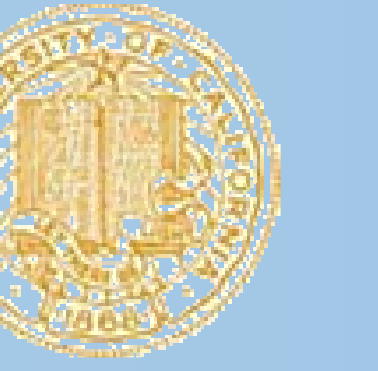




# Endogenous Contentious Politics

Thorsten Janus & Jamus Jerome Lim  
University of California, Santa Cruz



## Introduction

Social movements are a type of collective group action, aimed at the purpose of effecting political, social, or cultural change. Existing models of social movements either argue that social movements are the result of conflicts between old and new collective actors over the allocation of economic or political goods—the **resource mobilization** model (McCarthy & Zald 1977<sup>1</sup>)—or that movement actors tend to be boundedly rational, which then gives rise to predictions of thresholds and discontinuities in social movement formation; the so-called **single collectivity** models (Oliver 1993<sup>2</sup>).



In resource mobilization models, active elite action is necessary for there to be social change through social movements (Acemoglu & Robinson 2001<sup>3</sup>), while in single collectivity models, decision-making processes are not fully rational (Kim & Bearman 1997<sup>4</sup>).

The objective of this paper is to address the shortcomings of the existing literature by developing a model of social movement emergence and contentious politics that is *not critically dependent on active elite support*, while accounting for social movement formation dynamics through *strategic interaction among movement actors* via marginal analysis and social relationship effects.

### Contributions:

- Develop model with two-level social interactions that is flexible enough to incorporate a range of extensions
- Include in model multiple ways that group interactions can rely on the idea of negative and positive selective incentives and hence solve the Olson free-rider problem
- Detail consistency of model with empirical data in case studies

