

National Humiliation: Causes and Consequences

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Many wars have been attributed to insults or the besmirching of national honor. Notably this includes the Franco-Prussia war, which Bismark provoked by editing a telegram to give the appearance the Prussian king was “snubbed” by the French ambassador (O’Neill 1999, 143). Prior to the start of World War I, “In their private exchanges, German and Austrian leaders talked of ‘the outrage,’ of ‘settling accounts,’ and of ‘teaching Serbia a lesson’ phrases suggestive more of national honor than realpolitik” (144). Schroeder (1972) describing the cause of the Crimean War writes that, “The only power that consistently violated Concert rules, rejected or frustrated Concert solutions, and insisted on turning the crisis into a head-to-head confrontation between great powers was Britain. In so doing, she broke *the first law of the Concert, ‘Thou shalt not challenge or seek to humiliate another great power,’* and thereby helped ensure not only the outbreak of the war, but the demise of the Concert itself” [my emphasis] (409).

Recently, the role of national humiliation in Chinese and Russian foreign policy has attracted attention. In the early 1990s, the Chinese government launched the Patriotic Education Campaign to spread the narrative that China had a history of greatness but was humiliated by foreign powers. Scholars have suggested this has increased the Chinese government’s tendency to escalate international disputes (Callahan 2010; Wang 2012, 96). Further, scholars point to “humiliation” as a motivation for Russia’s annexation of Crimea (Larson and Shevchenko 2014).

International relations research is increasingly focusing on how actors behave and, in par-

particular, how this behavior systematically departs from the predictions of baseline rational models (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017; Little and Zeitoff 2017). Actors in ‘hot’ or emotional states do not make decisions the same way as actors in ‘cold’ states (Loewenstein 1996; McDermott 2004; Sayette et al. 2008, 698). Emotions can influence decisions through changing the salient aspects of a situation, changing preferences, as well as influencing what actors remember (McDermott 2004; Mercer 2005; Damasio 2005). Each of these violates the typical assumptions of rational models that actors use all available, relevant information, have stable preferences, and share common knowledge of history (Kydd and Herrera 2018; Golman, Hagmann, and Loewenstein 2017). How can these behavioral insights be integrated with rational models, and how can individual-level effects be incorporated into systematic explanations of foreign policy? Answering these questions requires understanding how particular emotions alter the parameters emphasized by rational models.

This dissertation provides an answer by explaining how humiliation influences foreign policy preferences at the individual level and how these individual influences translate into foreign policy decisions. It also clarifies when political groups spread narratives of national humiliation and when these narratives are most likely to appeal to the public. The emotion of humiliation increases individual preferences for conflict by decreasing their sensitivity to the cost of conflict. This can lead to conflictual foreign policy both directly through humiliation’s influence on policy makers and indirectly through public pressure. Political groups are most likely to propagate narratives of national humiliation when they can avoid responsibility for the event they frame as humiliating while blaming their political opponents for it. National humiliation narratives are most likely to resonate with individuals living above economic subsistence and connected to media networks

1 Defining Humiliation

Here I define humiliation 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. 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). 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). 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. While status is a set of actors’ common beliefs about where each of them falls within a hierarchy (Renshon 2016, 519), humiliation is an individual emotional state. 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.¹ Nisbett and Cohen 1996 were surprised to find that subjects insulted without the

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

presence of an audience had similar behavioral and physiological responses to subjects insulted with an audience present (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).²

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. 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. However, political actors are not likely to succeed by simply making up potentially humiliating events.

²See also Callahan 2010, 10.

Events involving national symbols are more easily framed as national humiliation. 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 humiliation narrative that no elites have promoted for many years, as long as they find a receptive audience.

This implies 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.

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 an 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; Van der 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 India 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.

2 Humiliation and International Conflict

An emerging field of emotions and international relations research has linked various emotional states and traits to conflict attitudes. 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.

