

# Order & Violence



## Next steps on projects

- Meetings next week
- What to hand in
- How the presentation days will go

## Before we get to the last two reasons: Some advanced topics

1. Some commitment problems other than preventative war
2. How do these strategic explanations interact?
3. The problem of centralized power

# Other situations that can create a commitment problem

## 1. First strike advantages

- Also known as “offensive advantages” or “preemptive war”
- e.g. Imagine if Athens and Sparta were evenly matched, but whichever moved first had a 75% chance of victory
- How would this apply to the situation of nuclear war?

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## 3. Laying down arms

- A particular problem in civil wars, where enemies must live together afterwards
- Also, typically one side must give up its arms, leaving itself vulnerable



# Other situations that can create a commitment problem

## 4. Collective action problem in arming

- Arming is inefficient
- In anarchy, hard to agree with your enemy to both reduce arms investments
- Successfully winning a war would give you a huge peace dividend from not having to arm any longer
- If this peace dividend is large enough, is there any transfer your enemy can provide you now to avoid fighting (especially if they too face a peace dividend)
- Reportedly led US to consider a preventative war with USSR early in the Cold War

## 5. Bargaining over the source of power

- What happens when the thing you transfer changes your ability to win future conflicts?
  - e.g. Strategic territory, arms, technological secrets, allies
- Better just to attack now?
- Related to idea of an indivisibility – the idea that you cannot give something away that does not have long run strategic consequences

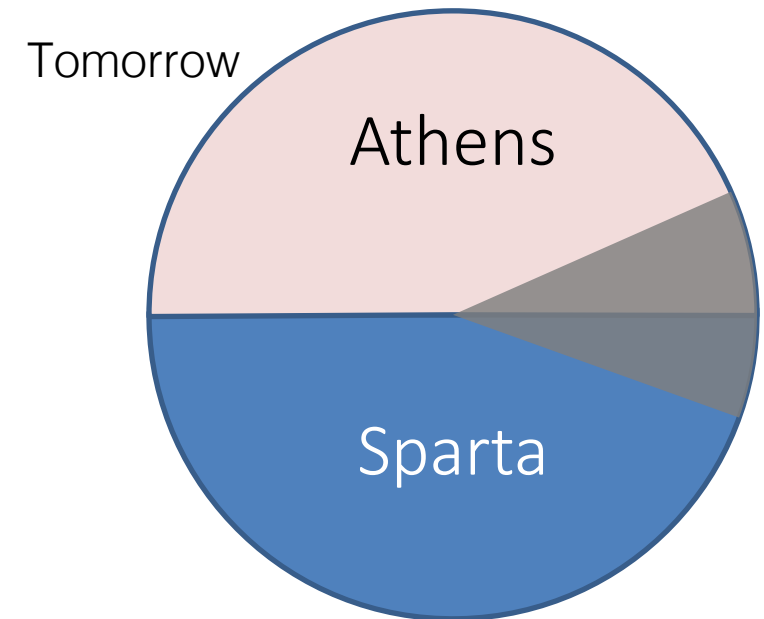
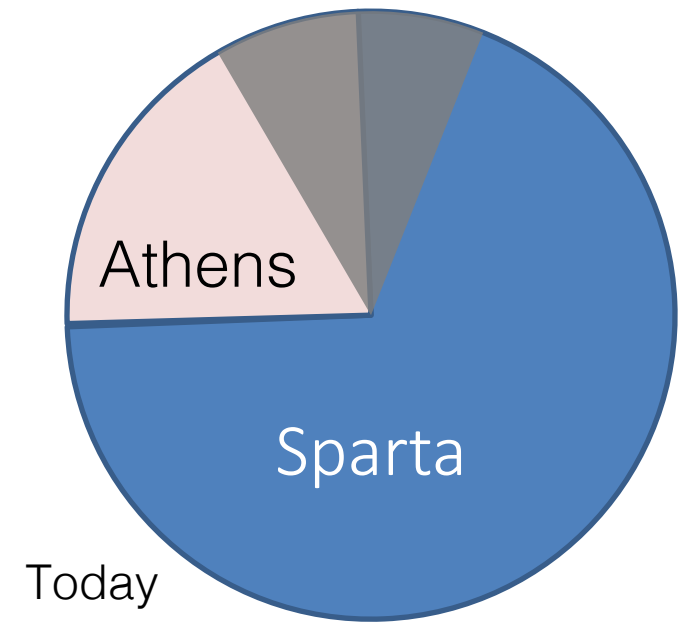


