The Market for Terrorism:

Strategic choices, interactions, and survival

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**Introduction**

The transition of conflicts from revolution, to civil war, to terrorist-based insurgency begs the question of how such conflicts evolve over time and space. Why did Syria’s revolution become a civil war when Bahrain’s dissipated? What explains the shifts in Chechnya’s conflict from a nationalist guerrilla-based insurgency towards a terrorist-based conflict? The dynamics that shape and reshape oppositional political movements are important to understand. It is equally important to understand how different forms of political contention relate to each other. This paper sets out to explore these dynamics.

Recent studies on terrorist outbidding, and the terrorist-civil war overlap, illustrate that terrorism is one of many modes of political contention deployed within a conflict zone. Work on forms of political contention, though, remain hived off and incomplete. We treat terrorism, or civil war, or protest-demonstration as distinct forms of political contention. Moreover, we tend to assert any relationship between these forms of contention is largely linear, progressing towards ever worse forms of contention. We are approaching a point in the accumulated knowledge where we need to begin putting the sectors together into a broader “market of political contention” to gain perspective on the place terrorism occupies vis-à-vis other modes of political engagement. Under what conditions does terrorism dominate the market of contention? When is terrorism relegated to secondary or tertiary activity? When does terrorism compliment or substitute other forms of political engagement? More broadly, how do oppositional political movements take shape, and reshape over time.

Terrorism, civil war, and protest-demonstration should be thought of as manifestations of contention that can represent “ideal” types. Space exists, however, between these forms of contention where the “ideal” types mix with other forms of contention to produce complex conflict environments where modes of contention coexist and compete with each other for position in the market. There are many different forces that shape which forms of contention become most prominent within any environment. In this paper I will focus on three possible factors that shape the form of oppositional politics, and the relationships between opposition factions: survival, strategic choices, and intergroup interactions. Separately, these factors help shape different modes of oppositional politics. Together, they interact to help determine which mode of contention becomes most dominant, or explain moments of transition between different modes of contention.

**Oppositional Political Movements: Violent versus Nonviolent choices**

Oppositional political movements emerge in every society, and they assume many different shapes. Commonly we observe protest-demonstration, terrorism, and civil war (see figure 1). This list is not exhaustive. Many different forms of these contentious strategies will manifest in any environment. Moreover, in some environments we may observe only protest-demonstrations, or terrorism. In other environments we may observe protest demonstrations evolve towards violent revolution and civil war. Terrorism may emerge within or around civil war at different stages of conflict. The actual form, or competing forms of political opposition can be complex.

{Figure 1}

The emergence of political opposition is attributable to certain structural conditions that give rise to grievances and create opportunities for non-contentious modes of political engagement to succeed or fail (Ross 1993).In general, the structural conditions relate to institutionalized forms of inequality, and institutional opportunities to participate. In the event that opportunities for non-contentious politics are closed, contentious oppositional political processes are more likely to take shape.

Why? According to bargaining theory we can attribute the emergence of contentious politics to bargaining failures related to low information and credibility (Lake 2003). More precisely, individuals, or political groups, possess information on capabilities and resolve that could better define their position in a bargain, but incentives exist to keep this information private (Lake 2003, p. 87). In the instance of contentious political behavior these incentives relate to relative group strength, shielding participants from suppressive tactics, and generally seeking advantage through unexpected events rather than broadcasting intention widely enabling the rival state to prepare.

Participants in contentious political behavior, of any form, can be defined as extremists. An *extremist* is a person whose interests fall beyond mainstream politics thereby placing interests in an area where non-contentious political action is less likely to succeed because there is not enough support to carry it through mainstream political processes (Findley and Young 2011, p. 363). What constitutes mainstream and extreme can vary between environments. To this point, bargaining theory opens a door to a discussion on why contentious political behavior emerges in any society. Our goal in this paper is to explore strategic choices beyond the threshold of contention. Two additional layers relate to (a) decisions between violent and non-violent forms of political contention, and (b) options between forms of violent political contention.

