Political Consequences of Mass Mobilization for War: A Theory of War, Unionization, and Democratization

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Emergence of mass democracy coincided historically with industrialization, the formation of the working class, and its organization into parties and unions on a national level. However, significant number of countries democratized after their engagements in major wars (e.g., WWI and WWII).

Does war influence democratization?
Wars require governments to raise armies and revenues, which places substantial demand on society. In exchange for meeting these demands, citizens press for democratic reforms. But wars may also militarize society, centralize power, and restrict civil liberties, and thereby promoting the rise of authoritarianism and the establishment of garrison states.

Puzzle: Why do some countries democratize after experiencing mass interstate wars while others don’t?

The political role of organized labor
• Working class has been depicted as “the most consistently pro-democratic force” by scholars such as Moore (1966) and Rueschemeyer et al. (1992).
• It has also been argued that the critical role of the working class explains both the general correlation between capitalism and democracy and the uneven and oft-reversed pattern of democratization.

War and organized labor
• Policy bargain occurs during wartime to effectively allocate labor for the war effort
• War increases government’s demand for labor, which in turn increases
  – Collective bargaining power of unions
  – Incentives for workers to join unions
• Strong unions increase the probability of democratic transition

Building blocks of my argument
• Government is highly dependent on the working class (or labor) during wartime.
• Labor needs to be organized as a group to increase collective bargaining power.
• Organized labor needs to be sustained and unified to maintain that sudden increase in collective bargaining power due to war.
• Democracy lock in increased collective bargaining power of organized labor while economic/political concessions (without democratic reform) doesn’t.
• Democracy and unionization are mutually reinforcing.

Figure 1.1: Critical number for i to join union
Percentage of total population
0 100

Figure 1.2: Critical mass point...cumulative form (Figure 1.3).

Motivation: Individual decisions by workers...in analyzing these decisions in isolation.

Figure 2: Tipping/Threshold Model

(Schelling (1978) and Granovetter (1978)’s “tipping” or “threshold” model)

Motivation: Labor organization as a network game instead of analyzing these decisions in isolation.

Figure 2: Tipping/Threshold Model

Diagrammatics of critical mass
1. Plot a histogram of critical mass points assuming that the distribution of various critical mass points is normal (Figure 1.1).
2. Idealize the histogram into a smooth frequency distribution (Figure 1.2).
3. Convert the frequency distribution to cumulative form (Figure 1.3).

Figure 2: Threshold Model of Unionization

Assumptions:
• Democracy generates redistribution
• Free and fair elections, extension of suffrage, and freedom of association are proxies for democratization

The Effects of War Mobilization on Democracy

Figure 3.1: Mobilization below tipping point
Expected share of union membership
Probability that i joins labor union
0 100
0 100

Figure 3.2: Mobilization above tipping point
Expected share of union membership
Probability that i joins labor union
0 100
0 100

Figure 3.3: Mobilization above tipping point
Expected share of union membership
Probability that i joins labor union
0 100
0 100

1. Political/economic concession during wartime shifts the s-curve upward
2. No concession: W is below the tipping point and identity line → L equilibrium
3. Concession: W’ is above the tipping point and identity line → L’ equilibrium

Level of war mobilization (W) must be above the tipping point (+) for labor unions to be highly mobilized

Figure 3.1: W is below both tipping point and identity line → L equilibrium
Figure 3.2: W is above both tipping point and identity line → H equilibrium

The extent of labor mobilization during wartime has political consequences:
• High unionization (→ High collective bargaining power of labor) → political inclusion of labor
• Low unionization (→ Low collective bargaining power of labor) → no or partial political inclusion of labor

The Effects of Democratization on Unionization

Figure 3.4: The Effects of Wartime Concession

Future Directions

• Collect data and conduct empirical analyses as well as case studies
• Model the effects of intensity of war as well as the degree of government reliance on workers for war effort
• Application to non-labor intensive (i.e., technology/intelligence-based) wars and prospects for democratization