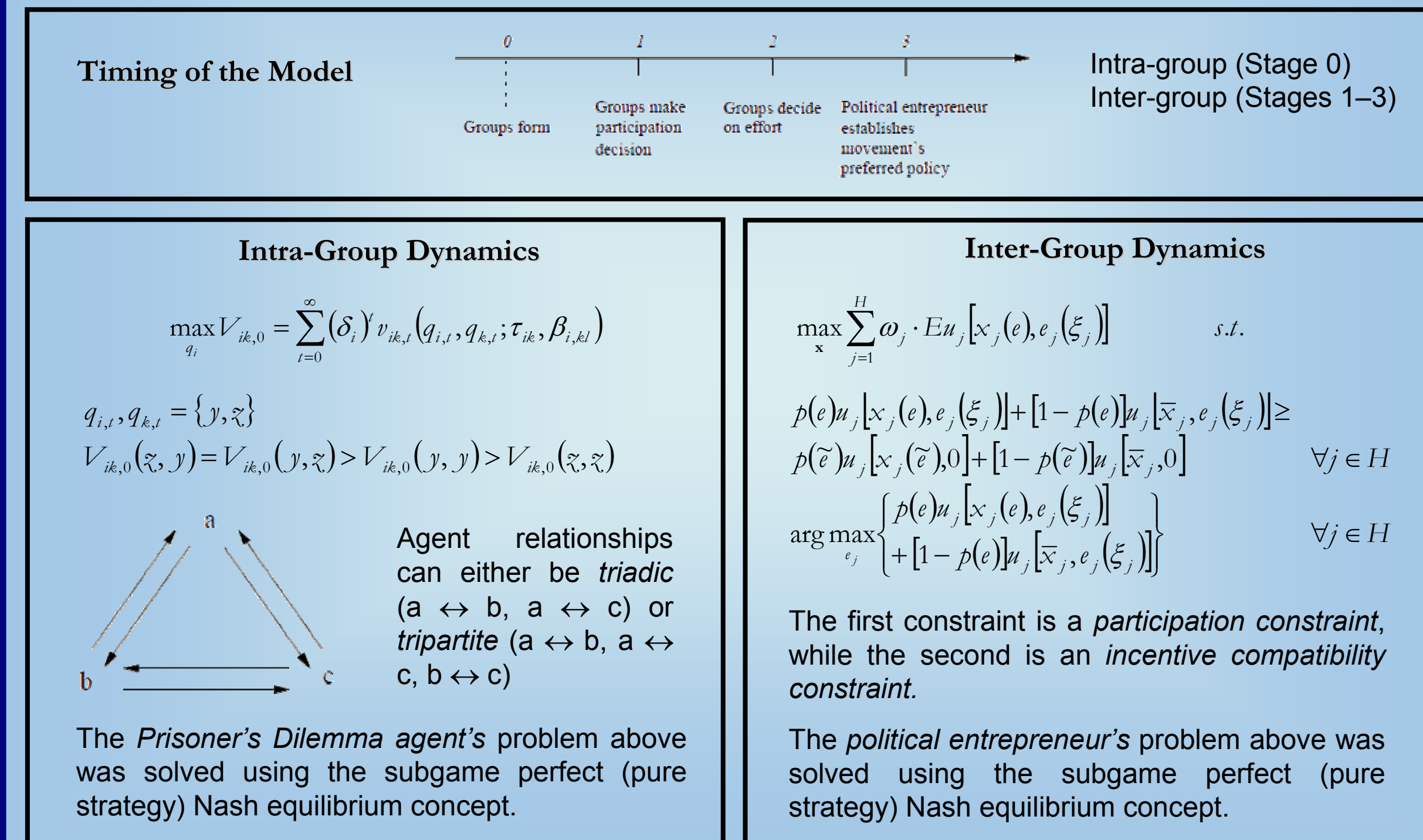


<sup>1</sup> McCarthy, J.D. & M.N. Zald (1977), "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory", *Am J of Soc* 82(6): 1212–1241  
<sup>2</sup> Oliver, P.E. (1993), "Formal Models of Collective Action", *Ann Rev Soc* 19: 271–300  
<sup>3</sup> Acemoglu, D. & J.A. Robinson, "A Theory of Political Transitions", *Am Ec Rev* 91(4): 838–863  
<sup>4</sup> Kim, H. & P.S. Bearman (1997), "The Structure and Dynamics of Movement Participation", *Am Soc Rev* 62(1): 70–93

## Abstract

Social movements—and contentious politics more generally—have been a feature of both developing and developed countries through much of modern history. Whether manifested in the violent or more peaceful versions, social movements have had a significant impact on the societies from which they arose. Existing formal models of social movements tend to subscribe, either implicitly or explicitly, to the resource mobilization model or to a variant of the collective action model. In this paper, we develop a model of social movement emergence and contentious politics that is not critically dependent on active elite support, but rather on strategic interactions among movement actors, as well as potential social relationship effects. In doing so, we accommodate the idea of both positive and negative selective incentives, and how these are impacted by exogenous shocks. Our framework is also flexible enough to incorporate multiple contracting mechanisms, elite involvement, and informational imperfections. Finally, we consider the empirical validity of our model by examining case studies of Indonesia during the Asian financial crisis and uprisings against the Mobutu and Kabila presidencies in the Congo.

## Model



## Results

**Proposition 1 (Social movement formation).** A group  $j$  participates in a social movement if and only if

$$\arg \max_{e_j} \{p(e)u_j [x_j(e), e_j(\xi_j)] + [1 - p(e)]u_j [\bar{x}_j, e_j(\xi_j)]\} \geq p(\bar{e})u_j [x_j(\bar{e}), 0] + [1 - p(\bar{e})]u_j [\bar{x}_j, 0]$$

The choice of a group participating in a social movement essentially involves two tensions: The increased expected utility from obtaining a policy that is closer to the group's ideal policy, against the increased disutility from exerting greater effort. Thus, the probability of social movement success, and the policy implemented conditional on success, is less favorable when group  $j$  is not participating, compared to when it does. However, this is tampered by the need to weigh the benefits of free-riding: Others may achieve the policy improvement from which  $j$  can benefit, and in such a case the expected disutility of effort is avoided. This idea of net benefits accruing to participation is analogous to Olson-style positive selective incentives. On the other hand, negative incentives discipline agents within the group.

