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# The Origins of National Humiliation and its Effect on Foreign Policy Preferences

In the early 1990s, the Chinese government's Patriotic Education Campaign propagated the narrative that foreign powers humiliated and took advantage of China during the 'Century of National Humiliation' from 1839–1949. Scholars have suggested this narrative of humiliation has had serious political consequences, namely by increasing the Chinese government's tendency to escalate international disputes (Callahan 2010; Wang 2012, 96). Similarly, Hindu nationalist groups including the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have promoted narratives of India's historical "humiliation and subjugation" (Singh 2013, 117). Other scholars point to "humiliation" as a motivation for Russia's annexation of Crimea (Larson and Shevchenko 2014).

Are public statements of humiliation merely bargaining bluster (Weiss 2014), or can humiliation actually increase individuals' willingness for war? The answer matters because if a state's cost of war falls, then the bargaining range shrinks, making conflict more likely (Fearon 1995). Yet, the major theories of international relations largely dismiss this question. Rational choice theories, including bargaining theory, realism, and liberal institutionalism, abstract away from emotions, arguing that one can largely account for important international behavior without resorting to emotional explanations. For these theories, expressions of humiliation can be discounted.

Other scholars have attempted to bring behavioral influences, like emotions, back into international relations theory, yet how to integrate behavioral insights with systematic rational theories remains a challenge (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017). Such scholars have offered various mechanisms through which humiliation might increase an actor's preference for war. Some theorize that humiliation leads to conflict because humiliated actors seek revenge (Lindner 2006; Löwenheim and Heimann 2008; Wang 2012). Others argue that humiliation makes people view actors that have humiliated them as enemies (Wang 2012). Still more claim that humiliated actors seek conflict to regain status, dignity, or pride (Saurette 2006; Fattah and Fierke 2009; Barnhart 2017). However, to be able to integrate humiliation with rational bargaining theories, which themselves rest on micro-level assumptions about behavior, and to understand *how* humiliation influences conflict preferences, we must first understand the microfoundations behind humiliation's influence on individual decision makers (Kertzer 2017).

A closely connected question is where do national humiliation narratives come from? Understanding when political groups use these narratives matters for three reasons. First, the possibility these narratives could increase the probability of war makes it important to understand what causes them. Second, explaining how individual emotional reactions spread is an important part of bridging the gap between individual-level research on the influence of emotions and nationalism on foreign policy preferences and state-level foreign policy outcomes (Hall and Ross 2015, 848). Emotional narratives that link emotions to group identities play a key role in connecting individual emotional experiences to intergroup conflicts (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2015, 370). Third, understanding where these narratives come from would also help explain when these emotions influence foreign policy preferences.

In theorizing about the relationship of humiliation and international conflict, I start by defining humiliation and distinguishing it from events that may evoke humiliation as well as other emotions. Second, I discuss the effects of humiliation on conflict decision

making. Third, I specify the scope conditions under which these effects influence foreign policy. Finally, I examine when political groups propagate narratives of national humiliation and when these narratives are most likely to appeal to the public.

## 1 Defining Humiliation

Before theorizing about humiliation's effects, it is necessary to define humiliation independently from international events and distinguish it from other emotional states. Humiliation is "the deep dysphoric feeling associated with being, or perceiving oneself as being, unjustly degraded, ridiculed, or put down—in particular, one's identity has been demeaned or devalued" (Hartling and Luchetta 1999, 264). While humiliation is an emotion experienced individually, triggers for humiliation target one's identity, and identities may be shared socially. Although individuals are the ones who adopt identities, these identities are created from raw material that is constructed collectively (Hymans 2006, 26–27). This does not imply that aggregate groups or states experience emotions. Because emotions take place within individuals' brains, emotional reactions can only occur at the individual level (McDermott 2014, 562). However, this does not deny that individuals who share an identity can have an increased propensity to have similar emotional responses at times when these identities are activated (Mercer 2014; Sasley 2011).

Not all decreases in self-esteem or losses of face, where face is the expectation among the members of your social group about the deference you will receive (O'Neill 1999, 139), constitute humiliation. The humiliated perceive that the humiliator has committed a grave injustice. This distinguishes humiliation from shame because when ashamed one feels that it is oneself who did something unjust (Leidner, Sheikh, and Ginges 2012). "People believe they deserve their shame; they do not believe they deserve their humiliation" (Klein 1991, 117). Experimental evidence supports this distinction (Fernández, Saguy, and Halperin 2015, 5). This distinction contrasts my approach with psychoanalytic accounts of humiliation, which

often treat humiliation and shame as interchangeable (Vogel and Lazare 1990, 140; Steinberg 1996, 8; Fontan 2006, 218). The key is that the humiliating action is perceived as unjust, not whether it truly is. This also distinguishes humiliation from stigma because stigma involves the internalization of values that indicate your identity group has done something wrong, making it more similar to shame (Zarakol 2011, 7). In contrast with shame and stigma, moral outrage is a key component of humiliation (Leidner, Sheikh, and Ginges 2012).

Humiliation is distinct from status because status is a hierarchy that must be recognized by a community while humiliation is an emotional state (Renshon 2016, 519). However, the perception of losing status can trigger the emotion of humiliation (Elison and Harter 2007, 311).

The humiliator need not have intended their act to humiliate, and no audience is necessary.<sup>1</sup> Individuals insulted without the presence of an audience have similar behavioral and physiological responses to individuals insulted with an audience present (Nisbett and Cohen 1996, 49–52). This is consistent with the idea that humiliation is an individual emotional response distinct from a communally determined status hierarchy. Because humiliation involves the gap between the treatment members of an identity group believe they deserve and the treatment they receive, a group’s pretension to higher levels of deference and respect than others believe they are owed can increase the likelihood and intensity of humiliation (Miller 1993, 10).<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 National Humiliation

For national humiliation, the relevant identity group of the humiliated is their nation. Personal humiliation is much less likely to spread socially. To resonate politically, humiliation must be framed as a matter of public concern and the public, or at least an important segment of it, must accept this framing. While individuals may be humiliated through identities other than national identities, other kinds of humiliation are likely to lead to different outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup>However, research suggests larger audiences intensify the effect of humiliation (Combs et al. 2010).

<sup>2</sup>See also Callahan 2010, 10.

Minority groups might use humiliation narratives to mobilize against social discrimination, but they are unlikely to be able to use this as a political strategy to take control of the state. They are also unlikely to conceive of foreign policy solutions to their humiliation. I focus on national humiliation because I am primarily interested the potential of humiliation to influence foreign policy.