Previous theories have linked humiliation to conflict (Wang 2012; Badie 2017; Barnhart 2017). 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 micro-foundations 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

Neuroscience and experimental psychology help build the case that humiliation influences 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).

Secondly, humiliation is an approach emotion (Otten and Jonas 2014; Elison and Harter 2007). Approach emotions make individuals more likely to confront the situation they are facing rather than withdraw. In the case of international threat, approach emotions should increase the probability of a fight (intervene) rather than a flight (buck-passing) reaction. While humiliation has been associated with avoidance responses under certain conditions (Atran and Ginges 2008), the perception that the humiliating action is unjust increases the probability of approach reactions (Fernández, Saguy, and Halperin 2015, 6). This injustice appraisal is more likely in in-group/out-group comparisons because motivated reasoning leads people to see their own group as the victim (Herrmann 2017, 67).

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, particularly the experimental evidence that would give the most confidence there is a causal relationship, is limited. Much of the psychological work on humiliation tends to focus on the causes rather than the effects of humiliation, and the work on humiliation's effects is often observational (Fernández, Saguy, and Halperin 2015, 2). In fact, "In the case of humiliation, very little is known about its behavior consequences [...]" (Otten and Jonas 2014, 32). This makes the development of theories of humiliation and conflict with clear micro-foundations even more important.

Humiliation is an emotional state that influences individuals' preferences for conflict:

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

Drawing on the ability of emotions to direct attention (McDermott 2004, 694), I offer two new mechanisms through which humiliation may influence conflict preferences.

First, humiliation should increase individuals' preferences for conflict by making them less sensitive to the cost of conflict. 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). Further, emotions 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. The emotional event appraised as humiliating causes pain, and the desire to escape from this pain helps explain why the response is “often immoderate” (Frijda 2007, 274). Therefore:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a) *Decreased sensitivity to the costs of conflict is a mechanism through which the emotional state of humiliation increases individuals’ preferences for conflict.*

This cost mechanism is distinct from prospect theory’s prediction that leaders in the domain of loss will become more risk acceptant for two reasons (Levy 1992). First, emotional experience of humiliation is not the same as being in the domain of losses with regard to the decision at hand. For example, one could be humiliated for personal reasons, but as long as one is in this state, one is less sensitive to the cost of conflict in their decisions 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).

The second possible mechanism is that humiliation increases attentiveness to the possibility that status could be lost. People in humiliated states express heightened fears of future humiliations (Hartling and Luchetta 1999, 263, 270). Further, status loss is one of the most frequent causes of humiliation (Otten and Jonas 2014; Klein 1991), so humiliated individuals should be particularly attentive to the possibility of status loss. Because emotions motivate the resolution of the emotional concern that gave rise to them and because humiliation is an approach response that makes fight rather than flight reactions more likely, individuals are more likely to turn to conflict to prevent this status loss.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b) *The increased salience of future status loss is a mechanism through which the emotional state of humiliation increases individuals’ preferences for conflict.*

This explanation supposes that humiliation increases the *salience* rather than the *value* of status loss. This is important because leaders in general tend to value status (Renshon 2017). However, when facing conflict there are many issues at stake and leaders 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). Affect 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, willingness to fight. However, in situations where status is clearly at stake, humiliation should not influence conflict preferences through this mechanism.

2.2 Cross-cultural Generalizability

Because national identities are socially constructed, the events likely to be perceived 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.³ 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 phenomenon that have both cognitive and physiological content. On the subject of the universality of emotions, appraisal theory argues that even if “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

³See also Ekman (1992), Ekman and Friesen (1971), and Elfenbein and Ambady (2002).

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). 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 when this influence should occur as well as who can be influenced. Second, I describe the observable implications the theory has for foreign policy behavior.

3.1 Scope Conditions

The first 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). 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). These connections may make it difficult to address international crises coolly.

