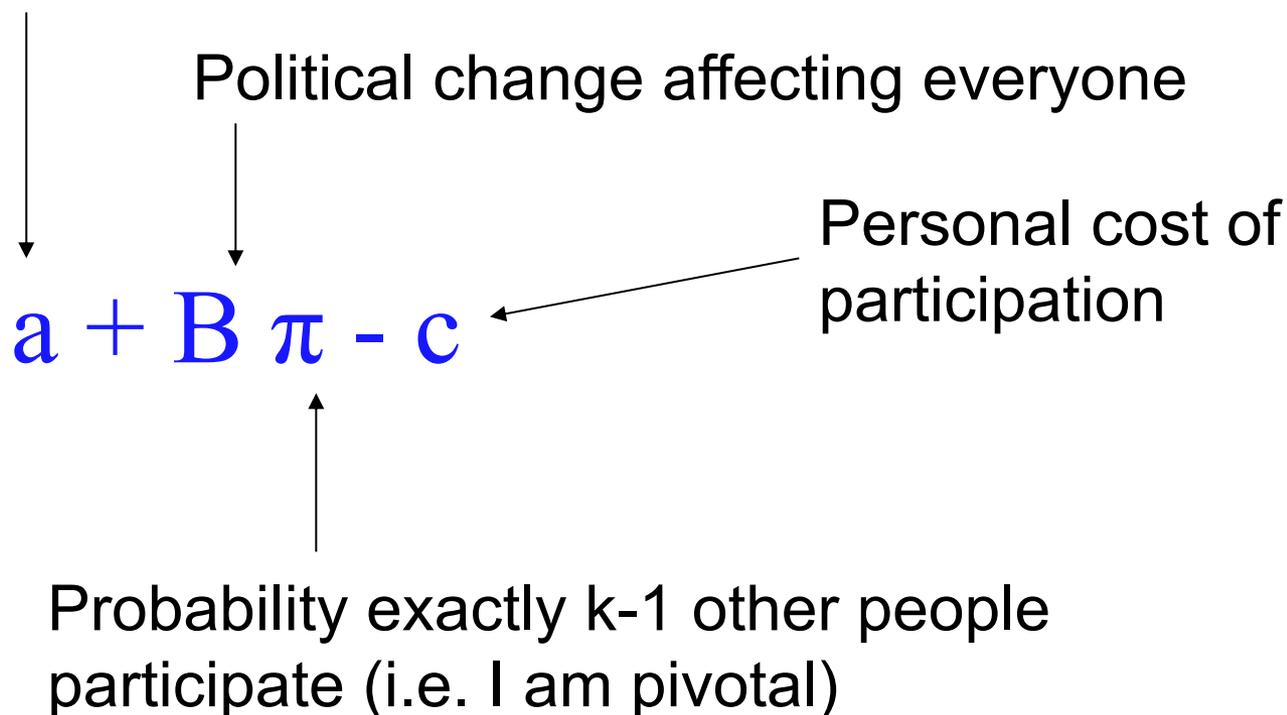
Rational-choice gives us a cost-benefit framework to think about collective action participation:

I will participate if...my personal benefit of participating  $>$  my personal benefit of **not** participating

$$a + B \pi - c > B \sigma - p$$

# Logic of Collective Action

Personal benefit from act of participation



# Logic of Collective Action

Political change affecting everyone



$$B \sigma - p$$

Personal punishment  
From NOT participating



Probability more than  $k-1$  other  
people participate (i.e. I am not pivotal)

