

Optimal Standard of Human Rights in Countering an Insurgency

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to explore why human rights violations take place in the midst of a rebellion. Authoritarian governments may not care for human rights but that is not very surprising. What is intriguing however is the fact that there are several examples of democratic governments that condone human rights violations. In order to understand the latter, we consider a government that values internal security as well as the human rights of its loyalists. We show that the primary cause of human rights violations is faulty intelligence which prevents the armed forces from separating a loyalist from a rebel. There are two type of defective intelligence that can occur viz., missed alarm and false alarm. We consider each of these cases and identify the incentives of the government to allow its armed forces to violate human rights. We also determine the optimal human rights standard of such a government.

We then examine the effect of a decrease in the human rights standard on the probability of quelling the rebellion. In our theoretical model, this effect is indeterminate (that is, can be positive or negative). We therefore empirically quantify this effect using the case of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in India. Since the probability of quelling the rebellion is not directly observable, therefore we use the magnitude of violence as its indicator. The magnitude of violence should be negatively related to the probability of the government's success. That is, a decrease in violence should indicate that the government has the upper hand, which means that the probability of crushing the rebellion is higher. We find that a lowering of the standard of human rights increases violence (that is, reduces the chance of quelling the rebellion) and this effect is statistically significant.