Because national identities are socially constructed, their content may vary both over time and across nationalist groups as well as be contested by individual members of a nation. The construction of an event as humiliating takes place through *humiliation narratives* that specify the humiliating event, the humiliated group, and the humiliator. These narratives are shared socially and are distinct from humiliation itself, which is an emotion that individuals may experience when exposed to these narratives. This is in line with Krebs (2015b)'s conception of narratives as selective presentations of events that tell causal stories that impose order on the world and contain characters (137). Research on emotions indicates that they are particularly suited for use in narrative creation. Further, the core emotional appraisal, or the cognitive meaning given to the emotional events, influences individuals' interpretations of each part of the narrative (Frijda 2007, 183).<sup>3</sup> The social sharing of emotions as well as tying emotions to identities and goals can extend their duration (Frijda 2007, 189, 273).

For a potentially humiliating event to become politically salient, domestic political actors must frame that event as humiliating and that framing must resonate with their audience. Sometimes the framing may take place many years after the event, when domestic politics creates an opportunity for humiliation strategies to become successful. Even if an event is not initially framed as humiliating, political actors may later reframe that event. Actors can reimagine past events as humiliating, even if people living at the time of these events did not experience national humiliation. Further, it is possible for actors to restart a national

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<sup>3</sup>Cognitive approaches to emotions are sometimes criticized as ignoring the nonconscious aspects of emotional experience (Ross 2014, 19–20). This criticism does not apply to appraisal theory. As Frijda (2007) writes, “True enough, the term *cognitive* may cause confusion. It suggests declarative as well as conscious representations, neither of which is implied when appraisal theorists use the word” [original emphasis] (102).

humiliation narrative that has gone ignored for many years, as long as they find a receptive audience.

If it is not events but how events are constructed in the context of existing national identities that determines the creation of national humiliation narratives, then researchers must examine the discourse of particular national groups to determine the concerns at the core of those identities. According to Hall and Ross, “Concerns are what we care about—objects, values, and goals that will, when meaningfully implicated in a situation, elicit emotions” (Hall and Ross 2015, 854). Individuals must hold a particular national issue as a concern to be subject to national humiliation over that issue.

Events involving national symbols are more easily framed as national humiliation. National humiliation may occur directly or indirectly through an insult or focal symbol and may or may not involve material harm (O’Neill 1999). Examples of acts that involve material harm and could be perceived as national humiliation include the destruction of a national religious site or the capture of national homeland (Hassner 2009; Shelef 2010; Shelef 2016; Veer 1994; Penrose 2002; Callahan 2004). Other potentially humiliating acts are solely symbolic. Metaphors (for example, the nation as a person represented in the form of a national leader) and prototypes (such as a national flag) can symbolize the nation (O’Neill 1999, 13). Perceived insults or slights to these national symbols may not entail material harm but still be taken seriously by nationalists. For example, the Indian foreign minister recently threatened to deny visas to all Amazon employees, despite the fact that this would pose a significant cost to the Indian economy, unless Amazon apologized for selling a doormat depicting the Indian flag and removed it from its store (Bearak 2017). Because a national symbol like the flag is taken to represent the nation as a whole, insults to these symbols may be considered attacks on the nation. Commemorating past humiliations is a way of activating group identities and connecting them to emotions (Frijda 2007, 287).

## 2 Humiliation and International Conflict

An emerging field of emotions and international relations research has linked various emotional states and traits to conflict decision making. Renshon, Lee, and Tingley (2017) show that emotional arousal can inhibit strategic thinking, causing actors to make suboptimal decisions in bargaining. Halperin et al. (2011) find that individuals who are high in hatred of the out-group are less likely to compromise in negotiations when angry. Zeitzoff (2014) finds that anger increases the propensity to punish among Israelis living in areas more exposed to rocket fire. Hatemi et al. (2013) find that individuals high in social fear have more negative opinions about out-groups. Stein (2015) finds that democracies that value revenge, measured by whether they allow capital punishment, are more conflict prone.

Some of these theories have linked humiliation to conflict (Wang 2012; Badie 2017; Barnhart 2017; Barnhart 2020). I build on this work by separating humiliation as an emotion from *events* that are experienced as humiliating. Distinguishing humiliation as an emotion from events that may cause it has several advantages. First, if humiliation is just the result of international events, then it cannot have an independent impact on foreign policy. Separating humiliation from events allows theorization of the mechanisms through which humiliation influences conflict preferences. Second, it allows examining whether particular events actually cause humiliation in the first place. Events do not come with emotions attached. The cognitive meaning individuals attribute to events (appraisal) plays an important role in determining what emotion individuals experience (Frijda 2007, 97).

Third, understanding humiliation's emotional aspects provides microfoundations for theories about humiliation and conflict preferences. Theorizing the effect of humiliation on individual preferences avoids the pitfalls of attributing emotions to the state (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017, 18). This enables examining individual-level differences in humiliation as well as how humiliation spreads socially through national narratives.

## 2.1 Humiliation's Effect on Individual Conflict Preferences

Here I derive expectations about humiliation's influence on conflict preferences. Just as is common with rationalist theorizations of bargaining, I abstract away from the specific issue at stake between states (Fearon 1995; Fearon 2018). I do this in order to focus on the way that the emotional state of humiliation affects individual-level conflict preferences, regardless of specific foreign-policy goals. While I use the term 'conflict preferences,' the logic of the theory applies generally to preferences regarding policies that take hostile actions against non-nationals.

To understand the effects of humiliation on decision making, I turn to neuroscience and experimental psychology. From research in these fields, I derive several reasons to expect that humiliation will increase conflict preferences. First, humiliation is an intense emotion. An experiment that recorded electro-encephalograms (EEG) while subjects read stories associated with various emotions found that "humiliation is indeed a particularly demanding emotional experience at the level of neuro-cognitive and emotional processing, more so than other approach-related emotions such as happiness and anger" and that "humiliation is a more intense emotional experience than happiness, shame, or anger" (Otten and Jonas 2014, 29, 32). This is important because more intense emotions are more likely to influence motivations (Smith and Pope 1992; Frijda 2007, 25–26). More cognitively demanding emotions are also more likely to take control precedence, which inhibits processing of information antithetical to the action of tendency of these emotions (Frijda 2007, 41).

Second, while both approach responses, which cause individuals to move towards the object of emotional concern, and withdraw responses, which do the opposite, have been recorded with humiliation (Vogel and Lazare 1990, 141; Atran and Ginges 2008; Torres and Bergner 2010, 200–201; Walker and Knauer 2011, 726), there are several reasons to expect an approach rather than a withdrawal response in an international relations context. Violent, approach responses from humiliation are more likely when an individual identifies as an "outsider who has become an enemy of the community" (Torres and Bergner 2010,

200–01). Approach responses to humiliation are also more likely when it involves intense anger, which alone is not sufficient for violence (Walker and Knauer 2011, 727; Leidner, Sheikh, and Ginges 2012, 4). In international relations, the role of enemy is well defined and readily available, and actors often see other nations as out-groups (Herrmann et al. 1997). An injustice appraisal that increases the emphasis on the moral outrage (anger) component of humiliation is particularly likely in in-group/out-group comparisons because motivated reasoning leads people to see their own group as the victim (Herrmann 2017, 67). This perception that the humiliating action is unjust increases the probability of approach reactions (Fernández, Saguy, and Halperin 2015, 6). In the case of international threat, approach emotions should increase the probability of a fight (intervene) rather than a flight (buck-passing) reaction.