Further results are possible when we assume a specific functional form for the utility function given by

$$U_j(e_j, e) = -\frac{1}{2} E \left[ x_j(e)^2 + \frac{e^2}{\xi_j} \right]$$

**Example 1.** In a social movement equilibrium with completely symmetric agents, all groups will participate in a social movement, such that  $H = J$ .

Parameter/Variable	Values	Parameter/Variable	Values
$\hat{x}_1$	2, 2.5	$\xi_1$	0.1, 0.5
$\hat{x}_2$	[2, 100]	$\xi_2$	[0.1, 1.0]
$\bar{x}$	1, 19	$J$	2
$\bar{e}$	10	$M$	1

For the general case, we perform numerical simulations to establish the qualitative impact of shocks on groups' optimal effort levels, decision to participate, and the eventual movement size. Parameter and variable values are reported in Table 1.

Figure 1 captures our main findings. The first two graphs of each panel illustrate the optimal effort and participation decisions of the treatment ( $e_2$ ) and control ( $e_1$ ) group, respectively, while the third graphs the total number of groups that participate in the social movement.

In Panel (a),  $\hat{x}_1 = \hat{x}_2 = 2$ ;  $\bar{x} = 1$ . Both groups participate, but the control group free-rides off the treatment group's willingness to participate. In Panel (b),  $\hat{x}_1 = \hat{x}_2 = 4$ ;  $\bar{x} = 1$ , the movement fails to form, since the control group's participation constraint does not cross the threshold. Panel (c) elaborates on the dynamics in (b), with  $\hat{x}_2 = 2.5$ ;  $\xi_1 = 0.5$ . In Panel (d),  $\hat{x}_1 = 2, \hat{x}_2 = 20$ ;  $\bar{x} = 19$ , and the social movement always forms *in spite of* the divergent policies relative to the *status quo*.