The extremist is an agent whose interests fall beyond the mainstream. The *violent extremist* is an agent who is more willing to accept/risk war (in some form) in order to advance his/her interest (Lake 2003, p. 85). Lake’s (2003) article explains extremists in general are more willing to accept violence. In this paper I add in the additional distinction of the “violent” extremist in order to highlight a starting point for the different forms of contention. Some agents are more naturally acceptant of violent strategies. Not all extremists, though, see violence as similarly necessary or useful. Yet all extremists can be thought of as holding views that make contentious forms of political behavior more likely.

The coexistence of violent extremists and extremists in an environment suggests any contentious oppositional political movement has potential for being violent. Even more accurate would be to say many oppositional political movements face moments, the inflection point, were violent options and nonviolent options have equal potential to dominate. Which mode of contentious engagement excels is often a product of *accelerating events*, moments of uneven, yet intense, violent suppression by a state against the opposition movement that either weakens the nonviolent movement, or weakens the violent movement. A classic example is the Bloody Sunday event in January 1972, Northern Ireland. In the event British SAS forces opened fire on unarmed civilians engaged in protest-demonstrations (fearing the PIRA intended to use the event as a cover for an attack). The event effectively suppressed nonviolent political contention for over a decade, providing space for violent contenders to dominate the political marketplace in Northern Ireland. In many instances, where violent opposition exists, we observe similar moments.

What separates the *accelerating event* from broader suppression is usually the uneven application of repression. Consolidated authoritarian regimes often experience fewer episodes of sustained violent opposition because they can more credibly commit to deploy repressive tactics (Findley and Young 2011, p. 366). Weaker regimes (democratic and nondemocratic) often experience higher rates of violent opposition (particularly in the form of terrorism) precisely because they cannot credibly commit to a consistent repressive strategy (Findley and Young 2011, p. 366).

The discussion to this point suggests once oppositional political movements arise, there is the potential of the movement to take on one of two forms: violent-nonviolent. This dichotomy, though, misses the bigger picture. The reality is more complex. Often mixed modes of engagement coexist for periods of time; with no one form completely dominant. Or the modes vacillate back and forth (strategically or competitively). We now turn our attention to these more complex situations in order to understand driving dynamics between various groups. The core dynamics the mediate forms of political opposition are: strategic choices, intergroup dynamics (competition versus cooperation), and group survival.

**Dynamics of Oppositional Political Movements: Coexisting frames of engagement**

In this portion of the paper, we loosen the perspective on political opposition movements. Setting aside the perspective that different opposition movements coexist (to a point), an inflection moment arises, and then one mode of oppositional engagement supersedes the other. In many cases, different modes of engagement continuously interact with each other with an ebb-and-flow between them. The ebb and flow is often driven by strategic choices, intergroup dynamics, and group survival concerns.

**Strategic Choices**

The strategic choice is about which mode of engagement is more likely to advance group interests. Factions within contentious political movements genuinely disagree over modes of engagement. Differences in opinion typically circulate around the utility of violence to achieve goals. For example, some agents see violence as necessary to demonstrate resolve over an issue (Lake 2003). Meanwhile, others may view any gains through violence as a pyrrhic victory. Concomitantly, agents within violent and nonviolent factions may actually have differentiated agendas, which may alter their perceptions about the value of violence as a means to achieve their interests. For example, individuals in Northern Ireland and the Israeli Occupied Territories often view the conflict in terms of equality (governance, access to public goods) and justice. However, those that support violence differ in the value of territory as a necessary feature to achieving these core goals. To supporters of violence territorial control is central to progress on goals of equality and justice (Masters 2004).

Factions within oppositional movements will attempt to pursue their strategies alongside each other. At some point resource stresses emerge between factions forcing leaders to conflict and pursue their strategies as alternatives. The interaction between factions will be defined by tactical steps to advance factional interests. Violent extremists will have to resort to violence to confirm their position over the utility of violence and to create a credible threat to the opposing state (Lake 2003, 87). The moderate factions will react in one of two directions: accept the turn towards violence and perhaps seek to control it in order to manage violence, or undermine the violent turn by exposing the provocateurs and hoping social support against violence is strong enough to reject it (Lake 2003, p. 87). It should be understood that the shift towards violence by an extremist faction is part oppositional interaction with the state, and part factional competition within the broader oppositional movement (more on these dynamics later).

