

# Humiliation and International Conflict

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A full draft of the paper is available [here](#).

# Motivation

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- 70% –To avoid a humiliating US defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor).
- 20%–To keep SVN (and then adjacent) territory from Chinese hands.
- 10%–To permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life.

# Humiliation and International Conflict

Scholarship increasingly incorporates behavioral differences from traditional conceptions of rationality (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017; Little and Zeitzoff 2017).

Previous theories have linked humiliation to conflict (Löwenheim and Heimann 2008; Wang 2012; Barnhart 2017).

# Room for Improvement

My goal is to:

- Separate emotion of humiliation from events
- Provide micro-foundations from experimental psychology and neuroscience
- Explain bargaining failure

## Defining Humiliation

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).



# Conflict Preferences

## Hypothesis (H1)

*The emotional state of humiliation increases individuals' preferences for conflict.*

- Perceived hostile perpetrator (Fernández et al. 2018)
- Intense (Otten and Jonas 2014)
- Approach emotion (Elison and Harter 2007; Otten and Jonas 2014)

# Causal Mechanisms

## Hypothesis (H2a)

*Decreased sensitivity to the costs of conflict*

- Reward insensitivity (Frijda 2007; Elster 2012)
- Cognitive interference (Otten and Jonas 2014)
- Decreased Inhibition (Otten and Jonas 2013)

## Hypothesis (H2b)

*Increased salience of the possibility of status loss*

- Heightened fear of future humiliation (Hartling and Luchetta 1999)
- Status loss important source of humiliation (Otten and Jonas 2014; Klein 1991)

# Empathy

## Hypothesis (H3)

*Observers are unlikely to account for the effect of humiliation on foreign others' conflict preferences.*

- Hot/cold empathy gap (Loewenstein 1996)
- In-group/out-group empathy gap (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2012)
- Incentive to mislead (Fearon 1995)

## Application to Elites

It is not that leaders act irrationally. Instead they act rationally according to preferences that are influenced by emotions.

- Elites susceptible to bias and emotional influence.<sup>1</sup>
- Public Pressure
- Elites less able to empathize (Stellar et al. 2012)

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<sup>1</sup>(Kertzer, Renshon, and Yarhi-Milo 2017; Hafner-Burton et al. 2014; Renshon 2015; Sheffer et al. 2018; Miller 2011; LeVeck et al. 2014)

## Why Experiment?

- Separate humiliation from beliefs and events
- Personal accounts of emotional decisions unreliable (Nisbett and Wilson 1977; Frijda 2007)
- Mechanism identification

# Samples

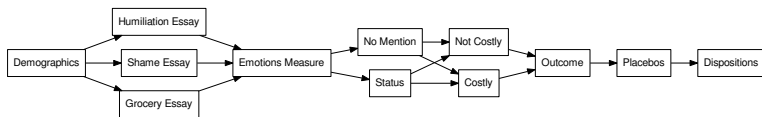
804 US MTurk respondents

1000-2000 Chinese Qualtrics respondents

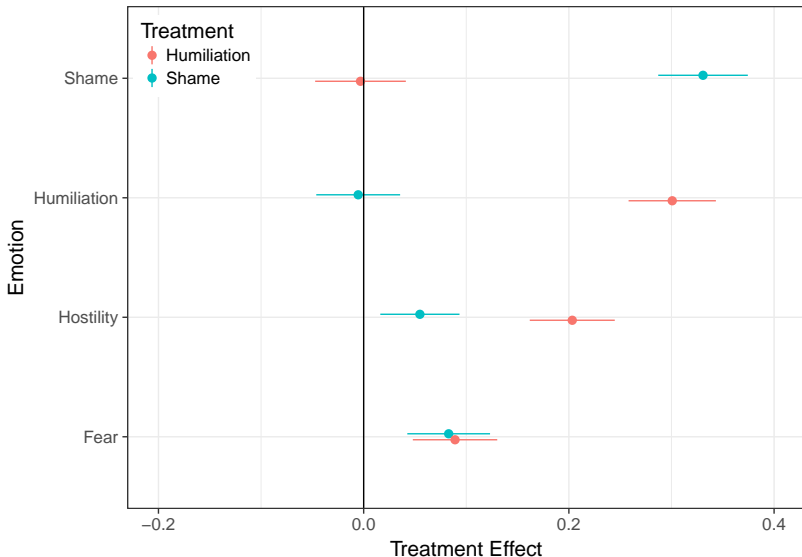
- Nationally representative on age, gender, and income

