

values across cultures might require a more developed, multi-item measure. To her credit, Stein employs this measure mainly as a “gut check” to establish variation.

Because the 2000 Gallup measure does not vary over time, Stein uses original data on death penalty laws across countries and time. Here, Stein should be commended for finding a proxy for vengefulness that can be objectively assessed across countries. Yet this remains an indirect measure. It is meant as an indicator of support for vengeance, the behavior that should be predicted by the core value. But the assumption that support is driven by this value is one degree of removal from the central concept. A second degree of distance is that death penalty laws may be driven by many causes, only one of which is the general vengefulness of a population. Stein is aware of these limitations and addresses them as best as possible, but the limitations remain.

The remainder of chapter 5 presents cross-national, over-time, multivariate regressions examining whether this measure—death penalty retention in a given year, as well as change from year to year—is associated with militarized interstate dispute (MID) initiation. This evidence is well explained and meticulously presented. It is hard to argue with the findings: countries that have the death penalty are more likely to initiate MIDs, even after controlling for a variety of predictors of initiation. This evidence is intriguing, to say the least, and is suggestive that cultures of vengeance matter for foreign policy.

Vengeful Citizens, Violent States is an ambitious book that will make a strong contribution to the study of domestic politics and interstate conflict. It makes a bold claim: that revenge can be thought of as a core value that influences actors’ political choices and that in turn it can constrain or enable national leaders. The evidence is comprehensive and, putting aside the limitations mentioned earlier, paints an overall picture of how core societal values shape the use of force.

Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power.

By Clifford Bob. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. 280p. \$29.95 cloth.
doi:10.1017/S1537592719003621

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Reading Clifford Bob’s new book, *Rights as Weapons*, made me uncomfortable. I found myself assuming a defensive crouch throughout the early chapters, clashing with Bob (who was not in the room at the time) and reasserting human rights orthodoxies in response to each charge he levels. With my intuitions under siege and my anxiety peaking, I reloaded only to be outgunned by a relentless barrage of compelling arguments supported by a global arsenal of rich examples. At the risk of metaphor sliding into pun, my final capitulation to the persuasiveness of *Rights as*

Weapons acknowledged a need to be uncomfortable in this space but also forced me to reconsider what it means for human rights to sit at the intersection of morality and power.

Rights as Weapons uses military symbolism in a non-violent setting in an effort to focus our attention not on the moral dimensions of rights struggles, but on the way in which rights are deployed as strategic tools in political conflicts. The book follows Bob’s previous works that, taken together, challenge us to look past the warm, fuzzy veneer of advocacy movements. In *The Marketing of Rebellion* (2005), readers considered how campaigners operate in a competitive environment and make decisions on the basis of material needs, not merely on righteousness. In *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (2012), transnational advocacy networks are revealed as constellations of illiberal political actors, even though scholars conventionally focus solely on progressives. The thread throughout Bob’s writing is a self-reflective critique of moral movements that see themselves and project themselves as heroic underdogs fighting the good fight against their evil, abusive overlords. Instead, and this point is a central pillar of *Rights as Weapons*, none of this should be taken for granted.

Not that it isn’t true: rights campaigners believe this very deeply, but we, as observers and researchers, short-change the analysis by foregrounding the moral convictions of these actors. In the final pages, Bob accuses scholars and journalists of treating subjects like human rights advocacy uncritically because of their personal desires to see the project succeed, preferring instead what he calls a “clear-eyed view” (p. 210). To recalibrate the study of contentious politics toward “objectivity” (unsubstantiated and undiscussed, but not at all uncontroversial), Bob instead depicts adversaries in a political environment trading swipes in an effort to have their particular vision realized, and in an era in which rights talk is a currency of its own, he finds that parties of all persuasions leverage such talk in conflicts with one another.