In the preceding discussion the strategic choices for violence do not include venue as a variable. The bargaining theory approach to terrorism and political violence seeks to liberate the discussion from a structural theory of violence. At the same time the environment does have an important shaping feature for preferences. Certain strategic choices hold more or less value based on environmental constraints. For instance, democratic countries by nature make it more difficult to advance violent strategies as opportunities for nonviolent engagement are more available and legitimate (Lake 2003). Democracies are, however, less constrained and have low credibility to impose suppressive countermeasures, making options like terrorism more viable (Findley and Young 2011, p. 358; Li 2005). The empirical record on terrorism and democracy is increasingly sophisticated. The assumption that democracies experience more terrorism in general is now supplemented by the view that weak states experience the highest rates of terrorism. The result is, as Findley and Young (2011) assert a condition where consolidated states (democracies and non-democracies) experience less terrorism than unconsolidated states (anocracies). Though, consolidated democracies do experience higher rates of terrorism than non-democracies (p. 366). Why? Democracies are often perceived as responsive to public demands, and terrorist threats and actions generate a public demand for safety. Hence, terrorists believe they are more likely to succeed in advancing their interests against democracies than non-democracies (Stanton 2013, p. 1010).

The choice for terrorism is not just relegated to the violent/nonviolent choice set. Once violence has been decided upon by many groups choices still remain over modes of violent engagement (terrorism, guerrilla war, etc). The exploration into the civil war-terrorism overlap is very recent. Yet research suggests nearly half of the domestic level terrorism in the world is related to ongoing civil wars (Findley and Young 2012b). It is important for us to understand these dynamics. To paraphrase Sambanis (2008) terrorism and civil war are like water and ice, connected but different under different conditions. The choice for terrorism versus guerrilla war is seen as a strategic choice based on the relative strengths of the target state and specific interests being pursued. Highly capable states (military capacity) can control space better than weaker states. Terrorism, in this regard, is better suited to contend with a stronger state where there is less need to control space. Meanwhile, guerrilla tactics comport better with weaker states where it is easier to capture territory for base operations (Cuenca de la Calle 2009). Similarly, in the context of civil war, violent opposition is likely to employ terrorism when the rival state is democratic rather than nondemocratic. Rebel groups opt for terrorism to leverage audience pressure on the state for concessions (Stanton 2013, p. 1011).

Strategic choices focus on the selection of options. In a way how, in a complex environment, where many oppositional factions may coexist, what factors shape the foundational strategic decision to use violence or nonviolence, and terrorism versus other forms of violence. To that end, this discussion highlights a number of relevant factors: perceived utility of contentious options, establishing credible threats and demonstrating resolve, and institutional constraints. From here the discussion now turns from foundational choices to how the violent path is constantly adapted, and what pressures exist to force constant adaptation to oppositional strategies.

**Allies or Competitors**

Terrorist groups, in most political environments, operate alongside competitor terrorist organizations, and contend with internal cleavages. At the same time terrorist groups coexist with political parties, social movements, and nongovernmental organizations seeking space as a representative of a group of people and to advance an interest set similar to that of the terrorist group. Thus, the political environment is crowded. Crowded political environments generate complex interactions that entail alliances and competition between terrorist groups and political actors.

The point of departure for most analyses on the dynamics between terrorist groups and other political actors is the assumption of an environment of limited resources (money, recruits) and a finite range of allegiance from constituents towards the political actors. In other words, constituents are likely to support one group over another at any given point in time. Allegiances can shift between groups, but it is fixed at specific points in time. The assumption builds in the notion that all political groups (terrorists, political parties, interest groups, social movements, non-governmental organizations) must compete against each other to capture the resources in order to survive, and emerge as a dominant representative of a defined constituency.

Given the diversity of mobilized political groups operating in an arena, it is safe to assume that democratic processes cannot determine which group or factions will arise and dominate (Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson 2007). Since electoral politics is relegated primarily to political parties, terrorist groups and other non-violent political actors must settle their position vis-à-vis other groups with other means. It becomes natural to assume that terrorists groups (organized around the acceptability of violent means to their political ends) are inclined to use violence against other political actors in order to secure their space in the political arena. Violence is directed at multiple targets within, between, and outside of the terrorist group depending on case, and competitive situation.

