DICTATORS & FINDING THE INSURGENT:

THREE GAMES ON OPPRESSION & RESISTANCE

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Why do we rebel against those in power who might have done us wrong? This age-old question is as relevant today as it ever was. This is a common theme in many courses in political science and international relations and it is one that is often difficult to teach in the abstract. In this paper, we discuss three games or simulations that faculty can use to get students to answer the question for themselves. Each of the three games explores the question in a slightly different way. In the first game, students are asked if they would protest — non-violently or violently — a dictatorial takeover and resulting oppression and discrimination. More importantly, they are asked to explain their decision. The second game, "Dictatorship vs. Democracy," looks at how structure can impact a willingness to rebel. Finally, "Find the Insurgent" explores the human condition about rebellion by asking students to find and punish insurgents (or to stop their peers from doing so). In each of these games, the students are asked to think about the agency, structure, and rationality of rebellion. These are core concepts in comparative politics.

Why Active Learning through Simulations and Games

In 2008, a NAFSA Task Force reaffirmed the need for "a new generation of global citizens capable of advancing social and economic development for all" (2008). This is no secret to political scientists, of course. For us, our best tools for inspiring these global citizens is active learning in various forms including structured debates, case studies, and simulations among many others (Paulson and Faust). Many have argued in favor of the

value of political simulations in the education of students of politics (Kaarbo and Lantis 1997; Kathlene and Choate 1999; Shellman 2001; Pappas and Peaden 2004; Shaw 2006; Mariani 2007; Dittmer 2015; Horn, Rubin, and Schouenborg 2015; Neys and Jansz 2019) and international relations (Asal 2005; Newmann and Twigg 2000; Shellman and Turan 2006; Enterline and Jepsen 2009; Crossley-Frolick 2010; Butcher 2012; Asal and Kratoville 2013; Biziouras 2013; Brynen and Milante 2013; 2015). The reason for the rapid expansion of simulations in classrooms appeared in the very first issue of the *Journal of Political Science Education*. Bray and Chappell (2005, 87) argue that "converting 'knowledge about' into 'how to' knowledge is central to civic competency." As Asal and Blake (2006, 2-3) argue,

> This sort of experiential learning [a simulation] allows students to apply and test what they learn in their textbooks, and often helps to increase students' understanding of the subtleties of theories or concepts and draw in students who can be alienated by traditional teaching approaches. By putting students in role-play situations where they need to make defensible decisions and often have to convince others to work with them, simulations also provide students with the opportunity to develop their communication, negotiation, and critical thinking skills, and in many cases, improve teamwork skills.

We, as educators, want our students to develop and practice these skills before joining the clichéd "real world."

The value of simulations and games appears in many ways. One of the most profound benefits is the fact that simulations and games provide students with a deeper connection to the work being studied. This connection creates an environment where students learn more due to the greater "buy-in" than other methods of course delivery (DeNeve and Heppner 1997; Boyer, Trumbore, and Fricke 2006; Siegel and Young 2009; Hatipoglu, Müftüler-Baç, and Murphy 2014; Asal et al. 2020). Asal et al. (2020) notes that this is even

more true when considering introductory courses where the mix of majors is greater. Student dynamics change through multiple mechanisms including dialogue and debate among classmates (on the same or opposing sides) or through incentives offered by the professor. Personal investment is elicited through a variety of mechanisms such as rapport with classmates or class incentives such as bonus points. Finally, Rebecca Glazier (2011, 376) notes that students "believe that simulations help them learn." The investment between students and the simulation are central to that belief.

More importantly, simulations take the abstract theories and concepts of the discipline and provide interactive (and fun) applications to tangible, if imagined cases (DeNeve and Heppner 1997; Asal 2005; Boyer, Trumbore, and Fricke 2006; Shellman and Turan 2006; Siegel and Young 2009; Hatipoglu, Müftüler-Baç, and Murphy 2014; Langfield 2016). Courses with a high theoretical component, such as international relations or ethnic conflict, function is crucial especially for the instruction of IR, which incorporates several theories that may be too abstract for students to grasp through a traditional lecture format (Boyer, Trumbore, and Fricke 2006; Hatipoglu, Müftüler-Baç, and Murphy 2014; Brynen 2015; Haynes 2015; Asal et al. 2020). For example, Siegel and Young (2009, 765) note that employing in-class simulations requiring the application of game theory may make the theory easier for students to understand than if taught in the abstract. The classroom thus provides a controlled environment in which "the student becomes the lab rat" (Asal 2005, 361).

However, simulations are not without certain problems or limitations. The single largest difficulty that educators have with simulations is creating effective simulations that reflect the goals and objectives of their own classes. The absence of a clear manual for

creating and using simulations in classrooms makes it difficult to effectively measure how simulations work over time (Shellman and Turan 2006; Raymond and Usherwood 2013; Pettenger, West, and Young 2014; Rushby 2016; de Freitas 2018; Westera 2019). Assessment is critical to any university classroom, but it is even more important with games-based learning less the critics deem the work just play. As Rushby (2016, 19) argues, "If we can be specific about the desired outcomes and set some indicators of improved performance, then we will know when we are successful."

Three Simulations for Political Violence

Would You Protest or Use Violence If?