Third, unlike similar emotions, such as shame, humiliation is associated with the perception of a hostile perpetrator (Fernández et al. 2018, 2). Because emotions direct attention to actions that remedy the emotional concern at stake (Mesquita and Frijda 2011, 782), humiliation motivates action against perceived perpetrators. Further, this hostility is *not limited to perceived humiliations* but can extend to other actors as well (Elison and Harter 2007; Barnhart 2017, 319; Frijda 2007, 274).

Despite this information, the evidence linking humiliation to conflictual responses is limited. Much of the psychological work on humiliation tends to focus on the causes rather than the effects of humiliation (Fernández, Saguy, and Halperin 2015, 2). In fact, “In the case of humiliation, very little is known about its behavioral consequences [...]” (Otten and Jonas 2014, 32). This makes the development of theories of humiliation and conflict with clear microfoundations even more important.

This leads to the hypothesis that:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1)** *The emotional state of humiliation increases individuals’ preferences for conflict.*

How does humiliation do this? Understanding the mechanism is vital to provide microfoun-

dations to the theory, to understand when the theory is most likely to apply, and to provide research guidance on case selection and which mechanisms to examine.

Broadly speaking there are two ways that emotions can influence preferences about conflict. They can either increase the perceived benefits of conflict or decrease the restraint of the cost of conflict. It is likely that humiliation has some effect on both cost and benefit considerations, but its effect on one may be stronger than the other. This makes it useful to theorize expectations of humiliation's effect on conflict propensity when the benefits vs. the cost component of the effect dominates. I will refer to mechanisms that decrease the restraint of the cost of conflict as cost-side mechanisms and mechanisms that increase the perceived benefits of conflict as benefits-side mechanisms. I restrict this theorization to the interesting case where the benefits of conflict are not already so high that actors in any emotional state would choose conflict. The conceptualization of humiliation's influence in terms of cost and benefit considerations does *not* imply that this is a rationalist account of humiliation, but it does have the advantage of making the integration of this theory with existing rationalist accounts straightforward. The difference is that in this account, preferences are not fixed but changed based on actor's emotional states.

Whether cost-side or benefits-side mechanisms dominate humiliation's effect on conflict preferences has implications for the magnitude of the increase in conflict preferences due to humiliation across different costs of conflict. At low values of cost, the cost component cannot decrease the restraint of the cost of conflict much because it is already low. At higher values of cost, there is more room for cost-side mechanisms to decrease the influence of cost on decision making. In contrast, benefits-side mechanisms increase conflict preferences uniformly across all values of cost because higher benefits make individuals more likely to choose conflict independently of cost.

If the effect of humiliation is mostly cost driven, then humiliation would only have a minor effect at low costs of conflict because only the smaller benefits-side effect is operating, but once the cost of conflict rises beyond a certain point, the effect of humiliation on conflict

propensity would start to increase as non-humiliated individuals choose conflict at lower rates but humiliated individuals are less sensitive to this rising cost. In other words, humiliation would have a small effect on conflict preferences when costs are low but a large effect when costs are high. In contrast, if the effect of humiliation on conflict preferences is mostly benefits driven, humiliation would increase propensity for conflict across all values of the cost of conflict. Any increase in humiliation’s effect as the cost of conflict increases would be relatively minor, since most of the effect comes from benefits-side mechanisms. In other words, humiliation would generally increase preferences for conflict and any differences in the magnitude of this increase across the cost of conflict would be slight.

I offer two new mechanisms, one on the cost side and one on the benefits side, through which humiliation may influence conflict preferences. These mechanisms are not exhaustive. However, they have the strongest theoretical case for influencing preferences at the individual level. These mechanisms are neither dependent on each other nor mutually exclusive. It must be determined empirically whether one, either, or both operate.

First, humiliation should increase individuals’ preferences for conflict by making them less sensitive to the cost of conflict.<sup>4</sup> Emotions have a corresponding action readiness that prepares the person experiencing them to achieve a particular aim (Frijda 2007, 27). These action tendencies are “reward insensitive”, meaning that “Foresight of bad outcomes tends not to deflect from their purpose [... For example,] in urge for revenge, you risk sacrificing your life [...]” (Frijda 2007, 46). This is particularly the case for strong emotions (Elster 2012, 156–58).

Humiliation could also decrease the impact of perceived costs on decision making. Emo-

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<sup>4</sup>There are two reasons why this cost mechanism is distinct from prospect theory’s prediction that individuals facing losses will become more risk acceptant (Levy 1992). First, the emotional experience of humiliation is not the same as facing losses with regard to the decision at hand. One could be humiliated for reasons that are not directly tied to the dispute. Humiliated individuals might be confronted either with the prospect of gains or losses, but as long as one is in this state, one is less sensitive to the cost of conflict in general. Second, *cost sensitivity* and *risk preference* are not the same. Given two options with the same expected value, a risk acceptant person will choose the riskier option. In contrast, being less sensitive to cost changes the expected value of the options because cost now has a lower impact on the utility function. If you are less sensitive to cost, then you are more likely to choose a strategy that could result in costly conflict, independently of the likelihood that strategy will lead to conflict (the risk).

tions interfere with the processing of information that is antithetical to their action tendency (Frijda 2007, 41). The especially intense cognitive demands humiliation poses make it particularly likely to interfere (Otten and Jonas 2014, 29, 32). Because humiliation with a strong injustice appraisal leads to a hostile approach action tendency, individuals experiencing humiliation may discount the costs of taking hostile actions or simply be less able to integrate this information into their decision process.

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a)** *Humiliation increases conflict preferences through decreasing individuals' sensitivity to the costs of conflict.*

The second mechanism is a benefits-side mechanisms involving status. Humiliation can make individuals think they stand to gain status if they prevail in a conflict and lose status if they back down. I will refer to this mechanism of leading individuals to attribute status value to the dispute when they otherwise would not as increasing the salience of status. Humiliated people express heightened fears of future humiliation (Hartling and Luchetta 1999, 263, 270). Because status loss can result in feelings of humiliation (Otten and Jonas 2014), humiliated individuals should particularly be alert for situations where they might lose status. This could cause them to attribute status implications to dispute outcomes when they would not otherwise.

In international relations, status refers to a country's standing in a global hierarchy. It is distinct from reputation, which lacks this relational aspect where one country's status depends on its ranking in comparison with other countries (Renshon 2016, 519–20). Individuals can value their state's status either intrinsically or because they believe that it will make them more likely to be able to achieve other outcomes they desire.