## Some advanced topics

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2. How do these strategic explanations interact?
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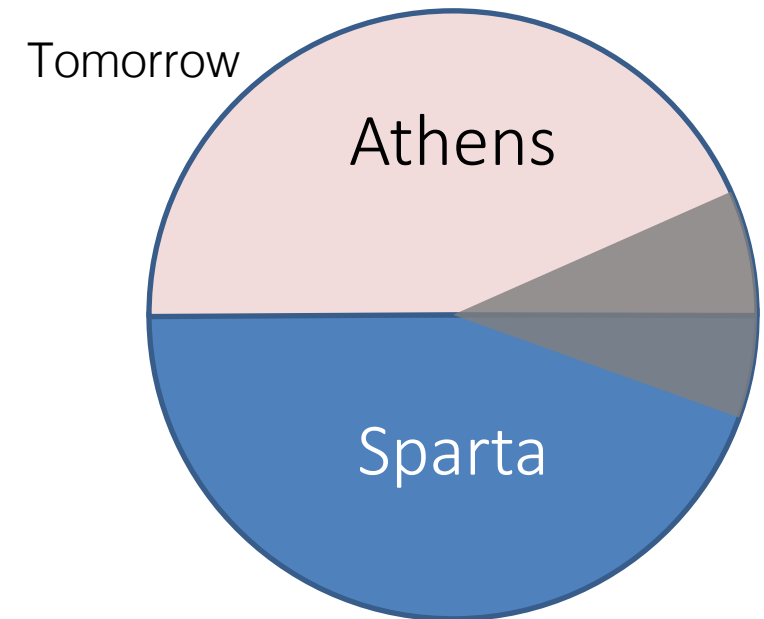
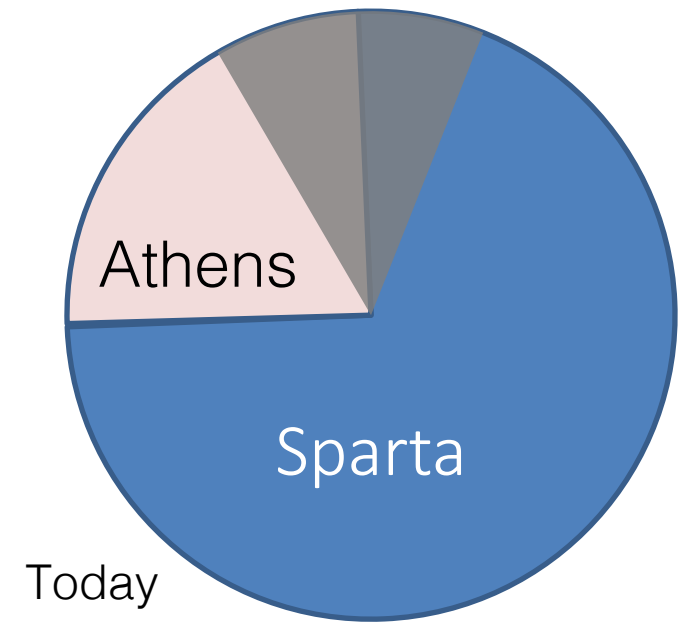
# What happens when other forces shrink the bargaining range?