For example, ETA in Spain faced down internal divisions in 1966, only to experience an open split between ETA militar, and ETA politico-militar in 1974. ETA-pm eventually becomes *Euskadiko Eskerra (EE)*, a normal political party that competes in regional elections (Douglass and Zulaika 1990). ETA also entered into an alliance with Herri Batasuna (HB) as a political wing that now advances interests that include Basque separatism, but broader political issues as well, meaning that HB is not strictly a mouthpiece for ETA. In the late 1980s, ETA contends with anti-violence movements in *Gesto por la Paz* and *Elkarrie* (Funes 1998). Finally, in the 1990s ETA forged an unofficial relationship with leaders of the *Kale Borroka* (street violence) targeted at moderate Basque political factions like the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV)* (Van der Broek 2004).

In short, ETA is forced to contend with competitors in the political arena, which encourages behavioral changes in order to establish its place among the groups and to distinguish itself from its competitors. First, ETA stakes out a more radical and intransigent position to distinguish it from competing groups (Funes 1998, p. 506). Taking a radical position allows ETA to claim a spot on the political spectrum devoted to Basque separatism, and that violence is the primary means in which to achieve this goal. Meanwhile, Elkarrie seeks to capture a spot that advanced Basque separatism using non-violent means (Funes 1998). The two groups occupy the same space in reference to their political goals, but differ in their articulated means on how best to achieve those goals. Second, ETA alters its pattern of violence, broadening the scope to include Spanish targets and Basque competitors. Moderate political parties, like the PNV, are targeted in nearly sixty percent of ETA attacks against its political competitors (Van der Broek 2004, p. 719). The Kale Borroka (street violence) is supported in order to “socialize suffering” to such a degree that Basques would accept any solution to make it stop, including following ETA (Van der Broek 2004, p. 721). In short, the Basque conflict takes on an internecine dimension.

The Palestinian national movement, which is one of the most diverse political movements that involve numerous terrorist organizations, political parties, political party-terrorist group alliances, social movements, demonstrates a pattern of behavior referred to as *terrorist-electoral cycling* (Weinberg and Pedazur 2003). During the 1990s, when the Oslo Peace Process was on-track, Palestinian public opinion was decidedly pro-peace process and the fortunes of Hamas and Islamic Jihad waned to the point where public approval of the groups and their methods fell in the single digits and violence dropped off precipitously. By 2000, public opinion on the peace process soured and public support for suicide bombing increased to a point where Hamas and Islamic Jihad surpassed Fateh, and other groups. In response the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (a decidedly secular organization) began to conduct suicide missions in order to keep pace and not get drowned out by Hamas in the political arena (Bloom 2004). In this case targeting maintained an external focus on Israeli targets, but all groups moved in the direction of suicide missions in order to remain competitive. Hence, the direction of public support shaped the tactics employed by different groups.

Both cases reinforce the general assumption that resources in a political arena are scarce, allegiance is fixed at points in time, and terrorist groups compete with themselves and other political actors using violence as the primary means to create and defend their political space in that arena. At the same time we do observe that terrorist groups may not necessarily rely on violence in all cases to capture political space. Instead, terrorist groups may be drowned out by nonviolent groups, or accommodate alternative means of advancing group interests when faced with competition. Thus, terrorist behavior in relation to other political groups is multi-dimensional. For example, the *Free Aceh Movement (GAM)* in Indonesia has shown interest to develop local networks and local democracy even at the expense of seeing non-GAM political groups elevate into positions of local power (Beardsley and McQuinn 2009, p. 639).

How do we account for these variations where political competition results in spirals of violence (some conducted in an air of one-upmanship or as internecine violence), while other cases illustrate cooperation? According to Siqueira (2005) the sorting mechanism is the production of externalities, and whether those externalities are positive or negative to the group’s activities. If we structure the political environment to include political groups and terrorist groups, assign their relationship as allied (cooperative) or competitive, and assign their strategic behavior as substitute or complimentary, then we can develop a picture that explains the different patterns of behavior we observe between terrorist groups and political groups.