The second scope condition has to do with *who* the theory applies to. I argue below that both elites and the public are subject to the influence of humiliation on conflict decisions. 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).⁴ The emotional motivation for retaliation is enduring, which might make it persist even if the decision is delayed (Löwenheim and

⁴See 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 just the public, 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 instrumental. Their interpretation of this event may have been influenced by narratives of national humiliation the CCP began to promote years earlier.

Experiments conducted on leader and public perceptions about conflict have “obtained nearly identical results” (Kertzer, Renshon, and Yarhi-Milo 2017). 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). 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.⁵ 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).

Supposing that leaders are insulated from the emotional influence of humiliation on their decisions, implies an additional 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 the public's 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.

3.2 Foreign Policy Implications

The hypothesis that humiliation increases preferences for conflict (H3a) has several observable implications. First, emotional expressions of national humiliation should correlate with advocacy of more conflictual foreign policy. If these emotional expressions are genuine, then this would apply to both internal deliberations of leaders, information leaders intend for public consumption, as well as to the advocacy of policy positions by members of the public. If these expressions are strategic rather than genuinely felt, then there should be a divergence between leaders' public justifications and private deliberations. Further, the additional scope condition of public pressure, discussed in the previous section, would apply to the below predictions about international behavior.

⁵See He (2007, 18) and Shen (2010, 103).

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. Leaders deliberations about and public justifications for conflict should reflect this.

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 rarely distinguish between what causes political groups to use national humiliation narratives and what makes this strategy succeed. One might suppose that groups decide to use national humiliation narratives because they anticipate this strategy's success. However, groups disseminating national humiliation narratives do not always take

or maintain government control. Failed invocations of national humiliation narratives make sense if the use of these narratives is not entirely determined by strategic factors. Below I extract the implications of existing theories for the use and success of 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 supposes 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 humiliating 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). Another scholar argues that minorities’ increased proletarianization aided the success of Hindu nationalists appeals in the 1980s (Jaffrelot 1999, 8-9). According to this theory the presence of a “threatening other” leads to narratives of national humiliation (Jaffrelot 1999, 11, 21).⁶ 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.⁷

Arguments that rely on traumatic or humiliating events to explain national humiliation narratives are incomplete for two reasons. The first is that there are always events that could be construed as humiliating, but not all of them get deployed in national humiliation narratives, let alone successful ones. The second is that not all political groups within a

⁶See also Kaldor (2004, 168-69).

⁷On face, see Gries (2005, 27). On self-esteem and modernity see Jaffrelot (1999, 13).

country respond to events that might be considered humiliating the same way (Van der Veer 1987, 299). Van der Veer makes both these points when describing how Hindu nationalists revived the issue of whether the Mosque of Babur was built on Ram's birthplace in 1984 after the issue was dormant since 1949, "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" (Van der Veer 1987, 299). As Jaffrelot acknowledges, in the context of his study of Hindu nationalists' perception of a threat from 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 must be socially constructed as humiliating.⁸

4.1.2 Domestic Political Explanations for the Use of Humiliation Narratives

Neither are national humiliation narratives simply nationalists using nationalism to get support.⁹ A more limited version of this argument proposes elites promote narratives of national humiliation when they face a crisis of legitimacy (Wang 2012, 9). Another explanation posits 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

⁸On the broader point that foreign policy events do not speak for themselves, see Krebs 2015, 35.

⁹See for example Mansfield and Snyder (1995).

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 20th 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 events preceding the takeover of the Communist Party in 1949, 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 the use of 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, which are usually motivated to contain resistance and often to increase national in-group solidarity, that do not turn to national humiliation narratives.