# Logic of Collective Action

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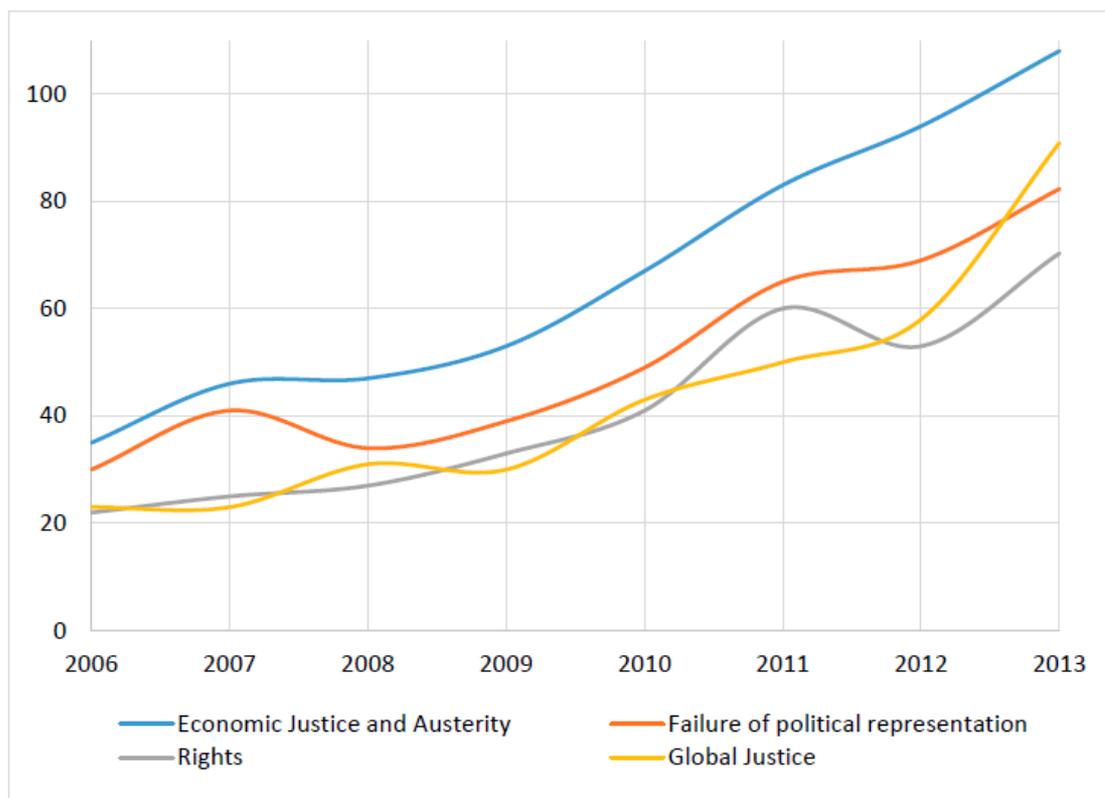
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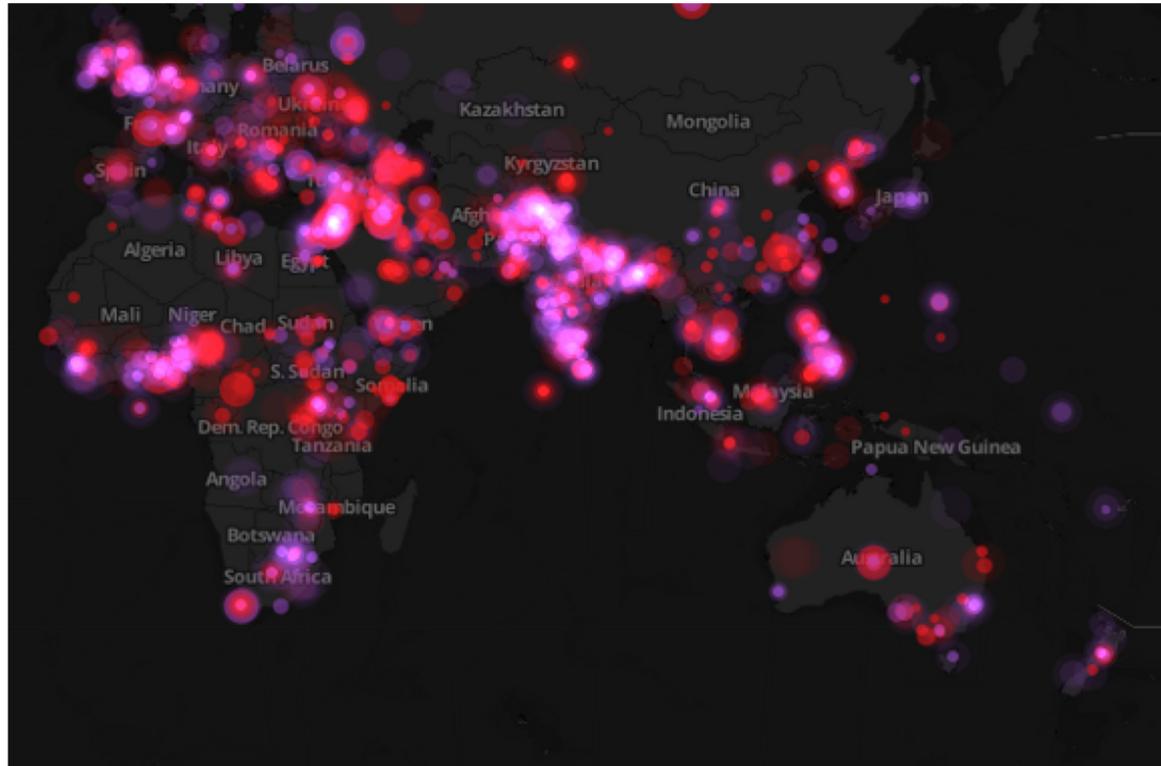
# Behavioral Approach

- Elinor Ostrom (1997) and others ask instead:  
Given free-riding and this rational-choice framework, why do we still see so much collective action?

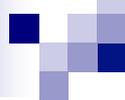


Number of World Protests by Grievance (2006-2013) Source: World Bank

# Collecting and using protest data



Source: GDELT Project



# Factors behind Arab Spring protests

## 1. Grievance

- Economic crisis, corruption

## 2. Emotional trigger

- Self-immolations
- Early violent repression
- Neighborhood demonstration effects

## 3. Sense of impunity

- Size of protests + scale of repression

## 4. Role of social media

- Overcome collective action problems

# Revolution Game, revisited

What changes could be made to our game that would make choosing revolution more likely to succeed?

- Changing the cost-benefit calculation
  - Lower participation costs  $c$
  - Raise non-participation punishment  $p$
  - Raise perceived collective benefits  $B$
  - Requiring a smaller  $k$
  - Overstate likelihood of any individual being pivotal  $\pi$
- Grievances
- Communication
- Being able to see how others were acting
- Staggered timing
- Established group organization
- Activist leaders coordinating



Princeton University students stage walkout in protest of Ferguson grand jury decisions and police brutality, December 04, 2014