First, terrorist groups are similar to all other political groups in that they do seek resources in order to advance their issues and to serve as a constituent representative (Berti 2013). We can safely assume that those resources are scarce. However, we do necessarily have to assume that constituent allegiance is fixed at one point in time. Constituents can hold multiple allegiances with different groups in the same issue sector. In other words violent and nonviolent tactics do not need to exist in opposing spaces. Violence can coexist, compliment, and cycle with nonviolent tactics based on political conditions at fixed points in time. In other words terrorism can be a strategic compliment to the activities of a political group. This particular form of relationship is labeled *cooperative-complimentary*.

Second, the activities of one group may generate positive externalities while the other generates negative payoffs. In this condition, positive behavior is rewarded and negative behavior is cut back, spurring competition between the factions (Siqueira 2005, p. 233). Since each group would pursue its activities independent of the other, these groups can react by striking an alliance to cycle between grassroots mobilization and violence. This defines a *cooperative-substitute* relationship.

Alternatively, the terrorist group may react by using violence to push out other political groups in order to dominate the political space. If the terrorist group increases its activities other political activities may decline as a result of the pressure (Siqueira 2005, p. 233). This defines a *competitive-substitute* relationship. For example, Beardsley and McQuinn (2009) note that the *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE* or the *Tamil Tigers)* generate significant resources from the Tamil diaspora, and aggressively protect their revenue stream. The Tigers have been known to aggressively coerce other political actors, circumvent peace initiatives, and limit access to the Tamil communities via LTTE approved organizations to defend its position as the sole representative of the Tamil community (Beardsley and McQuinn 2009, p. 634).

Finally, terrorist groups may engage in violence that generates moderate positive externalities to a larger political movement, but other political actors see them as competing voices for the same constituency. In this situation, terrorist behavior may be tolerated as a necessary evil, but eschewed as an illegitimate political force. This would define a *competitive-complimentary* relationship. For example, Loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland have periodically sought to create political-wings in order to compete with the PIRA-Sinn Fein arrangement for the nationalist-Catholic community. In order to create space, the Loyalist political groups associated with the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Ulster Defense Association (UDA) stake out a position to advocate for the defined political arrangement with Britain, but to accommodate Nationalists via political equality and powersharing in a regional government. Such efforts have meet with resistance within Loyalist community where the main political parties (UUP and DUP) have staked out domination as the political voices of the Loyalist community. The Loyalist paramilitaries are tolerated within the dynamic of violence, but not seen as legitimate political actors (Bruce 2001).

Taken together we can now define four potential relationships between political groups and terrorist groups: cooperative-complimentary, cooperative-substitute, competitive-substitute and competitive-complimentary. As indicated, the impact of these relationships on the behavior of terrorist groups is ambiguous. Cooperative relationships seem to be the most beneficial overall, but more so when their activities are complimented by political actors. In this situation the externalities of both groups are internalized and become reinforcing, which increases group activity (i.e. violence). Jeanne Knutson (1980) best explains this particular manifestation by noting that terrorist groups are bounded by maximal tolerances of violence within a constituent community. The upper limit for violence is determined by the group’s ability to convince its constituents of its rationale for violence. The ability of the group to communicate its grievances in a way that expands tolerance for violence is enhanced by cooperative political groups providing direct and constant communication of the goals and propaganda to justify the use of violence (Berti 2013; Siqueira 2005, p. 232). Meanwhile, all other relationships are likely to produce different outcomes with regards to terrorist behavior, namely lower levels of terrorist activity. First, in situations where terrorist action and political action are substitutes, as one substitute increases in use (and popularity) the other will decrease. Therefore, when terrorist groups and political groups are in cooperative-substitute relationships, terrorist violence will likely cycle up and down, but the number of incidents and/or casualty rates will be lower over time. Additionally, when terrorist groups compete against political groups, and their behaviors are treated as substitutes by the constituent audience, then terrorist violence may escalate. However, if political activity gains traction and support, terrorist activity will decline. In such cases terrorist violence is likely to be lower over time in the number of incidents, or casualty rates, or both. Second, when terrorist groups compete against political groups, but those activities strategically complement each other (absent a formal alliance), terrorist violence may again cycle up and down based on the relative power position of the political actors, but overtime the number of incidents is lower, and casualty rates are lower as well.