# Experimental Design

Figure: US Preferences Experiment Design

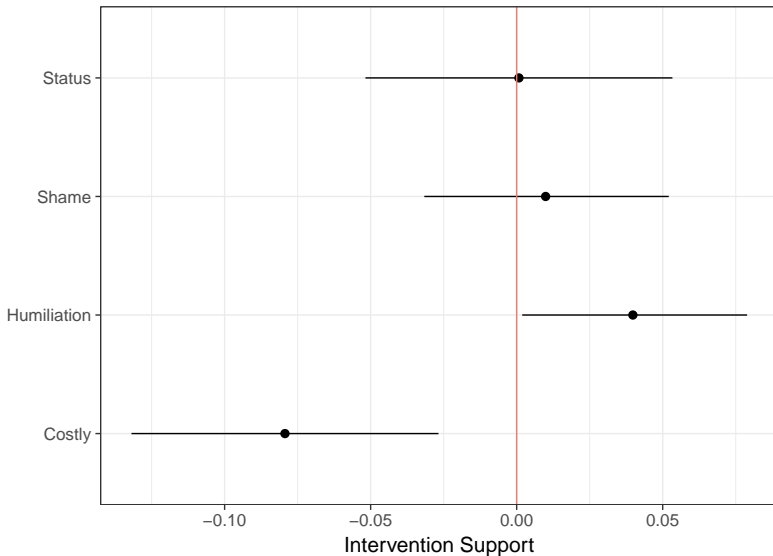


# Effect of Treatment on Target Emotion

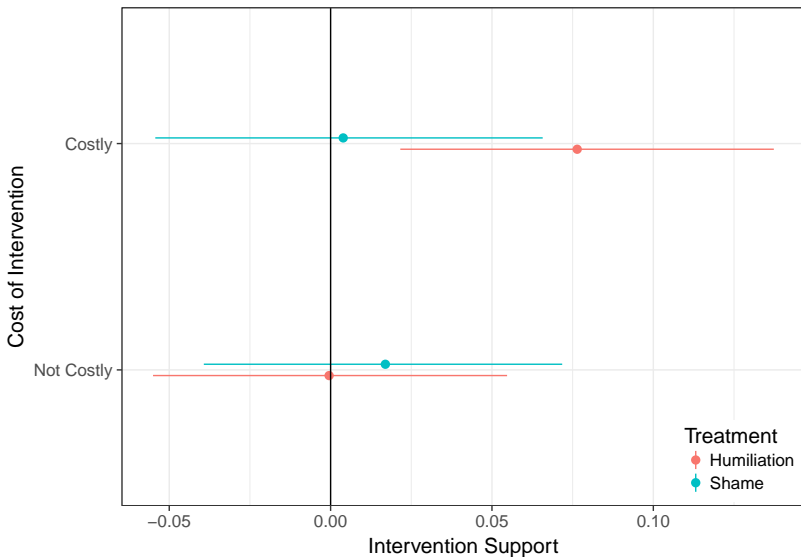




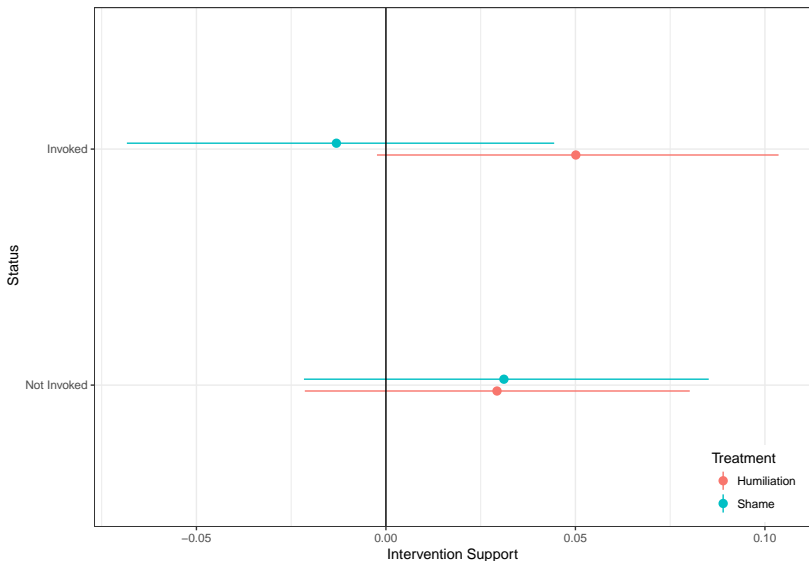
# Effect of Treatment through Target Emotion Score



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## Why Experiment?

- Cannot measure actors' estimates of others' resolve observationally
- Observational counter-factual unclear

## Empathy Experimental Scenario

Country A is a [democratic/nondemocratic] foreign country in a territorial dispute with a neighboring country (Country B). The territory has the same strategic and economic value to both countries. The military strength of these two countries is about equal.

[In humiliation condition: Many people in Country A feel that Country B has humiliated them in the past. They say that Country B historically treated their country very unjustly.]

## Conclusion

- The emotion of humiliation makes individuals more likely to support international conflict.
- This effect operates through the mechanism of decreasing individuals' sensitivity to the costs of conflict.