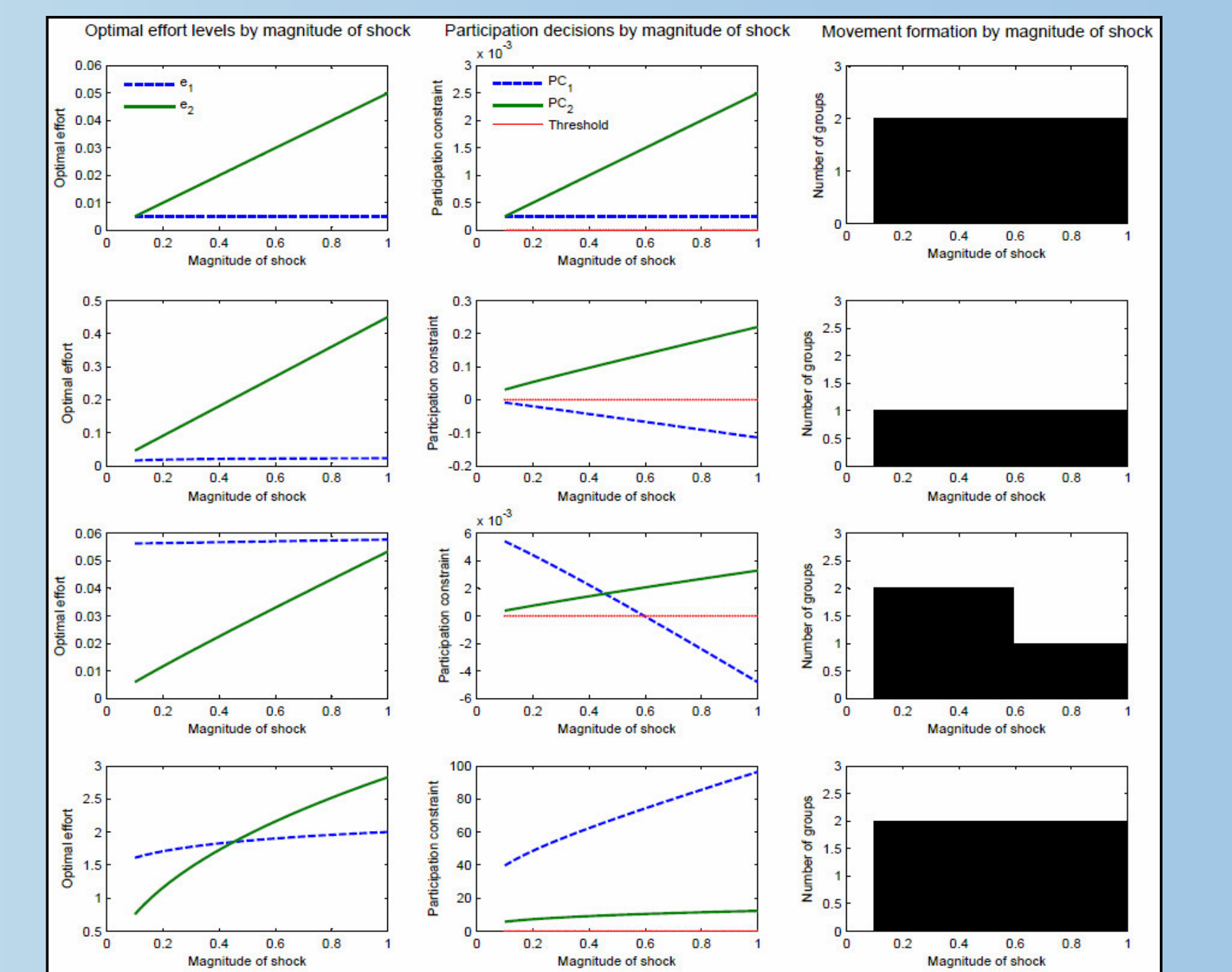


Figure 1. Effect of shocks on optimal effort levels, participation constraints, and social movement size

**Proposition 2 (Group formation).** For  $0 < \delta_i < 1$  and  $A = \{a, b, c\}$ , there exist Nash reversion strategies with sustainable group formation even when one or more incentive compatibility constraints are violated.

**Proposition 3 (Contentious politics).** For a contentious political movement where each group has an equal ability to influence policy through effort, a group  $j$  will participate in a social movement if and only if there exists an individual  $\tilde{i} \in j$  for which

$$\beta_{\tilde{i}, k, l} \geq \sum_{k=1}^{n_j-1} \sum_{l=1}^{n_j-1} [\tilde{e}_{\tilde{i}, k} - \sigma_k(e_k | \Pi(x^*, e^*)) \geq 0]$$

$$e_k = \frac{e_j}{n_j}, \Pi(x^*, e^*) \equiv \arg \max_{e_j} \{p(e)u_j [x_j(e), e_j(\xi_j)] + [1 - p(e)]u_j [\bar{x}_j, e_j(\xi_j)]\} = p(\bar{e})u_j [x_j(\bar{e}), 0] + [1 - p(\bar{e})]u_j [\bar{x}_j, 0]$$

Thus, with an individual within a group that benefits disproportionately from the continued maintenance of group relationships, this individual will pay the majority to stay in the group, and the movement forms.

## Discussion

The participation decision of a group, ultimately, depends on the two dimensions of the magnitude of the shock and the intensity of policy preferences, as illustrated in Figure 2

### Extensions:

- Alternative social relationship mechanisms in the intra-group stage, such as ensuring cooperation through **linked games**, or by credible punishment from a **single large player**. This allows sustainable group formation through either positive or negative selective incentives.
- Allow reactionary elite behavior through **appeasement** policies, or by **reinforcing** their entrenched positions through resource investment. Both approaches lead to less contentious politics, but in the former (latter) case the surplus from the relationship is largely appropriated by movement groups (elites).
- Provide role for informational imperfections by allowing **shocks** impacting a group to differ and be **private information**. This breaks the strong symmetry results of Example 1.