- Suppose unchecked rulers or intangible incentives halve the net costs of war that leaders consider
- Today, Sparta's expected value of war is \$135  
= 75% of  $2(\$100 - 10)$
- Athens' expected value of war is \$45  
= 25% of  $2(100 - 10)$
- The bargaining range is just \$20 wide



## Addendum: What happens when other forces shrink the bargaining range?

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- The bargaining range is just \$20 wide
- Backwards induction tells us there should be no war—barely
  - Tomorrow, when playing for \$100 pie, Sparta knows it is assured of at least \$45
  - Thus, it needs to get \$90 today
- Athens can transfer this today, provided there are no limits on its ability to hand over territory or spoils
  - Especially in ways that avoid decreasing its future power

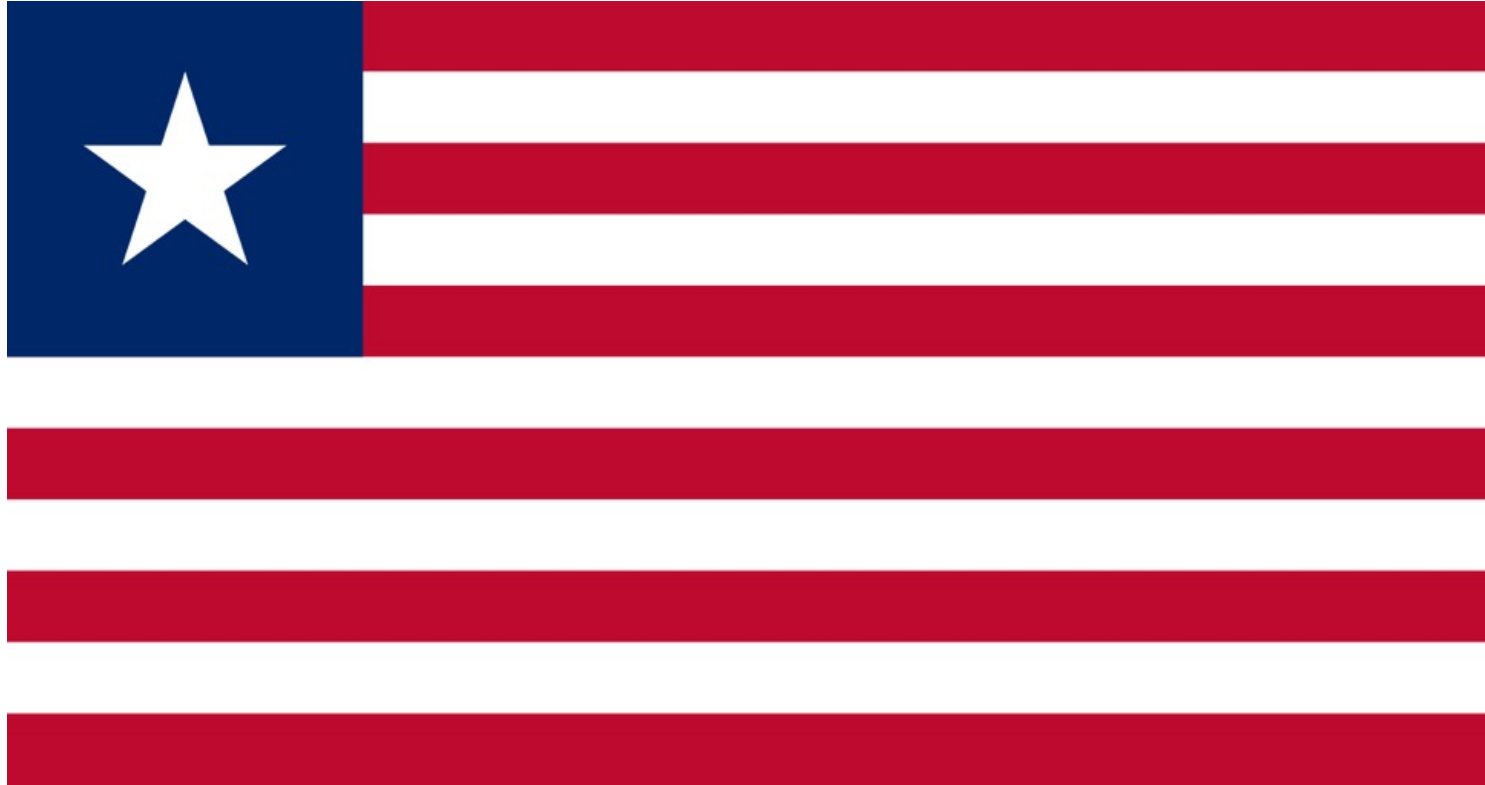


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# Let's look at the example of Liberia