This explanation supposes that humiliation increases the *salience* rather than the *value* of status. This is important because people in general tend to value status. However, many issues are at stake in conflict decision making, and individuals cannot keep them all in mind at once. Instead they assess how a policy will affect one or two salient values and this influences their assessment of the policy's other impacts (Jervis 1976, 137). Emotional

arousal makes some risks more salient than others (Vertzberger 1998, 45). In situations where the status implications of a dispute are not obvious, humiliated individuals are more likely to believe that status is at stake. This can increase their assessment of the stakes and, hence, the perceived benefits of choosing conflict.

However, does increasing the salience of status increase the appeal of conflict, or does it simply displace other motivations for conflict? The way humiliation increases status's salience should, on average, increase the likelihood of conflict. The belief that one stands to lose status if one concedes on the dispute increases the payoff of fighting relative to backing down. Other considerations that status could displace may or may not make conflict more appealing. In the case where status displaces another consideration that equally points toward conflict, it will not increase the probability of conflict, but when it displaces neutral considerations or considerations that point against choosing conflict, it will increase the appeal of conflict. Therefore, on average, increasing the salience of the status value of the dispute raises the appeal of conflict.

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b)** *Humiliation increases conflict preferences through increasing the salience of future status loss.*

## 2.2 Cross-cultural Generalizability

Because national identities are socially constructed, the events likely to be constructed as national humiliations vary across cultures. However, the emotional state of humiliation itself as well as its effects on decision making should be similar. There is broad evidence for the universality of emotions and their action tendencies.<sup>5</sup> While some of this evidence has been challenged recently, much of the disagreement stems from whether statistical patterns in emotional brain activity should be interpreted as discrete emotions or more general emotional processes (Barrett 2017). My theory primarily draws on appraisal theory, which analyzes emotions as phenomena that have both cognitive and physiological content. On the subject

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<sup>5</sup>See also Ekman (1992), Ekman and Friesen (1971), and Elfenbein and Ambady (2002).

of the universality of emotions, appraisal theory argues that while “It is still possible that what is universal are not emotional dispositions, but human and animal concerns plus the contingencies in subject-environment interaction that emotions respond to: threat, need and opportunity for bonding, and the like. One may also argue that what is finite and restricted are the limited sets of possible or conceivable relational changes, such as self-protection and forceful opposition” (Frijda 2007, 34–35, 56–57). For my purposes, it does not matter whether emotions are shared because they are innate or because humans globally face broadly similar concerns. As long as an individual can experience an emotional state that we would recognize as humiliation, then my theory about humiliation’s effects on decision making should apply.

Still, one might insist that emotional states differ across cultures. There is a psychological theory that corresponds to this way of thinking called the “theory of constructed emotions,” which argues that an individual’s experience of an emotion depends on their knowledge of socially constructed “emotional concepts” (Barrett 2017, xiii, 92). An implication of this theory is that emotions are not innate and vary by culture (Barrett 2017, xii). However, even proponents of this theory acknowledge that computers are able to find systematic variation in brain scans that corresponds to different emotions and that the existence of this systematic variation provides a foundation for generalizations about how populations experience emotions on average (Barrett 2017, 16, 23–24). In practice, advocates of the theory of constructed emotions tend to also make use of appraisal models because of the value of their parsimony (Fox et al. 2018, 404). Further, the amount of exposure to emotional concepts required according to Barrett, a leading proponent of this theory, are minimal. As little as learning the name of an emotion and its definition can enable one to experience it (Barrett 2017, 54). This implies that cultures exposed to globalization would have been exposed to the emotional concept of humiliation.

### 3 Implications for International Behavior

In this section, I discuss the implications humiliation's individual-level effect on conflict preferences has for foreign policy decisions. First, I discuss the scope conditions that need to be met for humiliation to influence conflict decisions. These include both who can be influenced and when this influence should occur. Second, I describe the observable implications the theory has for foreign policy behavior. While this dissertation only examines the empirical evidence for the implications discussed in this section regarding expressions of national humiliation and expressions of support for hostile foreign policies, including the other implications has value because they provide empirical implications for future research to test to further evaluate the theory. Further these implications help make clear the substantive importance of the theory by explicating its implications for major foreign policy outcomes, like conflict.

#### 3.1 Scope Conditions

The first scope condition has to do with to *whom* the theory applies. I argue below that both elites and citizens are subject to the influence of humiliation on conflict preferences. However, I also discuss the implications for the theory if elites are insulated from emotional influences. A critic could argue that leaders do not make decisions about conflict on a whim and can delay their decisions to limit the effect of extreme emotions (McDermott 2004). However, elites are not necessarily motivated by the high stakes of their decisions to use better information processing techniques, even when they are not under time pressure (Vertzberger 1998, 390). Leaders may be unable to avoid emotional influences even with conscious effort. Individuals in hot (emotional) states struggle to imagine how they would think in cold states (Loewenstein 1996, 281–284).<sup>6</sup> The emotional motivation for retaliation is enduring, which might make it persist even if the decision is delayed (Löwenheim and

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<sup>6</sup>See also Nordgren, Pligt, and Harreveld (2007), and Van Boven and Loewenstein (2005), and Sayette et al. (2008).

Heimann 2008; Frijda 2007, 272–273).

Rational decision-making cannot be separated from emotions, and leaders, not only citizens, experience emotional influences on their decisions (McDermott 2004; Mercer 2005; Damasio 2005). Even China’s top leadership discussing the United States’ 1999 bombing of a Chinese embassy in Belgrade—accidental according to U.S. accounts—behind closed doors speculated that it was done intentionally to humiliate China (Zong 2002). The fact that content of this discussion was not intended to be public suggests that the leaders’ connection of national humiliation to this incident was not simply to mobilize public support. Their interpretation of this event may have been influenced by narratives of national humiliation the CCP began to promote years earlier.

While one might imagine that emotions affect decision making differently for leaders than for the general public, the experimental evidence is beginning to stack up against the idea that elites are more rational or less biased decision makers than the public (Hafner-Burton et al. 2014; Renshon 2015; Sheffer et al. 2018). Experiments conducted on leader and public perceptions about conflict have “obtained nearly identical results” (Kertzer, Renshon, and Yarhi-Milo 2019, 18). In the context of emotions, the evidence suggests that, if anything, politically sophisticated individuals are more likely to have emotional responses to politics and that these responses have a greater influence on their behavior (Miller 2011). Regarding bargaining, experiments show that elites are even more likely than the general public to reject unfavorable offers that are still better than no deal (LeVeck et al. 2014). This does not imply that leaders act *irrationally* in the sense of acting against their preferences (Little and Zeitzoff 2017, 524). Rather, it means preferences are endogenous to emotional states.