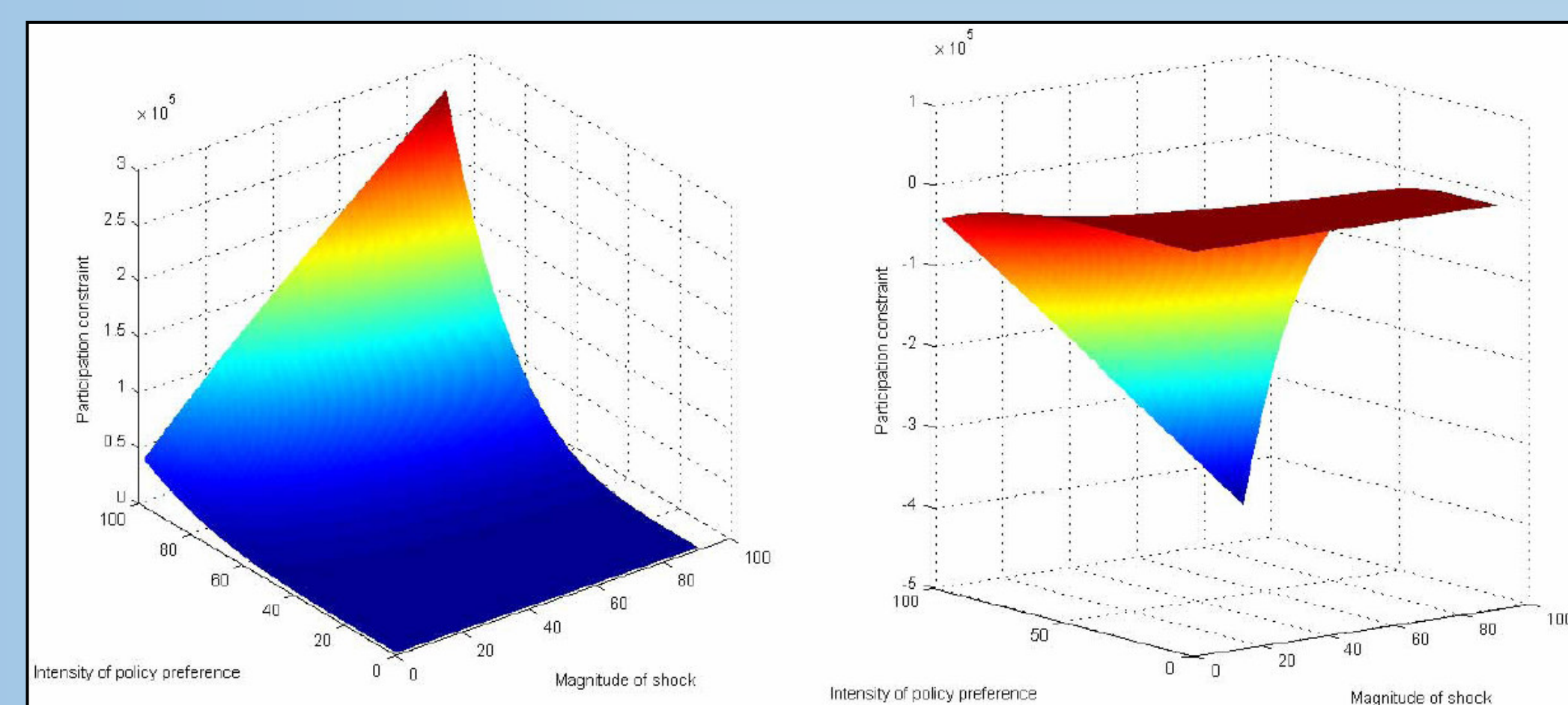


Figure 2. Participation decisions by magnitude of shock and intensity of policy preferences

### The Asian financial crisis and the Indonesian Revolution

The economic shock from the Asian financial crisis very likely lowered the opportunity cost of entry for a much wider number a opposition groups, coalescing them into the *reformasi* movement, with elites mostly playing a secondary role.



### Uprisings against Mobutu and Kabila in the Congo

Kabila's rebellion in 1996 stemmed in part from Hutu refugees of genocide and warfare in Rwanda, which changed the cost-benefit ratio of participation for Tutsis; similarly, the insurrection against Kabila in 1998 was due to new information that Kabila was not a good bet after all.