And Amos Sawyer's diagnosis and cure



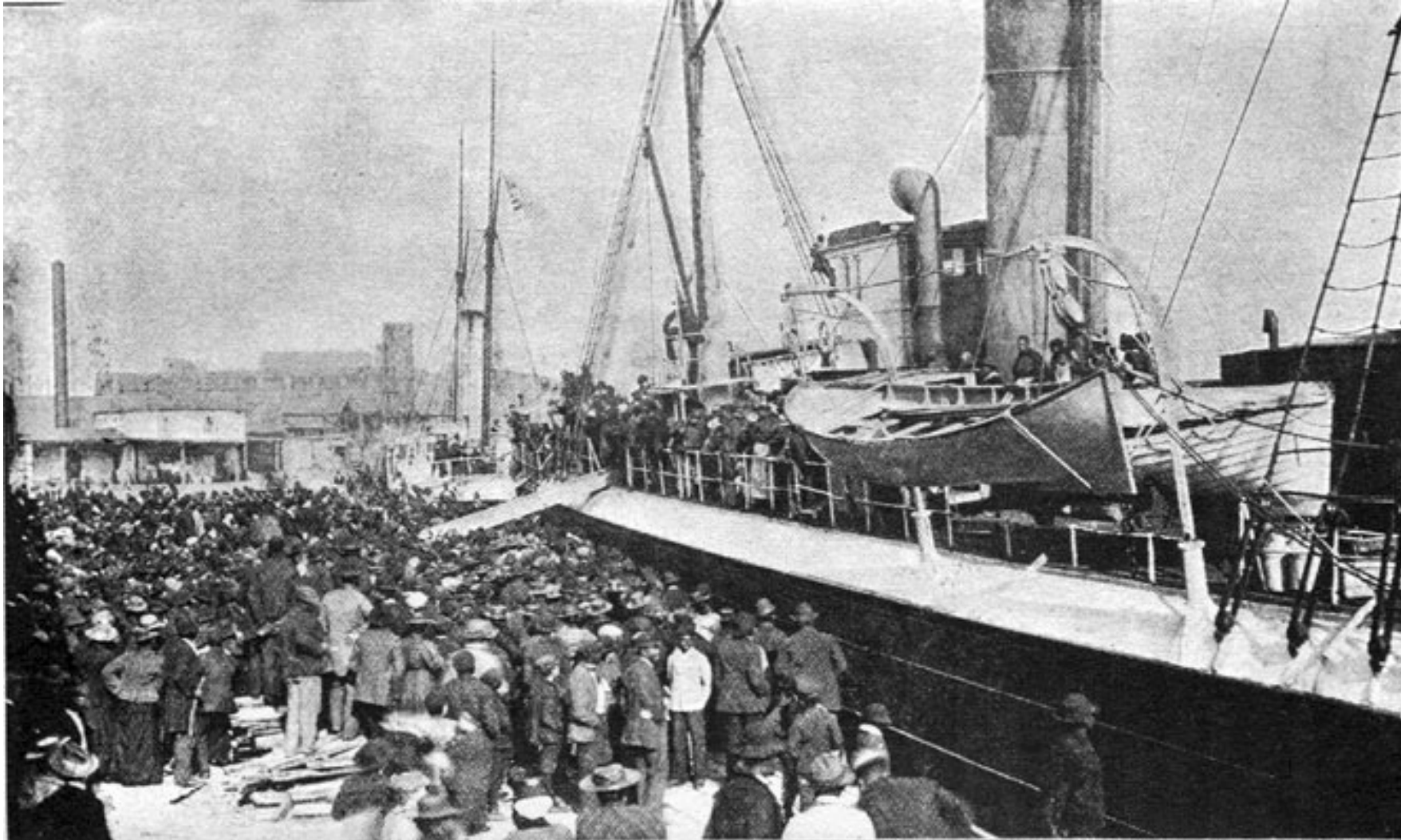
# Liberia

- ~4 million people
- Colonized by African-Americans in early 19th century
- Independent republic since 1847
- Two devastating civil wars 1989-2003
- Relatively stable and growing 2003 – present
- Still one of the world's least developed nations



# The first American colony

Born of the 19th century Back-to-Africa movement



Departure of the Back-to-Africa Movement ship Laurada bound for Liberia with approximately 300 passengers, half of them from Arkansas; [March 1896](#).