**Group survival**

Terrorism, like any military activity, has a strategic logic to it. The force employed by terrorists is done so in order to advance an objective. Typically the objective is defined around the operational goals of the group (social, political, economic change). Operational goals, however, are only one part of the picture. In most cases, force is employed by actors with an additional set of goals in place. These include organizational survival and dominance. We often refer to these as “process goals” (Cronin 2009). For established military units, or highly organized and well-resourced insurgent groups, process goals are less important. The conventional military is mostly secure in its role as part of the state. For the well-resourced insurgent group their position vis-à-vis other groups is well established affording it a kind of non-competitive dominance among rivals. For terrorist groups, and less well resources insurgents, process goals remain important to the group. The terrorist group, in particular, usually exists in a condition where it is constantly justifying its existence as a legitimate actor. The violent activities of the organization serve as a barrier to broader acceptance (Cronin 2009; Knutson 1988). However, absent violent engagement with the state few would know of their operational interests.

From this characterization we can assume terrorist groups are constantly acting with two different strategic interests in mind: advancing their political goals, and enhancing their survival. It is the latter behavior that most directly relates to outbidding. The theory of a *Dual Contest* is the best way to frame this discussion on outbidding (Cunningham et al 2012, p. 69). The dual contest theory is based primarily ethnic conflict, much like outbidding itself (see Horowitz 1985). The theory assumes that in self-determination movements the group (ethno-national identity group) is comprised of many factions. These factions interact with the state and each other. The factions can be violent or nonviolent organizations, but what unites them is their effort to engage the state in order to advance the interests of the group (Cunningham et al 2012, p. 72). The factions have two interests they pursue in the conflict: Public Goods and Club Goods. The public goods are those that benefit the group (autonomy or independence). The club goods relate to power and material goods that benefit the individual faction. More precisely, the faction seeks a prominent position within the group. The faction seeks political relevance in the conflict, meaning the faction must be dealt with either politically or militarily in order to reach a settlement (Cunningham et al 2012, p. 72). The struggle for political relevance between factions becomes a defining characteristic of the conflict’s dynamics. In sum, the more factions there are in a conflict, the more intense the competition for political relevance. With each additional faction, the legitimacy of each faction to represent the group is diminished. The end result is we can expect higher levels of violence in the competitive atmosphere, and that the violence will be directed at targets on both levels of the dual contest (Cunningham et al 2012, p. 73).

It is the dualistic nature of violence that helps us to understand one part of outbidding: intra-group conflict dynamics. Intra-group conflict dynamics manifest in many ways. The most intensely studied form of intra-group conflict is the *outbid*, wherein groups seek to attract support by demonstrating their ability to effectively engage the rival state. What happens is a group is able to separate itself from other factions by employing unique and effective tactics that capture the “market interest” of the constituent audience. If the tactic is widely accepted by the population other groups will likely start to bandwagon around the tactic (Bloom 2004; Clauset, Hege, Young, and Gleditsch 2012). The Bloom (2004) and Clauset et al (2012) studies of the Palestinian conflict with Israel demonstrate that as suicide bombings (pioneered by Hamas in this conflict environment) became accepted among Palestinians during the al-Aqsa Intifada (beginning September 2000) other groups slowly followed suit. The core of outbidding took place between Fatah and Hamas as both were deemed most relevant (Clauset et al 2012). However, many other Palestinian terrorist organizations adopted the tactic including the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Even more telling is that groups started claiming more of their attacks during this period in order to attract support from the constituents (Bloom 2004; Clauset et al 2012).