In this exercise, we ask all the students to stand up and tell them that we are going to present a scenario to them, and they will have to decide if they would choose to be involved in protest or violence if necessary. We tell them to imagine that the US has been taken over by a dictatorship and New Yorkers (one of our universities is in the state of New York and this should be changed to where you are teaching the course) especially are being oppressed and discriminated against and money and industries are being removed from the state to other states where the dictator and their supporters are based — as well as many people being arrested or disappeared. We then ask the students if they would protest nonviolently or use violence against such a new development. Those who would do neither are told to go sit down. Many often say yes and keep standing. We then ask them if they would still do this if there was a strong chance if they did so they would die. Once that is said many of the students go and sit down quickly (and on a regular basis when this exercise is used most, or all, of the students sit down). We then discuss why they decided to

sit down. Often the answer is – I simply do not want to die. Better to be oppressed then be dead. This allows for a very useful conversation about why when oppression is often so common then why is resistance so less common- and why many such efforts to resist oppression turn to political violence.

We then ask them what theory best explains this drawing from Lichbach and Zuckerman (2009) *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* which we have read in class (or have discussed the theories beforehand even if they have not read it for the class). The students almost always say the key theory that explains this behavior is rational actor. They argue that from a rational actor perspective oppression is better than death.   We then can discuss how rational actor theory can help explain why though oppression may be common rebellion is usually rare. Better a bad life then to be dead as students often say. Some students will also say say culture — as in a culture of oppression. We can discuss how the culture that someone has been brought up in can shape how they see the world and the value of resistance- or the tremendous dangers thereof. Some students say structure because of where the power is located and we talk about applying structure to the idea of power and oppression. If no student suggests one of these theories we suggest it ourselves and ask them how it might be applied. We then break them into smaller groups and ask them to discuss which of these theories is doing the best job and why and then have a general class discussion about the most effective theory to apply.

Dictatorships and Democracies

For this exercise we ask for two students to volunteer who want to be dictators and "rule all they survey." Once we have the two leaders, we divide the class into two groups and each of the volunteer becomes is attached to a group. The leaders are told:

Volunteer A – you are the dictator of side A and decide what happens in that state	Volunteer B– you are leader of side B which is a democracy that votes
Decision to make in each state	
Either everyone gets 1 extra credit point for the next quiz	One person (chosen either by majority in country B or by the dictator in country B) gets 5 points
What are you going to do?	

Occasionally, the leader of the democracy tries to advocate for five points for themselves but rarely. Even if they do, they have never convinced the members of their democracy to give them five points as opposed to everyone in the group getting one extra credit point. Occasionally, I have had a dictator decide to give everyone one point but almost always the dictator takes the five points and does not even talk to the people in their group. The people in the dictator's group are often very angry. More than once I have had students ask me if they can rebel and make their group a democracy. This exercise helps students understand how a certain level of oppression can lead to true anger that can motivate a rebellion. It also illustrates very well the very important impact that the structure of a state has on the generation of anger amongst the populace and the decision-making power of the state — and how this might relate to where revolutions are likely to

happen. In addition, we discuss again rational actor and culture and how these theories would see this through a different lens then structure and ask the students to apply them and explain how they would explain them.

Who is the Insurgent?

In the final exercise, we will discuss in this paper is one where we invite each student to come outside for a brief moment to talk with us away from all the other students. We then tell the students that while talking to each student outside we talk between one and three students that they are insurgents, and their goal is to overthrow the current system. If your class is too large to do this with enough time you can simply tell the students that you have emailed one to three students before class about their role in this exercise. We then ask the students their job was to figure out who the insurgents are in the class and justify their argument. After someone was nominated as an insurgent, I would ask the students to vote on if they agreed and if a majority agreed the student voted on was told to sit in the corner and that they would be punished. Some students would push against this kind of vote which could lead some students to think they must be an insurgent. As a student wrote in response to a question about the exercise:

> For the most part, people did not choose their close friends, keeping their webs of significance safe which can relate directly to a cultural or rational actor perspective — which in itself can generate a very interesting discussion. In addition, people would nominate those that they viewed as a threat, which may seem rational, but in actuality is often due to cultural differences that they held. This simulation continues to demonstrate how culture causes intrastate conflict due to the people that would speak up against the injustices. They were attempting to protect those who they were classmates with just because it was wrong for them to be interrogated, tortured, or jailed due to word of mouth.

After the first person spoke up and was promptly jailed, more still attempted to rebel against the majority power (i.e., the Professor) to do what was morally right. This draw to stand up and fight because it is the right thing to do, despite the threat of torture or jail time, is how culture impacts intrastate violence. This push to fight for morals and cultural values is a large factor when it comes to conflict. If the individual is indifferent, they would not care and their cultural sense of ideals would not be negatively impacted.

Students have often said this exercise is very eye opening and leads them to discuss why certain people are seen as the "bad people" with no evidence. Once we are done with the discussion, I let them know that I actually did not tell any student that they were an insurgent- which makes this exercise even more eye opening for them. We then discuss the power of culture and demonization which can have a big impact especially in a region where there is discrimination or past conflict.

Summary and conclusion

Are rebels rational? Is rebellion rational? Students will often criticize rebels in the abstract but when put in a situation that has meaning to them, their views become far more nuanced. As the literature on simulations and games makes clear, the impact on student learning is often clear and profound. Students remember more, internalize the concepts more fully, and can apply specific skills more readily. While simulations are certainly incomplete representations of reality, they allow faculty and their students to work within a system to explore complex concepts in a way that lecture or discussion may not. Moreover, the access that students get within a simulation or game, particularly one covering rebellion, is rarely possible in a real political system (particularly one facing open

rebellion). The three games work well together to cover agency, structure, and rationality in rebellion or can be used individually to target more specific issues that an instructor might emphasize.

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