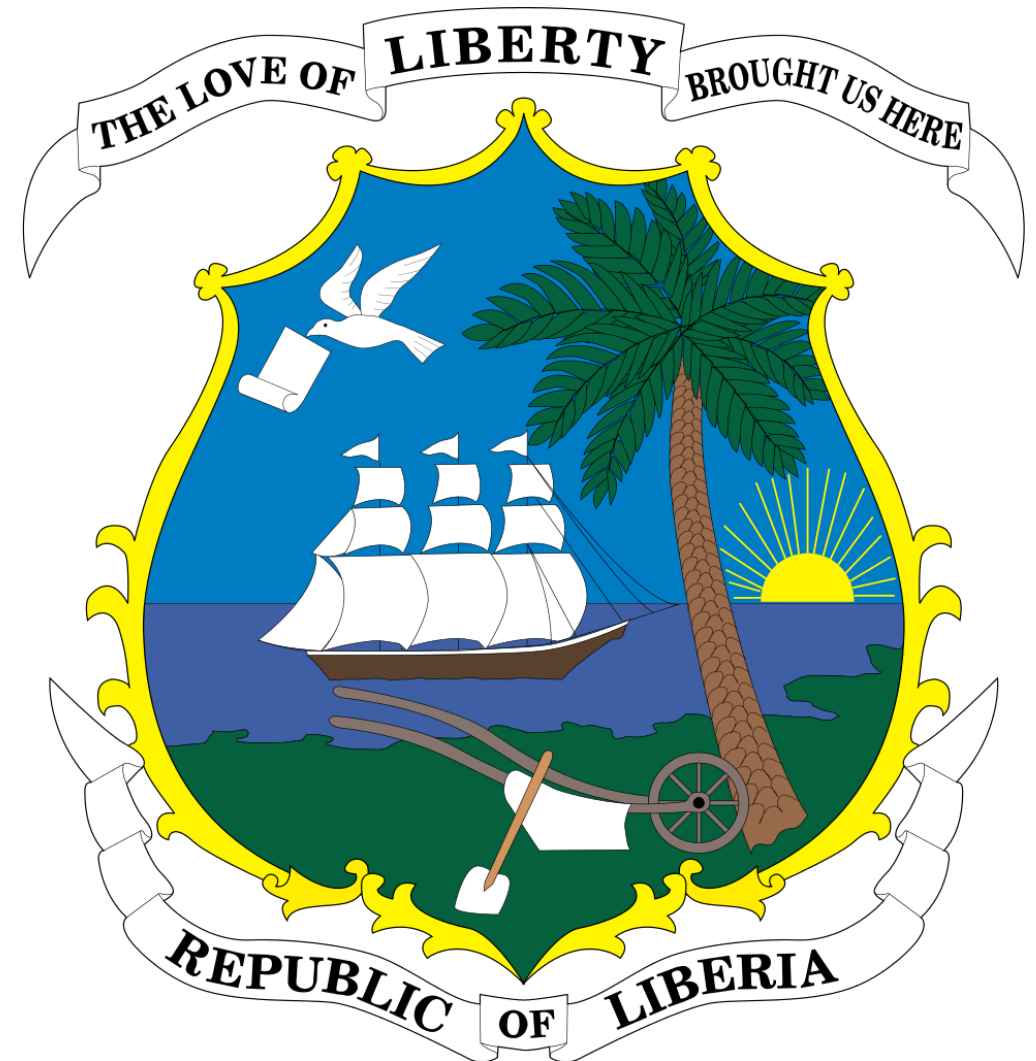


# How concentration in economic power favored concentration in political power

- Major commodities and exports in Liberia
  - Iron
  - Rubber
  - Diamonds
  - Gold
- What differentiates these products from:
  - Grains
  - Light manufactures

