

ABSTRACT

In this paper we propose a model of political change in which a revolutionary vanguard interacts with a continuum of individuals. The vanguard can mobilize a sizable contingent to push for a new regime and it reaps the bulk of the benefits—compared to individuals—if change occurs. Although both types stand to gain when supporting the prevailing regime, the vanguard prefers overthrowing the current regime while individuals favor it. We show that higher benefits from power make the vanguard more aggressive and individuals more inclined to join the insurrection, thus, increasing the likelihood of political change. We also show that vanguard's power is less effective the more individuals favor the current regime. In our model, vanguard and individuals also differ in their information about the underlying strength of the current regime. Hence, we also provide results stemming from the interplay of mobilization power, differential benefits, and quality of information. In particular, vanguard's influence is increasing in mobilization power and in its share of benefits from change, even when it does not have superior information.