The book covers expansive territory. The arguments stack up as follows. Campaigners use rights claims to mobilize supporters both within their movement and among third-party outsiders. They do so by proclaiming that rights apply naturally to all: they are universal, absolute, and apolitical. “Today all four of these rhetorical moves are often mistaken as incontrovertible facts. Certainly, activists advertise them as such, and trumpet them from the ramparts” (p. 14). Rather than dissecting any of these notions, each of which is a subject of serious scrutiny among academics and practitioners (neither incontrovertible nor certain), Bob identifies them simply as tactical choices. It is unimportant whether these claims are true or essential; it is only important here that they are key components of external messaging that rights campaigners use to persuade others. Presenting these “rallying cries”

without their normative garb exposes their strategic value. Rights talk is also used by these same actors defensively; that is, it is deployed to “shield” the target and “parry” attacks through countertactics.

In response, foes of these movements counter with rights talk of their own. Rights can act as “camouflage” that obscures motives, a “spear” targeting a specific law, “dynamite” that destabilizes culture and community, a “blockade” that squeezes out other marginalized groups, or a “wedge” that breaks up coalitions. These terms did not strike me as intuitive, but the examples are excellent in elaborating how rights are used in political practice. In the case of camouflage, Bob highlights the way in which animal rights were used to disguise an attack on Castilian cultural heritage and nationalism in Spain. In Italy, rights were used as a spear by atheists to call for the removal of crucifixes from classrooms. Women’s rights have been used to explode things (figuratively and literally) in the cases of France’s ban on the veil and to justify the invasion of Afghanistan. Activists for female suffrage in the United States propped up their cause by subordinating similar calls for the vote by African Americans. Defenders of Israeli policy elevate lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights in the country to break up any solidarity between the LGBT community and activists concerned with violations against Palestinian people.

Highlighting these unconventional examples surely complicates the idea that rights are used exclusively by weaker parties to limit the arbitrary power of the state. Sometimes rights talk is used by the state or its officers, particularly in terms of rights of the majority or of the nation itself. The descriptive analysis Bob sets forth drives us to consider a wider range of actors, beyond those to whom we typically consider rights proprietary. This position reveals, for Bob, that rights are tools of politics and do not possess any independent meaning suited to resist appropriation. If rights are understood instead as possessing “plasticity” and, further, “ideological emptiness,” then the door may well be wide open for use but also misuse; that is, if a standard exists for judging human rights language (p. 67).

Bob does not provide the reader with any such means for performing assessment of these scenarios, and, I think he does not believe they should be assessed or judged.

They just are. It seems particularly obvious that when an online identity praises Israel for its LGBT rights protection while emphasizing the poorer treatment of LGBT individuals in Palestine and Muslim countries, and this person turns out to be fictional and the product of a public relations stunt that may be funded by the Israeli government, rights talk is not being deployed in good faith. Rather than mobilizing an argument against the appropriation of rights talk, however, Bob asserts that “if rights can act as camouflage [or wedge] for any political movement, their supposed unique moral value must be questioned” (p. 92). Statements like this read as something more than moral agnosticism with respect to rights and veers toward moral skepticism.

My instinct is to argue that there should be some grounds for highlighting and discrediting cynical usages, unless rights talk really is just a free-for-all. Words do not lose their meaning when speakers use them in ways that run counter to reasonable standards. When pernicious actors engage disingenuously in rights discourse, there surely are grounds for calling out their hypocrisy or manipulation of the language. To this, Bob replies, “From an objective standpoint, however, such claims will be difficult to judge, and any determination will in any case be ignored or rejected by the tactician” (p. 189). I bristle at this conclusion for the way it permits open-ended equivocation. When men’s rights activists claim they are in fact the victims of discrimination by women who refuse to sleep with them and thus hope to deny female suffrage and legalize rape on private property, we must have some basis for judging that assertion. Understanding that rights are instrumental for an ideologically diverse set of activists is critical, but all movements or campaigns that speak of rights do not do so with equal legitimacy—and identifying one aspect they do have in common gets us somewhere, but also leads us away from somewhere else valuable.

Rights as Weapons may have won the battle by challenging its readers to rethink fundamental assumptions about rights advocacy, but the war is not over. The book will compel students, researchers, and practitioners to advance into new theaters and initiate new frontlines that confront how rights are used by unconventional actors in clever and even duplicitous ways to secure power.