However, even if leaders themselves are somehow isolated from the influences of emotions, public pressure can force them to behave as though they are influenced. This is not limited to democracies. The Japanese premier who signed the Washington System treaties, which limited the build-up of naval forces in the Pacific prior to WWII, was shot and killed by a nationalist (Campbell 2016, 109). Chinese officials are wary of moderating China’s South

China Sea claims for fear of being proclaimed a “traitor who suggests backing down” (Lynch 2015, 196). Some contend that nationalism and the emotions it evokes are more influential in authoritarian regimes than in democracies because nationalism is often the only accepted form of public criticism.<sup>7</sup> Further, it is difficult for leaders to change nationalist narratives in the short term, and authoritarian regimes that base their legitimacy on nationalism risk instability when they repress nationalists (Gries 2005, 46, 120). Even if the probability of losing office is lower for autocrats, they are more sensitive to it because they face harsher consequences, such as death and imprisonment, than democratic leaders who lose office (Debs and Goemans 2010).

If despite this we suppose that leaders are insulated from the emotional influence of humiliation on their decisions, this implies an addition scope condition. In this case, national humiliation should only increase the likelihood of conflict when it motivates the public to exert sufficient pressure that leaders feel they risk losing office if they go against citizens’ desire for conflict. Evidence for this could be found if leaders acknowledge both the undesirability of conflict and public pressure to engage in conflict in private deliberations that become available to researchers.

The second scope condition has to do with *when* the theory applies. An individual has to be in an emotional state of humiliation while making a decision about whether or not to initiate conflict. Just experiencing the emotion will not necessarily make one seek out a conflict to initiate. Narratives of national humiliation that tie past humiliations to current international disputes make make this scope condition more likely to be met. For example, the way the CCP often explicitly links current foreign policy setbacks to China’s humiliating past may increase the probability that humiliation is experienced when critical international decisions are made (Wang 2012). Rumination where individuals “contemplate the injustice of what happened or the perfidy of the perpetrators” decreases the chance that emotions dissipate over time and increases the chance that they motivate future aggression (Barash

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<sup>7</sup>See He (2007, 18) and Shen (2010, 103).

and Lipton 2011, 96).<sup>8</sup> National practices that encourage this kind of thinking may be the “social equivalent of personal rumination” (Barash and Lipton 2011, 96).

The ability of current events to trigger past memories of humiliation is another factor that may increase the probability this scope condition is met. Current humiliation increases thinking about past humiliation through mood-dependent memory (McDermott 2004; Frijda 2007, 273). Past experiences of humiliation are associated with vulnerability to and fear of future humiliation (Hartling and Luchetta 1999, 263, 270). Research on aggression has found that relatively mild triggers can provoke an aggressive response from individuals previously exposed to stronger provocations (Barash and Lipton 2011, 61). These connections may make it difficult for actors to address international crises coolly.

### 3.2 Foreign Policy Implications

Leaders’ beliefs about national humiliation are probably more complicated than a genuine/instrumental dichotomy allows because instrumental expressions will tend to bleed into true feelings (see section 4.2.1). For theoretical tractability, I lay out empirical implications for each end of this dichotomy while acknowledging that in reality it is more of a continuum. This also has the advantage of allowing readers who doubt elites are genuinely motivated by their own rhetoric to see how the theory’s predictions would change under this condition. For each implication below, if leaders’ emotional expressions are strategic rather than genuinely felt, then there should be a divergence between leaders’ public justifications and private deliberations. Citizens’ expressions and leaders’ public discourse would be as predicted by the implication, but leaders’ private deliberations would not. Further, the additional scope condition of public pressure, discussed in the previous section, would apply to the below predictions about international behavior.

The hypothesis that humiliation increases preferences for conflict (H1) has several observable implications. First, emotional expressions of national humiliation should correlate

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<sup>8</sup>See also Coleman, Kugler, and Goldman 2007; Anestis et al. 2009.

with advocacy of more conflictual foreign policy. Second, regardless of whether the cost or status mechanism drives preference change, expressions of national humiliation should correlate with the initiation of conflict. This is because both mechanisms shrink the bargaining range, meaning the range of settlements that both sides prefer to war (Fearon 1995). The cost mechanism does so by decreasing the cost of war, and the status mechanism does so by increasing the value of the disputed issue.

The hypothesis that humiliation decreases sensitivity to the cost of conflict (H2a) also provides observable implications for international behavior. Emotional expressions of humiliation should correlate with increased willingness to pay the cost of conflict, which could manifest in several ways. One is increased military spending. Another is greater willingness to accept casualties or economic damage due to conflict. Another way this could manifest is if leaders fail to consider or are unable to correctly calculate the expected costs of conflict due to cognitive interference from the emotion of humiliation.

The hypothesis that humiliation increases the salience of future status loss (H2b) has distinct empirical implications from the cost hypothesis. H2b implies that emotional expressions of national humiliation should correlate with discussions of status. Further, these status concerns should manifest themselves in justifications for conflict. Individuals attributing status value to a dispute where they otherwise would not should increase their value for the dispute, other things equal, and, hence, their willingness to fight.

## **4 Where Do Humiliation Narratives Come from and When do they Succeed?**

Existing theories of national humiliation narratives rarely distinguish between what causes political groups to disseminate national humiliation narratives and what makes this strategy succeed. One might suppose that groups decide to propagate national humiliation narratives because they anticipate this strategy's success. However, groups disseminating na-

tional humiliation narratives do not always take or maintain government control, indicating that foresight of success does not determine when groups propagate these narratives. Below I extract the implications of existing theories for the use and success of national humiliation narratives, explain how they are incomplete, and build on them.

## 4.1 Existing Explanations of the Origins of National Humiliation Narratives

Explanations for the use of national humiliation narratives can be divided into three categories. The first claims that traumatic events give rise to humiliation narratives. The second theorizes that leaders create narratives of national humiliation for domestic political reasons. The third explains the creation of these narratives as an international bargaining tactic.

### 4.1.1 Event-based Explanations for the Use of Humiliation Narratives

One explanation is that certain events cause both the use of humiliation narratives and their success when used. “Collective trauma” might create “an emphasis on victimhood and entitlement” (Miller 2013, 2). The presence of a “threatening other” could lead to narratives of national humiliation (Jaffrelot 1999, 11, 21).<sup>9</sup> Other versions of this argument substitute the desire to maintain face or self-esteem in response to the West or modernity for a threatening other (Gries 2005, 27; Badie 2017, 6–9).

The most comprehensive event-based account of humiliation appears in (Barnhart 2020). In this account national humiliation results when states fail to perform, especially in military conflict (18), or are disrespected by being denied rights their leaders expect their state is due (26). Defeats are more likely to lead to national humiliation when the state is defeated rapidly, when it is defeated by a weaker power, when it is defeated in a conflict it initiated, and when it loses territory (21–24). Humiliation from disrespect is more likely the more

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<sup>9</sup>See also Kaldor (2004, 168–69).

important the right the humiliator violates, the more clear the violation is intentional, the longer the violation endures, the more public the violation, and when the violator has equal or greater status (26–28).