# Increasingly centralized politics

- Relatively stateless, diverse region before settlement
- Americo-Liberian colonization (1821-1847) and dominance of politics
  - Merchant oligarchy dominated country through patron-client relations and military control
  - Relative exclusion of indigenous tribes
- All power concentrated in the Presidency
  - Had American institutions in loose imitation and form, but not function
- Augmented by US Cold War support to President
- Post WWII President cultivated a cult of personality



## 1980-89: Junior officer coup followed by decade of military rule



- Like much of Africa, a highly centralized regime
- (Indigenous) Samuel Doe overthrows government in a coup
- Has US support and aid
- Increasingly brutal and repressive rule
- Tribes aligned with Doe's Krahn group favored, rivals are disfavored, intimidated, increasingly persecuted
- Doe loses aid and military support with end of Cold War

# Charles Taylor and the invasion of Liberia, Christmas Eve 1989

- US intelligence agents reportedly help Charles Taylor escape from a maximum security prison in Boston in 1985
- Received guerrilla training and funding from Libya and Cote d'Ivoire
- Leads 100 soldiers over Cote d'Ivoire border, igniting a civil war
- Fails to capture the capital





Nigerian “peacekeeping” force occupies capital, civil society installs a civic leader/activist/academic as President (of Monrovia)



“World War I” and “World War II”  
Become iconic examples of civil wars in Africa





# Amos Sawyer, political scientist and former President, emphasizes over-centralization of power in the executive

- Like many African countries, almost no formal checks on Presidential power
  - No local fiscal or decision-making governments
  - Weak parliamentary bodies with little power
  - All revenues, aid travel through the President's cronies in national ministries
- Rule is largely personalized
  - No party system or professional bureaucracy to check the power of the President
  - Only a narrow relatively ethnically-focused set of elite actors
- The Presidency, which has near absolute power, becomes a prize to be captured through coups or invasion





# How might over-centralization of power lead to bargaining breakdown?

Can it help us explain why Charles Taylor couldn't demand a deal?

1. Unchecked leaders
2. Uncertainty
3. Commitment problems
4. Intangible incentives
5. Misperceptions

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In short, all of them

## Example: Unchecked leaders:

1. A personalized dictatorship
  - Insulated from many costs of war
2. Private benefits from war
  - Magnified by the presence of “lootable resources”: Diamonds, gold, lumber
3. Foreign powers unchecked as well
  - Funded proxy wars at little cost to themselves

Outside powers can give actors private incentives to fight & impede bargains  
Precisely because outsiders are not bearing the costs of war (i.e. they too are unchecked)



## We also have several ingredients for a commitment problem

- **1989: Sudden downward shift in Doe regime's power**
  - With end of Cold War, US decreases aid and military support for its more thuggish client states
  - A growing push to democratization in Africa reduces legitimacy of thuggish coup leaders
- **Limited transfers**
  - Like most African governments, already in fiscal crisis even before the plummet in foreign aid
  - Limited ability to borrow or allot revenue sources
- **Personalized dictators can't make credible commitments**
  - Institutions are sticky, and so power-sharing agreements are extremely difficult
  - No President can credibly commit to giving opponents a future share of the spoils
- This is a kind of “indivisibility” argument
  - There is a split of the pie that would give Doe and Taylor large shares (a bargaining range)
  - But the rules and apparatus of government means this bargaining range is institutionally infeasible
  - Rather, the rules and organizations have created a “winner take all” situation

Finally when rule is centralized and personalized, a ruler's individual tastes and irrationalities will not be constrained or mitigated by institutions

1. Unchecked leaders
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# Sawyer: Argues for a set of constraining institutions