4.1.3 International Politics Explanations for the Use of Humiliation Narratives

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). However, national humiliation narratives take time to develop and catch on with a domestic audience. If states could simply conjure up such a narrative to improve their bargaining positions, then humiliation narratives should be a ubiquitous feature of in-

ternational 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 states care about it asymmetrically. Humiliation narratives tend to resonate more with domestic than international audiences. Previous studies have shown that emotions can cause leaders to misjudge the interpretation and importance other leaders will ascribe to their actions (Mercer 2013). If other states' leaders do not care about the humiliated state's humiliation 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 people in other countries as well as how this emotional state will influence their decisions. Therefore, humiliation is likely to be a poor cross-national signal of resolve (O'Neill 1999, 174). 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). Individuals in cold states incorrectly imagine how they would feel in hot states, and humans underestimate the impact of others' emotions on their future behavior (Loewenstein 1996, 281-284).¹⁰ Further, even if one is in a hot state oneself, one is likely to weigh one's own emotions more highly than others', and this increases as the intensity of the emotion increases (Loewenstein 1996, 284). Evidence from neuroscience indicates that humans have limited abilities to empathize with out-groups (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2012).

Another problem from the perspective of bargaining theory is that leaders often demand concessions, such as apologies or changes in history textbooks, that seem hard to explain with an instrumentally-rational framework. If humiliation is simply a bargaining tactic, then why demand concessions that are only valuable if one is actually emotionally invested?

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

Further, leaders have interpreted international crises through the lens of humiliation even in closed-door meetings and private journals where they did not expect either a domestic public audience or an international audience to become aware of what they said or wrote (Zong 2002; Wang 2012). The private articulation of this link to humiliation suggests it is not intended as a signal to international bargaining counterparts. For these reasons, bargaining theory does not seem to be able to fully account for national humiliation either.

4.2 When Groups Use of National Humiliation Narratives

My explanation for why political groups use narratives of national humiliation builds on the domestic political explanations. First, a national identity that holds the potentially humiliating issue as an object of concern is a prerequisite. Second, political groups strategically use narratives of national humiliation in situations where they can blame their domestic political opponents for the allowing the events they are framing as humiliating to occur while themselves escaping responsibility.

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. This implies the prior concept of a nation that a political group meets the membership requirements of and the humiliator does not is necessary for a particular political group to use national humiliation narratives as a political strategy. This provides the nonstrategic component of the explanation and helps narrow down the groups that might use national humiliation narratives as well as what events they are likely to frame as humiliating, but it does not explain what groups use national humiliation narratives when.

In addition to national identity, strategic incentives play a role in determining when particular political groups use national humiliation narratives. The first, and most important, is the ability of the group to distance themselves from responsibility for the humiliating event and blame political opponents. Groups promoting the narrative of national humiliation need separation from responsibility for the event itself. One way political groups can be separated

from responsibility is if their party was not in power when the event occurred (Croco 2015).

Because national humiliation is viewed as an extremely negative event, it is unlikely a leader who was in charge when the humiliation took place would be able to deploy it as a successful political strategy. This leader would likely be blamed for allowing the humiliating event to occur in the first place. Likewise, people closely associated with the leadership when the potentially humiliating event occurred are unlikely to try to use it for political gain. However, new groups that come to power, or factions desiring radical change may deploy it. Past humiliation indicates that the state's policies were not working because it was unable to protect the nation. For this reason, national humiliation is a possible strategy to promote political change as long as this change is framed as necessary to protect the nation. Thus:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a) *Political groups are more likely to promote narratives of national humiliation when they can associate their political opponents with the event they construct as humiliating while themselves escaping responsibility for its occurrence.*

This association can be indirect. For example, even if the opposing group did not exist at the time of the humiliating event, groups that promote better relations with the humiliator can be labeled traitors.

The second strategic incentive to promote narratives of national humiliation is to motivate support for policies, which pose short-term costs to the public but can be justified in terms of international conflict. Supposing that H2a, the hypothesis that humiliation decreases sensitivity to the cost of conflict, is correct, then making the public feel humiliated should make them more accepting of the cost of policies that can be framed in terms of strengthening the nation or war. Further, national humiliation implies a glorious past when the nation was not humiliated. The appeal to this past can unite the domestic population and mobilize them in favor of reforms to restore the nation to glory (Greenfeld 2001). Lastly, 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.