I do not deny that events may increase the *probability* of humiliation narratives. However, because humiliation narratives are socially constructed, events are neither necessary nor sufficient for their construction. Event-based explanations are incomplete for three reasons. First, there are always events that could be construed as humiliating. This means that no one event is necessary to make the option of constructing a national humiliation narrative available. Second, not all events that could be conceived of as humiliating according to event-based accounts get constructed as national humiliation, meaning these events are not sufficient explanations for national humiliation narratives. According to the appraisal theory of emotions, given events can lead to different emotional outcomes depending on how they are appraised, that is depending on how individuals give meaning to those events (Frijda 2007, 97). This makes the interpretation of the event more important than the event itself.

Third, not all political groups within a country respond to potentially humiliating events in the same way (Veer 1987, 299; Giuliano 2000, 300). Van der Veer makes this point when describing how Hindu nationalists revived the issue of whether the Mosque of Babur was built on Ram’s birthplace in 1984:

“It seems reasonable to suggest that the very location of a mosque on Ram’s birth-site has always been a humiliating affront of Hindu feelings. This line of thought [...] hinders, in my opinion, the correct interpretation [...] First of all there is no ‘simple expression of Hindu feelings.’ Those who believe in Ram may support the liberation movement or may not support it depending on their interests and interpretation of the situation.” (Veer 1987, 299)

As Jaffrelot acknowledges, in his study of Hindu nationalists’ perception of Islam, “The reality of a threat was nevertheless of less significance than the Hindus’ subjective perception of one” (Jaffrelot 1999, 342).

If a Mosque in a Hindu holy site is sufficient, then why did attempts to mobilize Hindus on this issue fail in 1949 and succeed in the 1980s and early 1990s? Further, why did different Hindus within India have different opinions on whether the Mosque was humiliating? No event is inherently humiliating or threatening to self-esteem. Events alone cannot explain their narration because events are always consistent with multiple possible narratives (Krebs 2015a, 60). This argument is similar to the idea in the ethnic politics literature that there are no issues that automatically produce divides along ethnic lines; instead, the ethnic salience of an issue is determined by the way citizens and politicians construct it (Giuliano 2000, 196).

#### **4.1.2 Domestic Political Explanations for the Use of Humiliation Narratives**

Another perspective emphasizes the importance of nationalism as a source of leaders' domestic political support (Mansfield and Snyder 1995). One version of this argument proposes that elites promote narratives of national humiliation when they face a crisis of legitimacy (Wang 2012, 9). Another explanation posits that national humiliation "is largely deployed in specific circumstances as part of a nation-building project (anti-imperialist revolution) or a nation repairing (civil war) project" (Callahan 2004, 207).

These explanations likely contain part of the truth but are incomplete because there is still significant variation in the use of national humiliation narratives by nationalist groups. Essentially every domestic actor competing for political power in China and India during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, aside from the Qing Empire, was nationalist, yet they did not always use national humiliation narratives. Neither can legitimacy crises alone explain which events get narrated. For example, if the Chinese leadership had framed the sanctions following the Tiananmen Massacre as China's national humiliation rather than framing the events preceding the takeover of the Communist Party in 1949 this way, their efforts likely would have backfired because they would be blamed either for causing the humiliating event or for allowing it to occur. Further, if legitimacy crises lead to national humiliation narratives,

then the Qing Empire on the brink of its collapse and Indira Gandhi during the period of emergency rule in India should have used such narratives but did not.

While nation-building and fostering in-group solidarity may be one strategic motivation for politicians to promote a narrative of national humiliation, the nation-building explanation cannot tell us what kinds of groups are prone to deploy this strategy. Neither can it account for political groups that do not turn to national humiliation narratives.

### **4.1.3 International Politics Explanations for the Use of Humiliation Narratives**

The third explanation of national humiliation narratives finds their source in international politics. Bargaining theory could suggest that humiliation narratives allow states to credibly commit to use force during international disputes. Leaders may stress humiliation to both international and domestic audiences in order to argue that their domestic audience would punish them if they were perceived to humiliatingly back down, allowing them to credibly commit not to back down (Weiss 2014). In this way, humiliation might be cast as an honor commitment mechanism that increases the credibility of commitments and bargaining positions (O'Neill 1999, 127). Alternatively, national humiliation narratives could be an attempt to guilt international counterparts into compiling with policy goals (Finkel 2010, 54). However, national humiliation narratives take time to develop and catch on with a domestic audience. If states can simply conjure up such narratives to improve their bargaining positions, then humiliation narratives should be a ubiquitous feature of international bargaining. While a state may suppress or play up an existing narrative during a bargaining period, the creation of this narrative requires a separate explanation.

Moreover, humiliation does not provide an effective means to signal commitment internationally because humiliation narratives resonate more with domestic than international audiences. Emotions can cause leaders to misjudge the interpretation and importance other leaders will ascribe to their actions (Mercer 2013). If leaders cannot accurately assess the humiliation of individuals in other states or, perhaps, do not even pay attention to it, then

humiliation would not be an effective signal.

Research on empathy suggests that leaders should have difficulty assessing both the emotional state of non-nationals and how this emotional state will influence their decisions. Emotional perspective taking to assess the impact of emotions on the decisions of others involves two judgments that each have challenges. First, one must assess how one's own preferences would differ if one were in the same emotional state as the other person. Second, one must predict how similar one is to the other (Van Boven and Loewenstein 2005, 286). Emotionally unaroused individuals incorrectly imagine how they would feel when aroused, and humans underestimate the impact of others' emotions on their future behavior (Loewenstein 1996, 281–284).<sup>10</sup> Further, even if one is aroused, one is likely to weigh one's own emotions more highly than others' (Loewenstein 1996, 284). In the context of international relations, empathy is particularly difficult because humans find it harder to empathize with out-groups (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2012; Holmes 2013, 836). The attempt to get international partners, particularly those viewed as perpetrators of humiliation, to empathize with national suffering also risks backfiring and provoking anger and escalation (Finkel 2010, 56; Lind 2010), which raises further doubts about its use as a bargaining tactic.

## 4.2 When Groups Use National Humiliation Narratives

To develop a new explanation for why political groups use narratives of national humiliation, I build on the domestic political explanations. In addition to the problem of variation both within and across nationalist groups, current domestic political explanations face the challenge that recent experimental evidence from China does not find that exposure to humiliation narratives increases support for the government (Mattingly and Yao 2020). If these narratives do not increase support for the groups that promote them, then how do these groups benefit? One possibility is that national humiliation narratives may be more about decreasing support for alternatives than increasing support for the group propagating

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<sup>10</sup>See also Nordgren, Pligt, and Harreveld (2007), and Van Boven and Loewenstein (2005), and Sayette et al. (2008).

them. Research on emotions further provides reason to expect that groups will tar each other with humiliation narratives rather than build themselves up with narratives about more positive emotions. Humans habituate to positive events and not negative events, so negative emotional campaigns will likely produce longer lasting effects (Frijda 2007, 13).