- Shared, divisible power would:
  - Reduce commitment problems
  - Reduce elite's private benefits of war and force them to face costs
  - Reduce the role of a leader's idiosyncratic preferences and biases
- What would it take to make power more divisible and shared?
  - Fundamental Constitutional change
  - Complete restructuring of government to make it polycentric
    - Empower local government jurisdictions (elections, budgetary power)
    - Independent, task-specific bureaucracies crossing space
    - Regional security and economic apparatus
- Echoes elements of European and American constitutional principles:
  - E pluribus unum, Checks and balances

We will come back to this again in Part 2

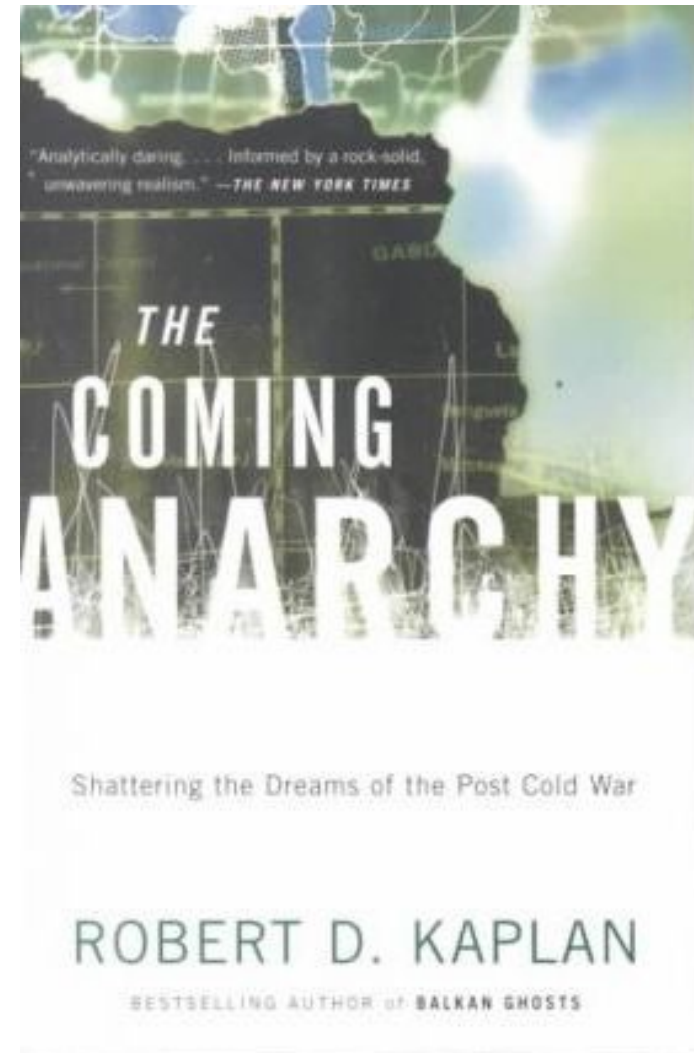


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- 4. Intangible incentives**
- 5. Misperceptions**

# The temptation of irrationality:

Irrationality, barbarism, emotions were a common narrative, rather than the underlying incentives and politics

- A common journalistic response to the wars in the Mano River region: Irrational barbarism
  - Crime and lawlessness spreading
  - State control and communal norms weakening
  - An underlying barbaric nature unleashed
  - Compounded by younger, more urban, rootless populations
  - Compounded by environmental degradation and disease
- We have to be wary of the irrational explanation because it is too easy to explain the “other’s” behavior this way



# How to integrate psychology into our framework?

Economic decision-making under uncertainty are founded on rational expected utility:

$$\max p(s)U(x|s)$$

What if we relax this?

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Economic decision-making under uncertainty are founded on rational expected utility:

$$\max p(s)U(x|s)$$

Matt Rabin (2004) categorized all of behavioral economics into:

## 1. Non-standard preferences

- what does  $U(x|s)$  really look like? What is in our utility function?
- Nothing “irrational” – permits us to use standard tools and models

## 2. How do people really form beliefs $p(s)$ ?

- What heuristics, biases, and systematic mistakes do we make
- Implies we may have the wrong  $p(s)$ , or fail to update, but we maximize

## 3. Lack of “stable utility maximization”

- Do people really max  $p(s)U(x|s)$ ?
- When do we fail to carefully calculate?