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

4.3 When do Narratives of National Humiliation Succeed?

I offer an inductive account of when national humiliation narratives lead to political success based on my study of political groups in China and India over the 20th century. Here political success means gaining or maintaining control of the national government. Two conditions are necessary for national humiliation narratives to bring success. First, if the government is determined to repress narratives of national humiliation, then the ability of these narratives to resonate outside of the group promoting them 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 access to mass media.

The second condition is economic development. This condition has two components. The first is that citizens must have access to the media, which is important for spreading nationalists messages (Jaffrelot 2010, 209). Literacy allows nationalist messages to reach broader audiences and spread (Hroch 1996; Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006). Penetration of radio and television extends the reach of nationalists messages (Rajagopal 2001). Further, as the economy develops, literacy and access to modern media increase.

The second is economic welfare (Hroch 2000; Hechter 2000). People 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, I claim that symbolic issues are less likely than bread and butter issues to resonate with subsistence farmers in comparison with other economic groups.

The empirical implications of this theory about economic development can be broken up into 3 parts. First, as more citizens gain access to media, national humiliation narratives are more likely to resonate. Second, when economic development 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. Third, 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 on whether they culturally resonate. 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 quotes Benjamin that “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,” which implies the civilization/barbarism distinction, which for Callahan is the cultural resource for national humiliation narratives, is always present (Callahan 2010, 24). This suggests the existence of other factors that determine *when* people respond to humiliation narratives based on cultural resources.

5 Empirical Chapter Outline

Here I briefly outline the three empirical chapters of the dissertation that test the theories put forward in this chapter.

5.1 Examining the Microfoundations of Humiliation’s Influence on Conflict Preferences

The goal of this chapter is to test my hypotheses about the influence of the emotion of humiliation on individual conflict preferences (H1, H2a, and H2b). Before looking at foreign policy outcomes, it is important to establish that humiliation actually does influence conflict preferences and understand the mechanisms through which it does so. I conduct both a survey experiment and a laboratory experiment where I manipulate both the emotion of humiliation as well as potential mechanisms through which it could influence conflict preferences. The laboratory experiment allows deeper exploration of the cost mechanism in an environment where respondents face real, monetary costs to choosing conflict. Both experiments support H1 and H2a. However, the status hypothesis (H2b) is not supported.

5.2 Examining National Humiliation’s Impact on Foreign Policy Preferences and Behavior

After establishing the microfoundations of the theory, I examine whether the processes it describes occur in the real world. If humiliation increases an individual’s support for international conflict, then emotional expressions of humiliation should correlate with advocacy for more aggressive foreign policy. I use machine learning to construct a measure of the use of national humiliation narratives over time in large dataset (more than 1 billion posts) of Chinese social media posts and a dataset of Chinese state media articles. I examine both whether emotional expressions of humiliation in the context of international relations correlate with advocacy of more aggressive foreign policy as well as whether these expressions correlate with aggressive foreign policy behavior.

5.3 Examining the Origins and Conditions of Success for National Humiliation Narratives

To examine whether political groups use narratives of national humiliation when they can blame their political opponent for allowing humiliating events while themselves avoiding responsibility (H3a) and whether political groups who wish to motivate their audience to make sacrifices on behalf of the nation are more likely to promote narratives of national humiliation (H3b), I examine political groups in China and India from the turn of the 20th century to 1999. I also search for conditions that make the political strategy of using narratives of national humiliation more likely to be successful. Drawing on a mix of primary and secondary sources, including Chinese language sources, I find support for H3a and H3b. I am able to rule out alternate explanations including that narratives of national humiliation are caused by: traumatic events (Miller 2013), threatening others (Jaffrelot 1999), and self-esteem maintenance. I also find, inductively, that national humiliation narratives are most likely to resonate with individuals above economic subsistence and connected to media

networks.

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