My theory offers a two-part explanation of when political groups propagate narratives of national humiliation. The first is nonstrategic and is a prerequisite to national humiliation narrative construction. The ability of an individual to hold national issues as objects of emotional concern is a prerequisite for an individual to be subject to national humiliation, as discussed in section 1.1. To construct a national humiliation narrative, first, a political group must share a national identity with its audience. Second, the humiliator must not share this identity (otherwise the narrative would be based in shame rather than humiliation). National identity helps narrow down the actors and the possible events for humiliation narratives, but identity is not a sufficient cause for national humiliation narratives.

The second part of my explanation focuses on the strategic incentives of political groups to promote national humiliation narratives. To understand the strategic incentives of political groups we need to know their preferences. I assume members of political groups are office seeking (Riker 1984). Based on my theory of conflict preferences, I further assume groups promoting narratives of national humiliation will be more willing to pay the cost of hostile policies. This implies these groups are more likely to have policy platforms that include such policies.

From these assumptions, two implications about the strategic incentives of political groups to propagate national humiliation narratives follow. The first, and most important, is the ability of the group to distance itself from responsibility for the humiliating event and to instead blame political opponents. One way political groups can avoid blame is if their party was not in power when the event occurred (Croco 2015). Each of the following hypotheses are about the likelihood of political groups to disseminate national humiliation narratives as compared with other political groups in the same country or themselves in time periods

when the political strategy variables take different values.

Because national humiliation is viewed as an extremely negative event, it is unlikely that a leader who was in charge when the humiliation took place would be able to use it as a successful political strategy. This leader would likely be blamed for allowing the humiliating event to occur. Likewise, people closely associated with the leadership when the potentially humiliating event occurred are unlikely to try to use it for political gain. However, competing groups may frame this event as a national humiliation and use it to claim that the ruling group failed to protect the nation. The association between the party receiving blame and the event can be indirect. Even if the opposing group did not exist at the time of the humiliating event, groups that promote ideas associated with the humiliator can be labeled traitors. For example, national humiliation propaganda about events prior to 1949 increases anti-foreign sentiment in China (Mattingly and Yao 2020), which increases the effectiveness of regime claims that advocates of alternative forms of government, such as liberal democracy, are stooges of foreign powers.

**Hypothesis 3a (H3a)** *A political group is more likely to promote narratives of national humiliation when it can associate its political opponents with the event it constructs as humiliating while itself escaping responsibility.*

Another source of strategic incentives to propagate national humiliation narratives comes from the kinds of policies that feelings of humiliation might drive people to support. Posen (1993) suggested that nationalism, in particular “nationalist feeling,” was important in motivating soldiers to sacrifice for the nation and enabled the creation of mass armies (113). My theory about national humiliation and foreign policy preferences, provides microfoundations for further theorizing exactly what kinds of nationalist feelings might motivate this sacrifice. In particular, humiliation should decrease sensitivity to the cost of military policies. This implies that making citizens feel humiliated should make them more accepting of costly policies that can be framed in terms of strengthening or defending the nation.

Further, national humiliation narratives typically include a glorious past when the nation was not humiliated. The appeal to this past can unite citizens and mobilize support for restoring the nation to glory (Greenfeld 2001). Goal formation can turn emotions into enduring passions, including for “revenge,” that can extend indefinitely and motivate action (Frijda 2007, 189, 192). National humiliation pits the nation against an other (the humiliator). According to social identity theory, perception of intergroup competition is likely to make members of groups think more in terms of the group than individuals (Tajfel and Turner 2001). Thinking in terms of the group makes individuals more willing to make sacrifices if they believe these sacrifices will benefit the nation as a whole. For these reasons we would expect that leaders using national humiliation narratives strategically would be more likely to do so when they wish to motivate their audience to sacrifice for national defense.

**Hypothesis 3b (H3b)** *Given that the conditions for H3a are met, political groups that wish to motivate their audience to sacrifice for national defense are more likely to invoke national humiliation narratives.*

The combination of national identity and political incentives accounts for when political groups propagate narratives of national humiliation. However, these factors are not enough to ensure that national humiliation narratives will resonate with their audience. The following section explores when national humiliation narratives are most likely to appeal to citizens.

#### 4.2.1 The Relationship Between Emotion and Strategy

Does the importance of political strategy mean elites are immune to the emotional content of the narratives and are able to dupe citizens who, contrary to my theory of the effect of humiliation on conflict preferences, have different political responses to emotions? It does not. Instead I argue that leaders who promote these narratives tend to have genuine emotional experiences of humiliation. Leaders who genuinely feel the emotion they seek to convey will be able to make more persuasive performances of this emotion in speeches. Even when leaders have strong incentives to deceive, research on empathy and mirror neurons

suggests that they may not be able to successfully do so in face to face communication (Hall and Yarhi-Milo 2012, 561–62; Holmes 2013, 830–31). Further, as these communications take place among in-group members, the audience does not face the same barriers to uncovering the true feelings of the speaker as an international out-group audience would (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2012; Holmes 2013, 836).

If a leader's performance of humiliation rings false, then it is unlikely to affect the political leanings of its audience, so leaders need to be able to persuasively exhibit humiliation. Hence, the strategic benefits of national humiliation narratives are inextricably tied to leaders' emotional experience. There are three ways leaders can attain an emotional state that allows a convincing performance of humiliation. The first is that a leader may interpret events as national humiliation and experience the attending emotional reaction independently of considerations of political strategy. The second two involve leaders rousing themselves into the emotional state they seek to convey. They may do this consciously in order to appear sincere (Hall 2011, 535), or they could become emotional as an unintended result of their emotional performance (Hall 2017, 11). Some have argued that leader's stronger identification with their group makes them even more likely to experience emotions that reference group identities (Sasley 2011, 460, 468). Regardless of which route leaders take to reach the emotional experience of humiliation, the important point is that they must reach this state regardless of whether their narrative is strategically motivated or not for it to be effective.

Further, the ability to give more persuasive speeches makes individuals who genuinely experience humiliation more likely to get selected as leaders of groups promoting these narratives. The need for effective delivery of the narrative to gain its strategic benefits requires even groups that adopt humiliation narratives for instrumental reasons to select leaders who genuinely experience national humiliation. As a group promotes national humiliation narratives over time, a combination of this selection process with the tendency of leaders to rouse themselves will increasingly populate the group's leadership with individuals who genuinely experience national humiliation. This holds regardless of whether the tendency of political

groups to select narratives that strategically benefit them comes from an evolutionary process through which more successful narratives strategies are retained over time or a rational process of adapting to incentives (Shelef 2010; Moore et al. 2014). In either case, political groups are likely to converge to narratives that benefit them strategically, yet these same pressures to succeed also demand the promotion of leaders who genuinely experience these emotions and can effectively sway their audience.