# How I bucket these, when it comes to conflict

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“Violent tastes”

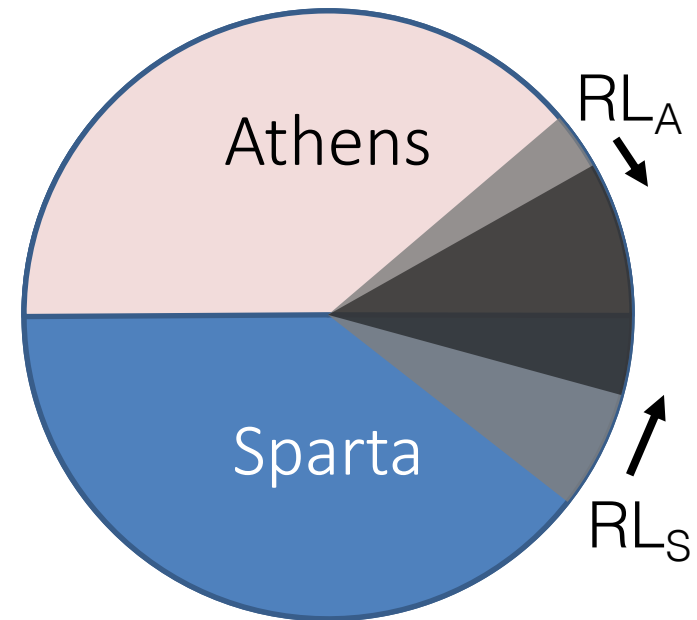
“Misperception”

Many forms of political participation are hard to explain without an appeal to preferences: intrinsic motivations or emotional rewards



# Preference-base explanations share a common feature: There are some circumstances where violence becomes its own reward

- There are times when violence is **intrinsically valuable**
  1. Direct utility
  2. Indirect utility
- This will offset costs, narrowing the bargaining range
  - At minimum, makes peace more fragile
  - In the extreme, the bargaining range could disappear
- If fighting is intrinsically valuable, then bargaining breakdown is no mystery





# What kinds of intangible incentives might plague the conflicts we have been discussing?

- China—Taiwan
- US—Taliban
- India—Pakistan
- Mexican state—Drug cartels
- Israelis—Palestinians
- US urban gangs

# Varieties of violent tastes I

## Sources of direct utility from violent actions

- Conditional on enemy's actions
  - Vengeance
  - Pleasure in agency, righteous action
- Not necessarily conditional
  - Status, glory and esteem
    - Absolute levels of status
    - Relative status / dominance
  - Aggressive drives
    - Pleasure in violence
    - Scapegoating and sacrifice
    - Social bonding, camaraderie
  - Parochial altruism / out group antipathy

# Varieties of violent tastes II

## Sources of indirect utility from violent actions

- “Value rational” violence
  - Actions “determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects of success” (Weber 1978)
  - Of course, doesn’t have to be independent of prospects of success
    - One is merely willing to pay an extremely high price
- Identity and ideological examples
  - The elimination or subjugation of an ethnic rival
  - The extermination of a heretic ideology or religion
- Unwillingness to compromise
  - Where the idea of compromise on some ideological principle is abhorrent
    - Liberty and self-determination
    - Property rights
    - The idea of a just distribution

## Note: Nothing about these preference-based explanations are necessarily “irrational”

- The actors are still maximizing, calculating, with stable preferences, intelligent and accurate information processors
- With violent values, we’ve simply opened up standard economic preferences (selfish, material) to social preferences and non-material payoffs
  - Even emotional reactions to injustice are rational if they are well-defined and stable, and rational actors know to expect at least some people to behave this way
- We can get awfully far with just these rational standard and rational non-standard explanations
- But a whole range of explanations for war violate the idea that we are calculating, optimizing, information processors with consistent preferences