In addition to the outbid, intra-group conflict dynamics can be observed in two other common forms: *inter-rebel violence* and *spoiling*. Inter-rebel violence means that factions begin attacking each other in order to establish political relevance. The primary goal is to secure material resources and political leverage so that when the conflict recedes, the faction is positioned well to capture the club goods (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012). Studies on this form of intra-group conflict suggest that as factions increase the probability of violence increases, and that we observe some of the strongest correlations between number of factions and violence against co-ethnic factions (Cunningham et al 2012, p. 85). Spoiling is often treated as a behavior distinct from outbidding dynamics, but it really is just another face of the overall competition dynamic. In spoiling a faction seeks to differentiate itself from others by staking a position on negotiations between a moderate and/or dominant faction (or a faction of preference to the rival state) and the state. The rival faction will stand opposed to the negotiations by adopting a “betrayal discourse”, attempting to exploit elections, or using violent intimidation against the negotiations (Gormley-Heenan and MacGinty 2008). Spoiling has the twin effect to (a) better differentiate a faction from others, and (b) undermine the legitimacy of a dominant faction in the eyes of the rival state by its inability to control violence by splinter factions in the group (Gormley-Heenan and MacGinty 2008; Cunningham et al 2012; Kydd and Walter 2006).

In sum, outbidding generally refers to a conflict dynamic between factions of a rebellious movement against a state. The behavior was defined first in the confines of ethno-national conflict, but has been proposed to apply more generally to other, non-separatist conflict contexts. Outbidding dynamics suggest that as factions within a conflict environment increase, violence on the whole increases. The violence is directed at many different targets at both levels of the conflict (Group v. State and Faction v. Faction). What questions remain?

**Conclusion**

In his pioneering study on terrorism and civil war, Nicholas Sambanis (2008) suggest terrorism and civil war are like water and ice. In this paper, we expand this conception to include nonviolent oppositional movements, hence requiring an expansion of this metaphor to say: nonviolent and violent actions (like terrorism and civil war) are like steam, water, and ice, connected, but different under different conditions. Like Sambanis, the goal here is to lay out different forms of political contention, but more to provide some understanding on the dynamics that link and transmute different forms of political contention. In doing so, we gain insights into dynamics of conflict escalation and de-escalation, the interplay between different actors.

Structural factors for terrorism and political violence more broadly provide a piece of the picture by indicating why opposition movements may take form in some environments. Ultimately, contentious political movements take shape through bargaining processes that often fail requiring the oppositional movement to take action in order to establish a credible threat. Once an oppositional movement comes together it can manifest in many forms, and transition between those forms repeatedly over the life of a conflict. Examining strategic choices we gain insights into the variety of “extremists” that are present and how those extremists interact, and seek to advance preferred strategic modes of contentious engagement. Factors like utility of violence, institutional configurations, and establishing credible threats shape strategic thinking about how and when to use violence (if at all).

Intergroup dynamics highlights the relationship between different political groups, both violent and nonviolent. The central feature of the discussion is the degree to which violent and nonviolent actors see each other as competitors or allies in a common struggle against a state. When violent and nonviolent groups see each other as cooperators, with complimentary strategies, we will observe terrorist-electoral cycling behavior. Or as the Provos referred to it “the ballot box and the armalite.” The activities mutually reinforce common goals, resources broaden between the factions, and both become increasingly effective in advancing their interests. When violent and nonviolent groups see each other as competitors, or as presenting substitute strategies, their activities will fail to reinforce each other. The groups will often seek to capture resources from each other, or use each other for individual advantage when and where possible.

Finally, group survival interests expand our perception of what oppositional groups want in a contentious political interaction. Sometimes the goal of group survival is as important, or more important, than achieving political success. Survival means resources and relevance and for some groups these goals are suitable. Crowded environments, though, threaten survival for some groups who must then adapt. The behavioral pattern of outbidding entails efforts to escalate violence in order to better distinguish one group from another. It is a signal of resource capabilities, which can attract more “investors” to the group and further expand the group’s resources.

Taken together, these factors help us to understand the shape and behavior of opposition political factions including the onset of violence and interplay between groups to become dominant actors in a market. The discussion presents a variety of explanations. Some of which circulate around developed research streams. The factors that shape behavior in the marketplace are supplemented with a variety of anecdotes. The next step in this project is to develop a variety of empirical examinations of these factors across several cases, and where possible, including large n-studies.

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Figure 1: Interactions between Oppositional Political Movements

Terrorism Protest-Demonstration

Civil War