### 4.3 When do Narratives of National Humiliation Succeed?

I offer an account of when national humiliation narratives appeal to domestic audiences based on my study of political groups in China and India over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I examine two indicators of whether narratives resonate with domestic audiences. First, does the party's propagation of the narrative help it gain or maintain political control? Second, what kinds of individuals are most likely to accept the narrative? I find that three conditions affect narrative resonance. None of these factors alone is sufficient to produce national humiliation narratives success, but together they form the background conditions that determine the likelihood of success. While these three conditions are inspired by the case specific literature on how nationalist narratives spread, I seek to synthesize these theories and my observations from the cases to produce an explanation that is more general, in that it travels cross-nationally, and more specific, in that it focuses particularly on explaining the success of nationalist narratives centered on humiliation.

First, if the government is determined to repress narratives of national humiliation, to the extent that it is willing to ban political groups propagating the narratives, then the ability of these narratives to resonate is limited. There may come a time when repressing these narratives is too costly. However, prior to these narratives becoming politically influential, the political environment must be sufficiently open for their spread. Even if a political group is willing to brave the risk of a government crackdown, the need for secrecy to avoid repression limits its ability to spread its narrative. Further, the government will deny the

message media access. An empirical implication of this condition is that as repression of national humiliation narratives declines, they should become more prominent (Snyder and Ballentine 1996, 5–6; Giuliano 2006, 294).

The second condition is the density of networks that link propagators of national humiliation narratives to their audience (Gorenburg 2003, 16). This condition has two components. The first is the existence of media networks that groups promoting narratives of national humiliation can use and their audience can access (Jaffrelot 2010, 209). One determinate of access to media networks is literacy, which allows nationalist messages to reach broader audiences and spread (Hroch 1996; Anderson 2006; Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006). Penetration of radio and television further extends the reach of nationalists messages (Rajagopal 2001). Increasingly, the internet and social media are important mediums through which nationalists messages spread (Cairns and Carlson 2016).

The second component is the institutions available to groups propagating narratives of national humiliation. State institutions including the educational system, museums, and state media can promote links that strengthen ties within identity groups (Anderson 2006; Suny 1989; Gorenburg 2000; Gorenburg 2001). They also provide conduits through which information can spread, which constrains the kinds of messages nationalist groups can send to their audience (Gorenburg 2003, 27). Political parties also provide institutions capable of disseminating narratives of national humiliation (DeVotta 2005; Moore et al. 2014). Civil society organizations, which often have official or unofficial links to political parties, provide additional institutional avenues of narrative promotion (Snyder and Ballentine 1996, 8). Besides information distribution, institutions also create social ties among individuals through which narratives of national humiliation can spread (Gorenburg 2003, 3). Moreover, the continued existence of institutional advocates makes narratives more durable by providing a stable source of advocacy (Suny 1989, 510; Gorenburg 2003, 31).

The empirical implications of the network linkage component of national humiliation narrative success are the following. First, as proponents of national humiliation narratives and

their audience become more linked through media networks, national humiliation narratives are more likely to resonate. Second, as proponents of national humiliation gain more control over both state and civil society institutions, national humiliation narratives are more likely to spread.

The third condition that determines whether narratives of national humiliation will spread is economic welfare (Hroch 2000; Hechter 2000). Citizens need enough wealth that they are not forced to spend all of their time engaged in subsistence farming for survival. Gellner notes, “Small peasant communities generally live inward-turned lives, tied to the locality by economic need if not by political prescription” (Gellner 2008, 10). Farmers living in these kinds of communities are less likely to mobilize over concerns that seem distant from their everyday lives, such as national humiliation. As a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) National Executive put it, “Emotional issues can only attract people when the stomach is full” (Jaffrelot 1999, 547). This is not an argument that subsistence farmers can never be mobilized over any issue. Instead, symbolic issues are less likely than bread and butter issues to resonate with subsistence farmers compared to other economic groups. Further, the argument is not that the appeal of national humiliation narratives should increase linearly with economic growth. Instead it is that individuals need to be above some minimal threshold of economic subsistence before national humiliation narratives will appeal to them. The effect of increased welfare beyond this point on the appeal of national humiliation narratives should be minimal.

The empirical implications of these inferences about economic welfare can be broken up into two parts, which distinguish them from other explanations of the spread of humiliation narratives, including those that predict that the rural poor are the most humiliated individuals because they experience the inequality of power and status the most intensely (Badie 2017, 124–25). First, when economic welfare is unevenly spread, narratives of national humiliation are more likely to resonate with literate members of urban professional classes than those living in poverty in the countryside. Second, as a country’s economy develops and

citizens are lifted out of poverty, national humiliation narratives are more likely to resonate.

### 4.3.1 Alternative Explanations for Narrative Success

Once event-based explanations that attribute both the use and success of narratives of national humiliation to a traumatic event are eliminated, there are relatively few explanations for why national humiliation narratives succeed. One might expect the success of national humiliation narratives depends the audience’s predispositions or culture (Snyder and Ballentine 1996, 20). Callahan argues that the Chinese Communist Party’s patriotic education campaign that emphasizes national humiliation “is so successful because it builds on a structure of feelings that actually precedes this particular propaganda policy, and predates the PRC” (2010, 19). However, this explanation cannot fully account for the case of India where Hindu nationalists drew on themes that existed in India prior to independence but did not experience political success until the late 1980s.

Further, because past events can always be reimagined as humiliating, this theme is always available. Callahan notes he is not making a “culturalist” argument that claims China is “unique,” and he claims the civilization/barbarism distinction, which for Callahan is the cultural resource national humiliation narratives require, is always present (Callahan 2010, 24). This suggests factors other than cultural predispositions determine *when* people respond to humiliation narratives.

## 5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that national humiliation shifts preferences towards conflict. It may do this both by reducing the constraint of the cost of conflict and by increasing the perceived value of the dispute. Humiliation reduces the constraint of the cost of conflict because its intense cognitive load interferes with the integration of information about the cost of its hostile action tendency into the decision making process. Humiliation increases

the perceived value of disputed issues, and hence willingness to fight for them, by making the status-value of the dispute salient to the decision making process when it would otherwise not be. Both of these mechanisms decrease the bargaining range, making conflict more likely.

I also explore where humiliation comes from and how it comes to be relevant to international decision making. I posit that humiliation gets tied to international politics through national humiliation narratives. Political groups, which share a national identity with their audience, disseminate these narratives when they can tie their political opponent to the potentially humiliating issue and avoid receiving blame themselves. These groups have a further incentive to propagate national humiliation narratives to promote their policies, which impose short-term costs on citizens and can be framed as necessary for national defense. The ability to persuasively deliver a national humiliation narrative in order to receive these political benefits requires leaders to genuinely undergo the emotional experience of humiliation. These narratives rely on a relative absence of repression, and networks that connect narrative propagators to their audience. They are more likely to mobilize individuals living above the economic subsistence level.

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